

THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2003

A CALL TO ARMS

The homosexual/lesbian controversies that have rocked the Christian Churches this last month have opened a Pandora's box with repercussions that threaten the very structure of major Christian denominations.

Such insidious and dangerous forces have not attacked the Christian Churches since the Middle Ages, when false doctrines finally brought about the necessary upheaval and reformation led by Dr Martin Luther.

As abhorrent as the sexual practices of homosexuals and lesbians might be, these practices are of themselves not the chief cause of the situation today. Rather, it is a certain type of academic thinking that has brought about the acceptance of these God forbidden, unhygienic acts with their disease propensity. These practices are the exact opposite of the Creator's design.

Pastor Paul McCain, Chief Executive Officer of Concordia Publishing House, St Louis, Missouri, USA, writes in reference to the Episcopalian Church United States America (ECUSA), whose House of Bishops has approved the consecration of a practicing homosexual, Canon Gene Robinson, as the Bishop of New Hampshire. *"The one very important thing to note, that has not been clearly pointed out, is that the ECUSA headed down this slippery slope when they approved the ordination of women years ago. And of course this was all made possible when they embraced the higher critical method of Biblical interpretation decades before. When the binding authority of Sacred Scriptures is rejected, the result is inevitable.*

The ordination of women as pastors has led, yes, even demands, the ordination of homosexuals. If Scripture's clear statements that prohibit the ordination of women as pastors can be ignored, or reinterpreted, so also every verse that speaks negatively about homosexuals."

One might add that with this type of thinking anything in Scripture can be reinterpreted, including miracles, the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, or that Jesus was the incarnate Son of God. The list is endless.

Just how big is this homosexual issue? Will it have any effect on Australian Lutherans? Let us say without equivocation that the ramifications are world wide, and will impact, not just on organisations and policy makers in churches, but it will call for every single Christian to make a personal decision on where he stands.

The background to the events leading up to this present time are that Canon Geoffrey John was appointed Bishop of Reading, in the United Kingdom, and this caused a furore in the Anglican Church with loud protests from many quarters, including Sydney's Archbishop Dr. Peter Jensen. The controversy threatened the unity of the Anglican Community worldwide. The Primate of the Anglican Church of Nigeria, Archbishop Peter Akinola, the head of a church with 17.5 million members, stated "The present development

(in the USA in New Hampshire) compels us to think of the nature of future relations with the Episcopal Church of the USA." Canon John has since withdrawn his name as a candidate for the appointment of Bishop of Reading owing to the controversy. Not seen in local Australian news is the announcement by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, that he "would call a crisis meeting of all church leaders following the election of a gay bishop by the US Episcopalian Church."

We now look at the situation of Lutherans around the world in the light of these events. At the Lutheran World Federation convention in Winnipeg, Canada in July, The Rev Mark Hanson, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church America, was elected President for the next six-year term.

President Hanson attended the ECUSA convention and addressed the ECUSA House of Bishops, saying, "It is clear that because of our full communion relationship, together we are hearing and heeding God's call to be engaged in God's mission." It needs to be mentioned here that the ELCA and ECUSA formally tolerate and condone abortion on demand and pay for it via their health care programmes.

The ELCA will participate in the consecration of the gay Bishop Robinson, because this is a requirement of their formal and binding relationship as set out in the text of the agreement between the two churches. Again quoting Pastor McCain of the Missouri Synod, *"It is entirely clear and accurate to say that The Lutheran Evangelical Church America will be consecrating, and thereby receiving as its bishop the same homosexual bishop that the ECUSA will consecrating and receiving as their bishop. One major point of the whole ECUSA-ELCA "relationship" is "fully interchangeable ministry of bishops" between the two churches. Fully interchangeable means fully received by both churches."*

So anybody who professes to be Lutheran has some stark choices to make. Can you be in fellowship or associated in any way with a body such as this? By being a member of the Lutheran World Federation for instance there can be no other inference than that you approve or condone homosexual clergy. A member church of the LWF, and that church's members, has as its worldwide spokesman a President who, to say the least, does not admonish his associates and colleagues about the error of their ways. Do you wish to be a part of an organisation whose office bearers have strayed so far from the basic tenets of the Christian faith? Do you wish to avoid the issue by pretending that all this is so far away and that it does not matter here? Whether a Lutheran believes this or not, the plain facts of the matter are that if you associate with such bodies you enhance their credibility and your very presence is a public support that gives them aid and comfort.

Whilst we are passing through grim times, we need not despair. Christians who seek the truth of God's Word will respond to common sense and a genuine call to the faithful

will not go unanswered. The church will prevail, as Samuel John Stone wrote:

*Though with a scornful wonder
Men see her sore oppressed
By schisms rent asunder,
By heresies distressed,
Yet saints their watch are keeping,
Their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping
Shall be the morn of song.*

Now is the time for people to follow Luther and declare to the world, "**Here we stand.**"

For those who are alarmed at these trends, for those who like Luther, wish to rebuke those who rebel against God's Word, for those who look for a safe haven, unadulterated by the false philosophies of the times, well, there is always the AELC.

MARBURG, MINDEN, LOWOOD

The Elders and Congregational Leaders, indeed all the members have been very supportive in helping their new pastor settle into parish life. He in turn has been busy learning everyone's names and getting around the parish visiting his new flock. The following three items may be of interest to the readers of 'Newsletter'.

The Congregation at Prayer

Over the last few months, the elders and pastor, together with congregational leaders have been encouraging members to be active in their devotional lives. We know that as Christians we need to feed regularly, preferably daily, on the Bread of Life (John 6), Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. To assist members with their daily meditations, Pastor has been supplying a weekly devotional guide called, "*The Congregation at Prayer*". It consists of a text for the week, a hymn of the week, a weekly portion of the catechism, daily Bible readings on either the church year, catechism, or just stories, which follow in sequence, the psalm and collect for the week plus prayer thoughts for every day. Quite a number of folk have opted to use it either as a family or individually and are finding it quite helpful.

Youth

The younger folk of the parish are meeting together on the fourth Friday of each month for an evening of Christian fellowship, fun and growth in God's Word. Last Friday about 20 turned up in the Marburg Church Hall. The next meeting, God willing, will be over at Minden, and the one after that at Lowood, and then we'll begin the rotation again.

Sunday Fellowship Lunch

The congregation has considered the suggestion that congregations hold a fellowship lunch after a 10.30 am service. It was agreed to do this as a trial every third communion Sunday. This would create an ideal opportunity for some adult Bible study as well as a good chance for an extended chat.

DISTANCE DOESN'T COUNT

When you have something precious to hang onto, what's a couple of hundred miles? In fact, what about 350 k's, plus or minus a few. Pastor Clarrie Priebbenow tells a wonderful story of families who travel this distance quite often, defending the Word of God, and enjoying every part of the trip.

Two years ago members of the Darling Downs Women's Guild travelled by car to hold a meeting in the home of Max and Melinda Seidel. There are three Seidel families at St George: Sid and Margaret, Max and Melinda (who have four young children), and Jack and Michelle (who have three young children). They are members of the Greenwood congregation, and they often travel the four hours each way to attend church at Greenwood.

The Guild meets monthly at Aubigny, but on Wed 6 August this year Guild members again travelled out for one of its monthly meetings among members who obviously cannot attend other meetings. A number of the men folk also went out. This time all went by a small bus, with the Guild subsidising part of the fares. All met for a study of part of the Large Catechism in Melinda Seidel's home. Then the men went for a trip around the Seidel farm, while the Guild conducted their business meeting. A guest-speaker explained a program of caring for one another by "half-sisters" that the Guild might take up or adapt.

There were twenty-four on the bus, including three children. It was a pleasant but tiring day, and we have nothing but admiration for the Seidel families who make this trip in the reverse directions so regularly.

A MISSED MESSAGE

In our June edition we were happy to report on the large number of messages and phone calls that came from all over Australia on the occasion of the installation of Pastor Mark Hampel at Marburg. In quickly writing down the list of those sending or expressing their greetings we regret to say that we missed the Greenwood congregation.

So, sorry Greenwood for an oversight! We can assure our readers that Greenwood, like all our congregations, are delighted to welcome Pastor Mark to the Marburg, Minden, Lowood Parish, and appropriate expressions of support were delivered on that very important day by Greenwood Chairman, Denis Janetzki.

PROFILE OF A PASTOR

Vernon Samuel Grieger was born in the well-known town of Tanunda, South Australia, on the 12 December 1932.

Some of the years in the 1930's were, not unlike today's decade, a time when the country was ravaged by drought and life was difficult. Survival often depended on ones ability to put in long hard hours. Vern worked as a lad on the family farm when they shifted to Swan Reach, and his primary schooling was at Moorundie and Swan Reach schools.

Secondary education saw Vern off to Adelaide to attend Concordia College and from there he progressed to Concordia Seminary under the watchful eye of Dr. Henry Hamann Snr. Under Dr. Hamann, a brilliant theologian, Concordia Seminary was the breeding ground for a succession of soundly trained and faithful pastors over many decades. His wise counsel and clear explanations of Scripture

had a lasting effect on the young pastor in training, and to the end of his ministry a large photo of Dr Hamann adorned the study of Pastor Vern Grieger.

This sound training resulted in a pastor who was undeviating in his loyalty to Christ and the Scriptures. To Pastor Vern the trend towards higher criticism and reinterpretation of Scripture to suit the exigencies of the social climate were anathema. Those who would dare advocate a position along these lines, be they high or low in the church hierarchy, were very firmly and smartly corrected, and the error of their ways made clear.

There are at least two outstanding features to Pastor Vern Grieger's ministry. We are in an age of declining church membership, and the congregations of most denominations are predominantly in the retired, grey haired class. The Marburg congregation is a remarkable exception. There would be few congregations in Australia who could equal its percentage of young people, young couples and their infants and children. This is due to sound training in early Sunday School days through to Confirmation classes which prepare the adolescent for a Christian life, and as a consequence, how to withstand the buffeting of life. In the disputes that led to separation from the LCA it was the young people's vote that decided the issue. They knew that the safest course was to stand by the pastor who had guided them so surely from their childhood.

Another outstanding feature was the production, together with Pastors Clarence Prieppenow and Pastor Vern's brother, the late Pastor Melvin Grieger, of the document titled "The Word Shall Stand."

The American paper, *Christian News*, one of the worlds most widely distributed Christian journals with a circulation of well over a million copies, reviewed *The Word Shall Stand* in these terms:

"THE WORD SHALL STAND is by far the best contribution we have seen for a Twentieth Century Formula of Concord. Every Christian pastor should get a copy. It should be studied by seminary Christian college faculties, particularly those of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod." Not a bad endorsement for a work by three Australian country pastors who have been largely ignored and rejected by the hierarchy in Australia.

Pastor Vern Grieger has produced a number of important works on a variety of subjects, but perhaps his most important is a collection of sermons in two books titled *Sanctify Us Through Thy Truth*. These books contain a selection of some of his outstanding sermons which are a combination of Christian teaching, sound doctrine, and accurate observations on the state of the world in which we live. Other outstanding contributions in the field of human relations and marriage are *He Her Honour, She His Glory*, and *Earthly images of the Heavenly Bride*.

Pastor Grieger is skilled in his hobby of book printing and binding. He plans in his retirement to continue to both write and print good books and make them available to interested people. He intends to maintain a keen interest in church activities and his services, knowledge, and long experience will continue to be of great benefit.

He goes into retirement with the blessing and good wishes of us all.

For those who wish to remain in contact, his address particulars are as follows:

Pastor V.S.Grieger, Bells Bridge via Gympie. 4570, Queensland, Phone: (07)54831414, E-mail vernashi@dodo.com.au

CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE ELECTS NEW CHAIRMAN

At the meeting on 28th June the CoOrdinating Committee elected Mr Errol Noble as Chairman for the ensuing year.

Errol Noble is a well known member of the Parish of Marburg, Minden and Lowood, of which he is also Treasurer, as well as Chairman of the Minden Congregation.

Other elected officers are:

Vice Chairman: Frank Steinhardt, Secretary: Paul Hoopert, Treasurer: Noel Wieck, Auditors: John and Wayne Ritter.

Office bearers for the Seminary Committee are Chairman: Alan Beutel, Secretary: Harold Prieppenow, Treasurer: Wayne Ritter.

The Co-ordinating Committee expressed special thanks to former Chairman Eric Jericho for his dedicated and efficient service to the AELC whilst he was Chairman, and an appropriate letter of appreciation has been sent to Eric.

YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS - PLEASE

Everyone hears from time to time the criticisms, and many quite justified, of how computers and the Internet take over people's lives. However, like fire, the modern communication system can be a good servant or a bad master. Our use of the email system can be a boon to mission work and help keep people up to date with news.

Luther was a fine example. He used the new invention to the maximum advantage and it was in fact the new printing presses that enabled the rapid spread of his message to the world.

Having this in mind the Co-Ordinating Committee hopes to use email as a fast efficient way to let people know important news and coming events.

We propose to operate such a service as an addition to Newsletter, which remains the official organ of the AELC. It is not the intention to choke your computer with endless "junk mail", only items of sufficient interest that require rapid circulation.

All readers and their friends are requested to send us their email addresses, and include postal addresses and phone numbers if desired. Send this by email if you already have it, or post it if you intend to go "online" but have not yet acquired an email address.

Our address and email address is on page 4 (four)

A fine example of how mission work can be accomplished with the new tools at hand has just come to hand. Pastor Peter Ziebell reports on an amazing contact with Brazil.

I am in regular contact via email with a man from Brazil by the name of Paulo Martins. Here is part of an email sent to me by Paulo last year (his English is not too good, so I have corrected it): *I left my job 4 years ago to study theology and become a Lutheran pastor. Next December 20th 2003, I will get the theology degree at University. I have been studying theology during the last 7 years. Next year I will have more one period of parochial practice before becoming a Lutheran pastor. Carmen my wife is a nurse and works at 2 hospitals. We have a daughter, Joyce, and she is 14 years*

old. Nowadays, my family lives in Rio de Janeiro City and I live in the Concordia Seminary (in other State).

There are two seminaries in Brazil. The IECLB – Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil, started when German immigrants arrived 150 years ago. Members: 900,000. They are a liberal church. They do not subscribe to the whole Lutheran Confessions. Secondly, the IELB – Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil – it arrived through a missionary pastor from the Lutheran Missouri Synod of USA, 100 years ago. Members: 230,000, they are a conservative church, trusting in the Word of God revealed in the Holy Scriptures by Law and Gospel. It follows the whole Lutheran Confessions, preaching Scripture Alone, Faith Alone, Grace Alone, and agreeing with the whole Book of Concordia (all documents of Lutheran Confession), and emphasising the Gospel and the clear difference between Law and Gospel.

Paulo belongs to the more confessional IELB. However, both of these churches are now in dialogue with one another. Paulo fears that all confessionalism will soon disappear from the IELB. Paulo has been very dismayed and decided to hold off being ordained, deciding to carry out his ministry by visitations in hospitals and following up those who had fallen away from the church. He has read all literature pertaining to the AELC and truly feels that he is one with us. However, because of the distance between Brazil and Australia, it is hard for us to help him. Nevertheless I encouraged Paulo to go to the Lord in prayer, emphasising how much we here have been blessed by the Lord.

I received a further email from Paulo a couple months back, in which he stated that through his personal contact with others, around 200 people had now returned to the true faith. This truly was answer to his prayer, and from this we too can take courage. Paulo continues to worship in an IELB congregation, to which he has raised many concerns about his own pastor, but he has been encouraged by the personal work he has done. By using Paulo, the Lord has increased His flock. Whenever I speak to Paulo and talk about our concerns here in Australia, he keeps reminding me that the Lord is in control. He always sends his greetings to us here in the AELC, and prays that we by the grace of God will continue in the truth. He has often travelled to suburbs where he is robbed at gunpoint, but this does not stop him from preaching the Good News. In the meantime, please remember Paulo in your prayers.

SMILE

A little girl walked to and from school daily. Though the weather that morning was questionable and clouds were forming, she made her daily trek to the elementary school. As the afternoon progressed, the winds whipped up, along with thunder and lightning. The mother of the little girl felt concerned that her daughter would be frightened as she walked home from school and she herself feared that the electrical storm might harm her child. Following the roar of thunder, lightning, like a flaming word, would cut through the sky. Full of concern, the mother quickly got into her car and drove along the route to her child's school. As she did so, she saw her little girl walking along, but at each flash of lightning, the child would stop, look up and smile. Another and another were to follow quickly and with each, the little girl would look at the streak of light and smile. When the mother's car drove up beside the child, she lowered the window and called to her, "What are

you doing? Why do you keep stopping?" The child answered, "I am trying to look pretty, God keeps taking my picture. May God bless you today as you face the storms that come your way and don't forget to SMILE! Pass it along to brighten someone else's day because I know you SMILED!! We can do no great things, Only small things with great Love.

YOUTH CAMP

There will be plenty of interest, and fun, at a camp for the young people (and perhaps the not so young) at a Camp on the 12th - 14th September at The Mapleton Centre, Mapleton.

NEWSLETTER'S ADDRESS

THE EDITOR,
A.E.L.C. NEWSLETTER
OASIS VILLAS
54/100 MORALA AVE.
RUNAWAY BAY 4216
QUEENSLAND

PHONE/FAX (07) 55290058
EMAIL: david.mattiske2@bigpond.com

This Newsletter is for and on behalf of the
Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church.
Newsletter Management Committee:
Pastor Clarence Priebbenow
Errol Noble
David Mattiske - Editor