

THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2008

EDITORIAL

LOOKING AHEAD

From time to time we have made the point that after successfully surviving the formative years, the AELC must look forward, not backward, ever mindful of an influential and expanding role in the communities in which we work and live. The start of a new year is an ideal time to reflect on how we must work as a united team to achieve the mission for which we are responsible, that is, the promulgation of the saving Gospel to all and sundry, neighbours, and friends.

Throughout Australia at this time of the year many organisations, particularly in the commercial world, are planning ahead on a myriad of matters, finance, staff, production, and operational and transport problems. Many Christian organisations do the same.

Most congregations of the AELC are planning their Annual General Meetings, preparing reports on the previous year's activities, and the election of office bearers.

It could be said that, apart from its pastoral mission in the world, the election of office bearers is the most important function in the life of the congregation.

For churches, like all manner of community organisations, clubs, sporting bodies, social groups and community bodies, the importance of having reliable, capable, energetic, leaders dedicated to their cause cannot be over emphasised.

It is quite accurate to say that the AELC, despite it being a relatively small body, has a surprising array of talent, perhaps greater than its numbers suggest. We have been blessed with people who have a good balance of skills and dedication. It is to be hoped that from this talent bank our congregations are able to elect office bearers who are capable of managing the routine day to day work that is an essential part of congregational life, but also to apply their capabilities for planning that lies ahead. Not only for the work of their congregations, but also the long term mission of the church. By virtue of their involvement in the Co-ordinating Committee, many of the office bearers in the congregations also carry a heavy responsibility when they make decisions concerning the future programmes and operations of the AELC.

This requires a balance of sound planning and wise decision making. Perhaps most important of all, it requires a united and dedicated team with common goals. Therefore it is appropriate to give consideration at this time of the year to the long term goals of the church.

Where does the future lie? Recent statistics

confirm again a sad picture of Australian church attendance where in some major denominations only 10 or 12 % of officially listed members regularly attend Divine Services. Commonwealth Census statistics are based on people nominating which Christian denomination they belong to, but these figures are sadly misleading. Millions of people who claim to belong to a Christian denomination never attend a Divine Service, so national figures do not give a true indication of the Christian content of the nation.

Add to this the continued attack by atheists, the importation and growth of pagan religions, constant pressure on governments to permit "gay" unions or marriage, the breakdown of the family structure, and a breakdown in public behaviour, law and order. We are witnessing an arrogant rejection of the Gospel by a huge majority of an apostate society.

This scenario might at first sight lead us to despondency, it appears a very bleak picture indeed, but it should not deter us. Actually, it should be seen as a great challenge, presenting us with a vast potential. It challenges us to devise ways and means of attracting people around us with the story of the Gospel and all the great benefits it bestows on mankind.

So we can look forward to 2008 with hope and with great expectations. We are confronted with a battle in which we can never surrender, and on which we set out with confidence and a positive expectation of success. It is a battle we can never lose because regardless of our human fortunes, which go up and down, in the long run His will prevails and the Word stands.

With unity, faithfulness, dedication and goodwill to mankind, there is no reason why we cannot make 2008 a year in which the AELC continues to make its mark for the greater glory of the Kingdom here on earth.

We wish all our elected office bearers God's blessing and every success in the important tasks that lie ahead in 2008.

ARE GAY MARRIAGES ON THE WAY IN?

Shortly after taking office, Prime Minister Rudd announced that he would not block Australian Capital Territory legislation proposing same sex civil unions.

The Federal Government has a power of veto over legislation proposed by the governments of the Australian Territories. Previously Prime Minister Howard had rejected civil union legislation submitted by the Australian Capital Territory.

The head of the Australian Christian Lobby, Jim Wallace, who had previously been a commanding officer of the Special Air Services regiment, challenged

Mr Rudd with a breach of faith. Before the elections the Labor Party had undertaken to oppose legislation “that has no ceremony or celebrant and does not mimic marriage.”

Now it is in a position where it will endeavour to find a position and half way house wording that appeases the ACT government and the gay lobby, but also does not start a contest with the Christian lobby.

However, the Attorney General for the ACT, Simon Corbell, said, “A registration scheme alone is not an adequate response. There is an important symbolic difference between registering a partnership and allowing a civil union to take place.”

The Chief Minister for the ACT, John Stanhope, says, “At this stage I remain comfortable and confident we can negotiate a position to achieve what we want.”

An email issuing from Mr Rudd’s office last year regarding his Party’s position read, “Committed to equality for gay men, lesbians, and same sex couples and if elected, will remove provisions which discriminate on the basis of sexuality,” and “all practical day to day discriminations faced by the gay and lesbian communities will be removed from our laws.”

It is likely therefore that initially the ACT will get watered down legislation. However the danger here is that once enacted it will be seen by future generations as legal, acceptable, and just another optional life style.

There are many countries around the world where various forms of same sex relationships have been established and made legal. It is to be expected that Australia will be subjected to the same pressures that have succeeded in other countries.

Christian churches will need all the determination and resolve they can muster to fight off what is clearly an abomination condemned by Scripture.

BRAINY BLOKE Baffles BRAINS

The medical scientist Dr. Graeme Clarke, whose work led to the bionic ear, has made some astonishing pronouncements, at least astonishing to evolutionists, but not to the Bible believing Christian.

Dr. Clarke, a committed Christian, worked tirelessly for years until he made medical history by implanting the world’s first bionic ear in 1978. His work took him into the functioning of the human brain and how the ear works in response to brain signals.

There are 100 thousand million nerve cells in the human brain, and each brain cell is connected to approximately 10, 000 other cells, which means that there are 100 million million connections.

Dr. Clarke says, “Could the physical universe, which physicists now show had only the remotest chance of producing carbon based life, have evolved into human consciousness by mindless chance? I think not. The human brain is so sophisticated a mechanism that scientists have not been able to design engineering systems that can match its crucial functions. For me

that means a supernatural entity, that means God, rather than saying it assembled itself by mindless chance.”

Dr. Clarke was chosen to deliver the ABC’s Boyer series of lectures last November.

OUR HYMNS AND MUSIC

Every Sunday we raise our voices in praise to God by singing hymns. The music and the words of the hymns have played an important part in our Christian life but most of us know little of the composers or the writers. Each edition Newsletter will endeavour to give our readers a glimpse of the music and writers who helped shape the way we worship.

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Probably the best and most widely known of all the famous Lutheran musicians, he was born at Eisenach, Upper Saxony in 1685. When Johann Sebastian was ten, his father died, and so did his elder brother. Bach then entered the choir at Luneburg as a soprano singer in order to make a living. In 1703 he became the court musician at Weimar and the following year the organist at a new church at Arnstadt. His reputation as an organist soon spread and in 1708 he was appointed as court organist by the Duke at Weimar.

In 1717 he was made director of concerts and then director of music and cantor at St. Thomas’s school in Leipzig, an appointment he held to his death. He was awarded the title of Kappelmeister by the Duke of Weissenfels, he served the King of Poland, and at one stage was summoned to the Court of Frederick the Great.

Sadly his work affected his eyesight and an operation blinded him. He remains the greatest organist and musician of his times, equalled perhaps only by Handel. He died in July 1750.

Amongst his vast collection of works there would hardly be a Lutheran anywhere who does not know and appreciate his *Jesu Joy of Man’s Desiring*, and there are very few quality classical CDs today that do not feature this magnificent contribution to the Christian Church.

PARISH REPORTS

ACTIVITY ON THE DOWNS

Although Christmas is fast fading into the background, Pastor Peter Ziebell’s report of Christmas activities is a demonstration of active mission work in the community. Oakey staged its own Carols by Candlelight and advertised it with a letter drop of 1600, which brought a response from non members that was not large, but gratifying, indicating that people can be attracted to a friendly Christian community.

The four congregations of the parish are geared up for their Annual General Meetings after the busy festive season. The congregations came together at St. John’s, Aubigny, for the annual Advent tea, and this year Greenwood invited everyone to a New Year’s Eve

family fun evening.

Last year the Oakey congregation was required to make an important decision regarding the church building. The building was in need of repainting, but it was eventually decided to clad the church. The cost was higher than painting, but provides a church with cooler conditions in the summer and warmer in winter due to the cladding's insulation, and unlike paint, which lasts for maybe 10 years or so, the cladding should last well beyond this time.

Pastor Ziebell hopes to expand his work in the community this year, as letter drops indicate there are people "out there" who will respond to the Gospel message.

AN ENCORE AT MARBURG

Because of the inspiring and successful visit by Pastor Daniel Preus last year, negotiations have commenced already to ascertain if Pastor Preus is available for another tour in the Australian winter. Newsletter understands that Pastor Preus enjoyed his visit and if his busy schedule permits, he is likely to come again. This would be another great event and we will keep readers posted, and pray that another visit is possible.

Enriching Worship through the use of the LSB

The congregations of Marburg, Minden, Lowood, and Bethania are all expanding their appreciation of the rich liturgical and hymnodic heritage of the Lutheran church as they actively engage in a year long trial of the *LSB* (*Lutheran Service Book*). Most Sundays a new hymn or tune is sung in the Divine Service, and our members are discovering some absolute treasures, and many very singable tunes. As Pastor, I am particularly pleased with the clarity, beauty and directness of the words in the hymns. In singing them, I often find that I am hearing the Gospel in a vital, alive and fresh way. I have also found the Sacraments receive a far greater prominence and emphasis in the *LSB*, which is what one would expect from a theologically very sound, Lutheran hymn book.

This year's Lenten services are the ideal opportunity for our members to become familiar with *Vespers* from the *LSB*. The Marburg congregation has asked the choir to learn the *Vespers* order so that they can help introduce it at our 2008 Midweek services. One feature I am particularly looking forward to, as part of the *Vespers* order, is the singing of the *Psalms*. The *Psalms* are meant to be sung. They are the songs of Israel. At present our congregations do not sing them, and if, on a rare occasion, psalms are sung in worship, it is by the choir. (Perhaps this is because many of our members find the "Anglican Chants" in our current *Lutheran Hymnal* a bit tricky.) The *LSB* has a far simpler way of singing the *Psalms*. If we can master this, I believe our members will be better able to, "sing the Psalms into their hearts," in a way that is not being

done at present.

Pastor Mark Hampel

BETHANIA

Pastor Owen Ohlson is resolved to move outward and onward. Whilst strenuously working to build up the Divine Service attendance on Sundays with visiting and letter drops in the district, he has also branched out into hospital and nursing-home visiting.

Visiting these people, he finds that in the main they are neglected by society and the main line churches do not seem to get to them the message of salvation. He tells of elderly and lonely people who break down and cry with profound relief when he assures them of God's love and salvation, which comes through faith in Christ Jesus. His presence and prayers in the name of Jesus have a wonderful effect on people who through previous and long neglect feel deserted, but now find reassurance.

As the population grows older this is certain to be a huge mission field for all Christians. The early church was often referred to as "the way," because of the way of life which comes from faith in Jesus Christ, and the members' loving and helpful attitude to one another.

The people in nursing homes that Pastor Ohlson visits may never be able to travel to Divine services or formally join a church, but perhaps he is leading us to a field, certainly in the metropolitan suburbs, that has been inadequately catered for by the Christian churches.

HIVESVILLE

Pastor Phil Mueller reports that Hivesville has already had its Annual General Meeting which saw the retirement from Elder of Mr Joe Horrobin. After many years of loyal and faithful service as an Elder, including the time of the formation of the AELC, Joe Horrobin decided it was time to retire as an Elder, but will continue to fulfil the Lay Reading role as and when required. Wayne Steinhardt was elected Elder to replace Mr. Horrobin.

Pastor Mueller plans more travels to his widespread Parish, visiting at least once the congregation in Melbourne and Rockhampton.

Over the years Hivesville has shown steady growth. This is the result of the age old practice Pastor Mueller describes as "people talking their faith." This policy will continue to be encouraged.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Sir,

Part of life for each one of us is a series of associations. Almost everyone associates with others in various aspects of life. We do this because we desire benefits which would be impossible or very difficult to obtain if we had to work for them on our own. The benefits can be described as the increment of association, or profit.

When individual Christians join together to form a congregation they are following the exhortation in scripture to do so. One of the increments of associating with like-minded Christians is a strengthening of their faith and a general feeling of well-being in knowing that there are others who share their beliefs.

However, in order to associate successfully, certain principles have to be understood and observed. Not only that, certain desirable qualities need to be held by those wishing to associate. In Christian circles we pray that God will give us these desirable qualities. Associations that are based on sound principles and have members who exhibit desirable qualities will produce the best results in terms of human satisfaction.

Successful organization cannot be a haphazard affair. Once individuals decide to come together, or associate, the next step is to make rules for the association. These rules are a constitution, laying down in advance various matters concerning the beliefs and operation of the association. The Constitution serves the members. A constitution is not a document that cannot be changed. Most associations have adequate provisions in their constitution for it to be changed if that is deemed desirable. The AELC's Constitution is no different in that regard.

Another factor for associations to be successful is that they require something more than just rules; they require that individuals in the association respect the rules. Within the guidelines of the Constitution there is freedom for the individual to pursue whatever he wants. But when his will clashes with what is written in the Constitution then the rule of law must be applied and upheld. There is always a desperate need in any organization to understand that without the rule of law it is virtually impossible to avoid a major disaster.

No matter whether the association is large or small, individuals require, in principle, the equivalent of the committee of the sporting association. This committee should be representative of interests rather than of mere numbers and that it should be a very good servant and not a bad master. We in the AELC should be pleased that those responsible for the drawing up of our Constitution presumably had these thoughts in mind. Therefore within our Constitution there are provisions to safeguard the autonomy of the local congregation. There is no overbearing hierarchy and administration on congregations. The CoC only has the power of recommendation. It does not matter whether it is AELC members, parliamentarians or public servants; the tendency to increase power is within all. Constitutional safeguards are necessary to curb this tendency.

But constitutional safeguards must be upheld. If the rule of law is not applied when constitutional safeguards are threatened then the constitutional rule, the association itself and in particular those who advocate breaking the Constitution are all brought into disrepute. The rule of law means that the individual as

well as the association is bound in all actions by clearly defined rules, known to all and announced beforehand. The rule of law does not infringe on the rights of the individual. So long as there is general respect for the rule of law it actually increases the rights of the individual.

Constitutions and the rule of law prevent chaos. The Constitution of the AELC, like all constitutions, is concerned with how the body runs administratively. To deliberately advocate and break a rule of the Constitution is un-Christian and an offence against the fourth commandment. Therefore we should think long and hard about our Constitution and our actions. The laws that bind an association together do not fall into the province of the moral law and the breaking of those laws cannot be justified on the basis that in so doing the law of Christian love is taking precedence. The law of Christian love is in fact exhibited by abiding by the rules.

Phil Lienert, Horsham

We appreciate receiving Letters to the Editor. If you would like to comment on anything, please let us know.

NOTICE OF MEETING

Congregations are reminded of the Notice of Meeting which reads as follows.

“There will be a combined meeting of the Coordinating and Seminary Committee to be held at 10am on Saturday 9 February, 2008, at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Troy's Rd., Toowoomba.”

Newsletter's Address:

THE EDITOR,
A.E.L.C. NEWSLETTER
PO BOX 1312
RUNAWAY BAY Q 4216
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:

David Mattiske (Editor)
Pastor Clarence Priebbenow
Pastor Peter Ziebell
Pastor Mark Hampel
Errol Noble

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