



THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

April/May 2021

WHERE NOW LCA?

The AELC has been established now for almost 30 years. In this time we have seen the religious landscape continue to decline across our country, with church membership numbers in freefall. While we too, have not been spared, yet we must thank our Lord for the precious time He has given to watching over and caring for our church. We truly are blessed to continue to meet regularly for worship, as well as many other activities together, and pray that this will continue.

The Lutheran Church of Australia continues to debate the issue of Women's Ordination. For the past 4 synods, a vote has been taken on this issue, and each time the motion to allow for women's ordination has failed to gain the two-thirds majority vote, although in each of the votes, more than 50% have been in favour. The question that needs to be asked is: "Since when does a doctrinal issue only require a two-thirds majority vote? If God has spoken, it is either all for, or all against." God has spoken quite clearly in the passages of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 that the Office of the Ministry is for males only. There should not be any continued debate, and definitely no vote taken.

An LCA congregation in Adelaide who are in support of women's ordination, put forward a proposal at the SA/NT District's recent Convention, requesting that at the upcoming LCA Synod, to be held at the end of September, Article 6.11 from the Theses of Agreement be removed. Article 6.11 reads, "Though women prophets were used by the Spirit of God in the Old as well as in the New Testament, 1 Cor. 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 prohibit a woman from being called into the office of the public ministry for the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. **This apostolic rule is binding on all Christendom** (*emphasis added*); hereby her rights as a member of the spiritual priesthood are in no wise impaired." Deleting 6.11 from the Theses of Agreement would clearly open the door to ordaining women.

At the SA/NT Convention, the proposal eventually passed with 135 for the motion, 128 against. The same proposal will be put forward by a Victorian congregation at the upcoming VIC district Convention. The issue is also alive in the New Zealand District of

the LCA, with many city congregations in favour of women pastors, and rural areas against. In the Queensland District, there also appears to be more in favour of women's ordination than against, and it will be interesting to watch what happens at their upcoming General Convention to be held in early June.

Surely, this proposal, and the fact that it has passed in the SA/NT district, must be the final straw for those who still wish to remain faithful to the LCA. There is a major split coming. For those truly conservative and confessional people who are still members of the LCA, then they must see the writing on the wall. This issue will simply not go away until those within the LCA get their way and ordain women into the ministry.

Will this finally lead to a walkout of the conservatives, or the continuing to turn a blind eye? Time will tell.

ENQUIRIES TO THE AELC

While the ongoing saga of women's ordination in the LCA continues, some more confessional members of that church body are already beginning to 'sus' out other Lutheran synods in Australia, including our own, looking for an alternative church. While our website (see story below) is usually the first place they go for information, for many, the use of an online social media platform like *Facebook* is the first port of call. On *Facebook* are many groups with members from various Australian and overseas Lutheran churches who often post comments and engage in dialogue with one another. Recently, in one particular Australian based Lutheran Facebook group, a question arose for members of the LCA: Would they remain a part of the LCA if there were other, more confessional church bodies nearby? The AELC was mentioned as one of the more confessional church bodies, but unfortunately one individual answered: "The AELC has its own issues that make me hesitant to jump ship to join them." When he was asked "what issues?" he replied, "lay consecration and receptionism."

Unfortunately, as often happens on online forums, false misinformation abounds, such as this individual's reply. Both of these claims about the AELC are false. The AELC rejects the use of lay consecration (see our Statement of Faith), and we certainly are not receptionists. Receptionism is the doctrine that the presence of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ is finally produced only at the reception of the elements themselves. Receptionists believe that the

bread remains bread and the wine remains wine until all three parts of the Lutheran sacramental action are actually completed, namely, the elements are consecrated, distributed, and received. While we would certainly agree that it is true that it is the Lord's Supper when the entire action is performed (Formula of Concord VII), *our taking of it* is not what completes the sacrament. The receptionist's way of thinking is that it is *my* eating of the bread makes it the body of Christ. *My* drinking of the wine makes it the blood of Christ. The bread on the altar remains bread until I eat it. The wine on the altar remains wine until I drink it.

The only way to really combat this false information about the AELC is to correct it. The problem with social media is that people often read a comment not based on facts and then jump to conclusions. Because someone said it, it must be true! While not everyone utilises social media, there are a few AELC members who do contribute to these online Lutheran chatgroups, and so I encourage these members to continue to correct some of these false things being said about our church. If something is asked of the AELC and what we teach and confess, then we must be "*prepared to give a defence of what we believe*" (1 Peter 3:15).

We must never become complacent and satisfied with the idea that "as long as we can come to church on a Sunday, then that is good enough for me." We need to be like Andrew who told his brother Simon, "*We have found the Messiah*" (John 1:41) and invite others to join with us in worshipping the Lord.

In fact, over the past couple months, there have been local people who have made genuine enquires about the AELC, and we continue to speak with and gently teach them. Prayerfully, by the grace of God, we shall have some new faces joining us soon.

**THE REMARKABLE OUTREACH OF
WWW.AELC.ORG.AU**

For some time, we have been wanting to make a few tweaks to the AELC website. Uploaded each week are the weekly bulletins and sermons, plus a recorded service. We also upload weekly announcements. But so much more can be done, therefore we are actively working towards publishing a completely revamped and a more informative site, giving out much more information about the AELC.

In recent playing around with the website, it was discovered that by going in through the 'backdoor,' all sorts of statistics could be obtained. Going through the backdoor simply means that we can see and do all

sorts of things to the site that people can't see from the 'front end.' Basically, we can look at statistics etc. of the site, and the results are encouraging. The following are the figures for April 2021:

Average daily visitor numbers: **2100** (busiest day is Sunday).

Average downloads each week:

551 downloads of the video recorded services.

74 downloads of the sound only recorded services.

1294 pdf files (these are the weekly bulletins and sermons, and also downloads from pages of *The Word Shall Stand*, and *Statement of Faith*)

Location of top 10 visitors in April:

1. Unites States
2. Australia
3. South Korea
4. Russian Federation
5. Canada
6. Germany
7. China
8. Sweden
9. Malaysia
10. Great Britain

Before we get too carried away, however, we must understand that our visitor numbers do include those who could just be looking briefly at the site and go no further. The downloads are what are important. Last year, for the months of April through to August, our download numbers pretty much tripled. Obviously, this was when lockdowns were enforced, and people could not worship in public. In some countries, this is still the case today. Nevertheless, our website continues to be a marvellous mission outreach tool.

CATHOLIC

"That's Catholic!" you may hear someone say when they see a Lutheran make the sign of the cross, see a crucifix hanging in the sanctuary of a Lutheran church, a pastor wearing a clerical collar or some other traditional practice they've not seen Lutherans do. What they're thinking is this means the Lutheran in question is acting like a Roman Catholic. They are often unaware that Lutherans have had these practices since the time of the Reformation or that the word catholic did not originally refer to the Christian tradition headed by the Pope. The word catholic has been used since the days of the early church to mean the whole Christian Church.

The word catholic is from the Greek word καθολικός (katholikos, literally “according to the whole”) and means “universal.” So, if we wanted to be sarcastic, we could answer the objection “that’s catholic,” “Why, yes! The whole church does it!” The early church would use the phrase: “catholic church” to mean the invisible church. When someone wanted to talk about the faith of the whole church and not just a single congregation or region, they would call it the “catholic faith.”

Soon the word was used to separate false teachings and false teachers from orthodox teachings and leaders. The true faith was called the “catholic” or “orthodox” faith. False teachings were called heresies (literally “other teachings”) and the groups that promoted it schisms (literally “divisions”) At the time of the Reformation, Luther’s opponents quickly charged him and his associates with not being “catholic” but heretical. They labelled them Lutherans as an insult (meaning followers of Luther and not Christ) and themselves as Catholic. From the very beginning Luther and Lutheran theologians defended themselves by saying they were the true catholics, teaching the orthodox faith which was taught and practiced from the beginning. As you might guess, they did not win this argument, even though they were right.

You will occasionally run into the word in Lutheran circles even today. You will sometimes see it in the creeds — especially the Apostles’ Creed, which reads in Latin and Greek (translated) “one holy, catholic and apostolic church.” Martin Luther changed the word in the Apostles’ Creed to “Christian” to avoid confusion. Theologians will still use the term from time to time when emphasising that we believe and teach what the church has always believed. So, don’t panic if you are asked to confess that you believe in the catholic faith — because you do!

ELCA ELECTS OPENLY GAY TRANSGENDER BISHOP

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America - a very liberal denomination - has just elected a bishop to serve in that church who is a woman who identifies as a man and uses the pronouns “they/them.” She is the first transgender person to be elected to the position of bishop in the US in any major denomination. It’s sad to continue to see the church ignoring God’s Word and encouraging others to do the same in the name of “tolerance” and “love.” But encouraging others to rebel against God’s created design for them

as either male or female (Genesis 1:27) isn’t loving - it leads them into sin and slavery to that sin (John 8:34).

Instead of starting with man’s ever-changing and depraved opinions and compromising with the pagan religion of our day, we need to start with God’s Word in all areas. I would urge this bishop to repent of her compromise, believe God’s Word, and encourage others to do the same.

FROM THE PASTOR

We have now passed through the Lenten and Easter Season, and it has been a joy to do so. Because of covid lockdowns, we were unable to celebrate these seasons with each other last year. That also meant that we had to cancel our annual Easter Monday Sunday School picnic at Aubigny last year. This year, after postponing for a week, we were able to hold the picnic on Anzac Day, and what a day it was! The weather was beautiful and it was a joy to see so many present for our morning service in the church – the most I think I have seen – and to see all the kids who spent the next few hours running around outside, competing in races and games. It really was a good day. I hope that our next Sunday School picnic to be held at Marburg later this year will be just as much fun.

Over the past few months, my workload across the two parishes (now one), has naturally increased. It is a fulltime effort to serve everyone faithfully – one that I enjoy immensely, and by the grace of God, I hope to be able to continue for some time yet, so please continue to pray for your pastor!

In the coming months I would like to hold Bible Studies across the parish focusing on the teachings of the Scriptures, but utilising our Statement of Faith, so as to see the major differences of doctrine we have not only with other Lutherans, but also other different Christian denominations.

In order to have the maximum amount of our members present at these studies, it would be ideal if these studies could be held immediately after Sunday morning services, while everyone is still together after worship. It is much easier for members to stay after church, rather than have to find another time to come for studies of a night-time. Also, we have many elderly members who simply cannot drive of a night-time, but who would, I am sure, stay for our studies after church and enjoy a little extra time of fellowship. Bible Studies on a Sunday after church are already happening in the congregations below the Range and are well attended (we usually have morning tea while

we hold our study), and Bethlehem Toowoomba do hold Bible Study on a Sunday morning before church. The question I have is, how do we do this across the whole parish, in all the congregations? Is it possible?

Another thing I would like to do is to have the opportunity to visit the children in Sunday School. I usually only see these children when I baptise them and then years later when they come to confirmation classes as teenagers! This is because of the rush to go to other services on a Sunday on the Downs. I do not have the regular chance to catch up with the kids to whom I am also called to serve. But not only the kids, I do not have the chance to catch up with any members after church at the early services.

Again, in recent times, new faces have appeared at some of our congregations (see story above), and I have not had the opportunity to welcome them and to talk to them after church because I have had to rush off. It is often left to our members to speak to them, which is fine, but they often want to meet the pastor and ask questions.

So I would like to everyone to take time to consider the following, or to come up with suggestions, and maybe we could speak more about this when our Parish Meeting is held (a date yet to be decided), as well as perhaps at our next CoC meeting:

1. For the four congregations on the Downs, do we need to hold 2 communion services every Sunday when pastor is here, or can we combine some of these into one, so as to have the opportunity for Bible Study after church, or for pastor to visit the Sunday School or have the opportunity to speak with any visitors after church? This leads to thought number 2.
2. Is there a way to make a better use of our limited resources and time (6 congregations, 1 pastor). Ideally, we need another pastor, but it appears for the time being, we have to work with one. We do not have any prospective students at the moment who wish to study for the ministry. As for men who are already pastors in Australia but belong to other synods, who would perhaps consider a call to the AELC, we must be thorough and take our time to put them through a colloquy. There are 2 young men about to begin studying in Walther Seminary in the States, who could perhaps help us, but even if one of these were to consider receiving a call from Australia,

they won't be ready for another 4 years. Besides, it is not an easy decision to accept a call to serve in another country. Although we do not know our future – we leave that in the Lord's hands. In the meantime, can we better utilise what we do have?

3. Whenever we hold combined services, I always hear how good it is for us to share fellowship time with one another. Should we be combining more often for AELC services?
4. Because we work on a three-weekly rotation, even if I miss one Sunday, that means at least one congregation will have 6 weeks of lay-reading. As it stands, each congregation is receiving on average 17 HC and 34 LR services per year. Is each congregation okay with this?
5. Regarding Bible Study, on the Downs, we are only holding Bible Studies for about 6 months of the year. This is inadequate. If we could combine some services, Bible Studies could be held more regularly throughout the whole year.

Perhaps there are some more ideas, or even better ones out there, and so I shall leave it there.

I continue to be in regular contact with the pastors of the ULMA. Each month we speak online via a Zoom call. Pastor Ross Mahan and the congregation of Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church, Michigan has recently been accepted into the ULMA after accepting the ULMA's doctrinal statements, as well as the AELC Statement of Faith. I have spoken to Pastor Mahan (an elderly pastor probably in his late 50's early 60's) and our discussions have been very friendly. From those discussions I can clearly see that the AELC and Faith's doctrine is one and the same. They have asked for permission to "lift" some pages of our Statement of Faith for their own use. Faith has a membership of around 30.

Over the past few months I have also been working together with the ULMA in preparing a statement for our two church bodies to adopt in regards to the practice of virtual communion. The ULMA recently held a conference where they put together a statement which has now been sent to the AELC for us to read. I shall endeavour to get copies of this statement out among the congregations to peruse before our next CoC meeting to be held on the 19th of June, where we shall discuss their statement and our response to it.