



# **THE RULES OF THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Updated February 2019

## **ARTICLE 1, NAME**

The name of this church shall be AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH (AELC).

### **PART A**

## **ARTICLE 2, DECLARATION OF FAITH AND DOCTRINE**

All teaching and practice in the AELC shall conform to Article 2 of these rules.

### **2.1 THE SOURCE OF OUR FAITH**

The Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC) and all its members accept without reservation the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as a whole and in all their parts, as the very Word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit and recorded without error in the original manuscripts by the Prophets, Apostles, and Evangelists. These Holy Scriptures are the only inerrant, infallible, authoritative source, and final rule, norm, and standard for all matters of Christian doctrine, faith, and life.

### **2.2 THE CONFESSION OF OUR FAITH**

The AELC acknowledges and accepts as true expositions of the Word of God, and as its own confession, all the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord of 1580, namely: the three Ecumenical Creeds: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed; the *Unaltered Augsburg Confession*; the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*; the *Smalcald Articles*, including the *Tract on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*; the *Small Catechism* of Luther, the *Large Catechism* of Luther; and the *Formula of Concord*, both the *Epitome*, and the *Thorough Declaration*.

### **2.3 THE AELC STATEMENT OF FAITH**

The AELC acknowledges its *Statement of Faith* as a Scripturally-based response to contemporary doctrinal and moral issues.

### **2.4 THE WORD SHALL STAND**

The AELC also acknowledges *The Word Shall Stand* as a Scripturally based explanation of the AELC's doctrine.

## **ARTICLE 3, MEMBERSHIP**

- 3.1 The unit of membership in the organisation of the AELC is the congregation. The congregation is the chief focus of work in the Lord's name. A person may become a member of the AELC only by joining one of its member-congregations.
- 3.2 Congregations that accept without reservation the confessional standards set out in Article 2 of these rules shall be eligible for membership in the AELC.
- 3.3 A congregation shall be received into membership of the AELC only after the congregations of the AELC have approved of its rules and received written assurance of its intention to abide by article 2 of these rules, our confessions.

## **ARTICLE 4, THE OBLIGATIONS OF FELLOWSHIP**

- 4.1 The AELC acknowledges that Jesus Christ is the one Lord and Head of the Church (Matthew 20:25-27; 23:8-12). He alone exercises authority in His church. Whatever power and authority is exercised in the church can come only from Him and be exercised by those to whom He has delegated it. Christ has delegated such authority to His congregations (Matthew 18:17-20) and to His ministers (1 Corinthians 4:1; John 20:23; 2 Corinthians 2:10; 4:5) when they speak in His name.
- 4.2 The orthodox character of the Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church is not established by its mere name or by its outward acceptance of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, but by the doctrine that is actually taught in the pulpits of member-congregations, in its seminary, and its publications. Because member-congregations are in fellowship, each congregation is co-responsible for the doctrine and practice in other member congregations. Member-congregations therefore assume co-responsibility for all public teaching, whether spoken, in print, or in the electronic media. On the other hand, a congregation does not lose its orthodox character when errors intrude casually, provided that these are combated and eventually removed by doctrinal discipline. A congregation is obliged to listen carefully to words of admonition from a sister congregation and to act upon them cordially whenever necessary.
- 4.3 The AELC has the right and solemn duty to insist that its member-congregations exercise doctrinal discipline.

- 4.4 The AELC shall have the power, on behalf of its member congregations to insist that congregations conform to the confessional paragraphs of its rules and observe them. If any congregation persists in wrong doctrine or doctrinal practice, the only recourse is to drop it, after admonition, from membership of the AELC.
- 4.5 Member-congregations shall exercise doctrinal supervision over one another, encourage and maintain true unity in the one true faith (Ephesians 4:3-6; 1 Corinthians 1:10), and maintain a united defence against the false teachings of our times and against schism and sectarianism (Romans 16:17-18).
- 4.6 Member congregations shall provide brotherly supervision of ministers, teachers, and sister congregations, to help and encourage them in their God-given duties and responsibilities, as well as provide protection and assistance where needed.
- 4.7 Member-congregations shall maintain and extend true fellowship with those who are one with them in pure doctrine and practice (the pure marks of the Church), and, consequently, cooperate in the sacred functions of the church with other organisations that practise the same confessional position.
- 4.8 When a congregation is dissatisfied with the doctrine or doctrinal practice of a sister congregation, it should first approach the sister congregation directly. If it is still dissatisfied, it should notify the chairman of the CoC, to arrange for the issue to be discussed with all other congregations.
- 4.9 The AELC encourages congregations to discuss innovations that may involve doctrine with sister congregations before introducing them.

## **ARTICLE 5, THE AUTONOMY OF MEMBER-CONGREGATIONS**

- 5.1 Local congregations of every place and time, rather than wider ecclesiastical organisations, must be seen as instituted by God. Local congregations are brought into being by the ministry of the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments, and exist for their sake.
- 5.2 The powers and authority of any wider ecclesiastical organisation over a truly Lutheran congregation are those of an “outward polity” (*Apology* Art VII. VIII, 13; *Triglotta* p.231), and are by human ordinance rather than by divine right. They can be advisory only, not coercive.

5.3 We recognise the autonomy or sovereignty of the local congregations in matters that God has neither commanded nor forbidden.

5.4 Neither the AELC nor its member-congregations shall interfere in the administrative affairs of another member-congregation.

## **ARTICLE 6, THE AUTHORITY AND POWER OF THE AELC**

6.1.1 Neither the AELC, as an institution of men (*Augsburg Confession* VII), nor its officers can have any power and authority except that which the member-congregations have expressly vested in it.

6.1.2 The AELC, in accordance with these rules, shall have power and authority, entrusted to it by the congregations of its membership, to make rules and regulations for the administration of its affairs.

6.1.3 The AELC may delegate the exercise of its derived authority and power to officers, boards, committees, commissions, or tribunals that are elected or appointed under these rules, as may seem appropriate.

6.1.4 The AELC shall have the power to acquire, accept, hold, dispose of, or otherwise deal with such property and estate as it may deem necessary for the carrying out of its functions. It may make regulations, always and only under the provisions and spirit of these rules, to administer and care for its assets.

6.1.5 The AELC shall have power to hold in trust any or all of the funds and assets of the association known as the AELC.

6.1.6 The AELC shall have power to establish such institutions and/or organisations that will effectively carry out its aims.

6.1.7 The AELC is supported by free-will contributions and gifts of congregations and individuals and shall have no power to require congregations or members to pay dues or subscriptions.

6.1.8 Member congregations of the AELC have the right not to be bound by decisions of the AELC in matters that God has neither commanded nor forbidden.

- 6.1.9 Under no circumstances shall the AELC acquire or hold legal title to the property, land, or possessions of member congregations. It recognises that this practice may silence congregations and individuals or force them to conform. For the same reason, the AELC shall not introduce a system of superannuation or benefits for pastors that could in any way induce them to remain silent or that could make it awkward for them to speak their minds in opposition to AELC officials.
- 6.2 The AELC shall always recognise that it is only an advisory body with respect to the self-government of its member congregations.

## **ARTICLE 7, ALTERATIONS TO RULES**

- 7.1 Articles 2.1 and 2.2 may not be amended.
- 7.2 Article 2.3, *The Statement of Faith*, can be amended or added to, if, in all constituent member congregations, 75 per cent of all voting members present at the meeting of each congregation, agree to the changes.
- 7.3 Changes and amendments to other portions of these rules may be made, provided that three months' notice of the proposed amendment is given to the member-congregations, and provided that two-thirds of the member-congregations of the AELC vote in favour of the proposed change.

## **ARTICLE 8, ALTERATIONS TO GENERAL GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES**

- 8.1 A set of guidelines may be adopted to clarify procedure for implementing these rules and to provide additional details of them. Such guidelines shall not in any way conflict with these rules, but they shall agree with the spirit and letter of these rules, so that they may serve to clarify the same principles in them.
- 8.2 Guidelines may be changed at any time by a simple majority of the members present to vote in their congregations when the question is put, provided that two thirds of AELC member-congregations vote in the affirmative.

## **ARTICLE 9, PROCEDURE IN APPLYING FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE AELC**

- 9.1 A congregation that applies for membership shall send its rules to the Secretary of the AELC, for study by the congregations of the AELC.
- 9.2 The AELC shall provide the rules of the congregation that is applying for membership to the member-congregations for study.
- 9.3 The applying congregation shall provide details of its office-bearers.
- 9.4 There shall be a unanimous acceptance of the applying congregation's doctrinal subscription and doctrinal practice on the part of all the member-congregations of the AELC.

## **ARTICLE 10, MINISTRY IN THE NAME OF ALL CONGREGATIONS**

If a pastor is called by a number of congregations, for example, as a Seminary lecturer, the call shall be extended by the congregations, not by a committee of the AELC, even though a committee may prepare the details of the call to present to congregations.

## **ARTICLE 11, PASTORAL CONFERENCES AND DOCTRINAL FORUMS**

### **11.1. Pastoral Conferences**

Preamble: The AELC acknowledges that its pastors may wish to meet periodically by themselves for mutual support and to discuss confidentially sensitive issues in their ministry, and when such meetings are necessary for the well-being and mutual support of the pastors.

- 11.1.1 Pastoral conferences shall be convened by the chairman of the Co-ordinating Committee to discuss doctrinal issues that arise.
- 11.1.2 A pastoral conference shall provide a written report of its deliberations and recommendations to each member congregation of the AELC.
- 11.1.3 A pastoral conference shall prepare discussion papers for doctrinal forums.

### **11.2 Doctrinal Forums**

- 11.2.1 Doctrinal forums of the AELC shall be open to all communicant members.

- 11.2.2 Doctrinal forums shall be convened by the chairman of the Co-ordinating Committee.
- 11.2.3 Doctrinal forums shall have no decision-making powers. Their purpose is to provide information and education.
- 11.2.4 Doctrinal issues that have not been resolved after being discussed at a pastoral conference and a doctrinal forum shall be dealt with under Article 4 of the AELC Rules.

## **ARTICLE 12, CONTACT WITH OTHER CONFESSIONAL LUTHERANS**

- 12.1 The AELC acknowledges that it has a responsibility to recognise Lutheran congregations and individuals throughout the world who are not members of a heterodox congregation and who uphold a confessional position that is in accordance with the pure marks of the church. It will extend altar and pulpit fellowship to those Lutherans whose doctrine and practice are consistent with the AELC Statement of Faith.
- 12.2 The AELC shall proactively seek to compile a register of Lutheran organisations and individuals who are not members of a heterodox congregation and who hold a confessional position that is compatible with the AELC Statement of Faith.

### **PART B, PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES FOR THE AELC**

- 1. There shall be no hierarchy or degrees of status and superiority, either among the laymen or among the pastors of the AELC. All office-bearers shall be seen as servants of the congregations that they serve, and not lords or masters.
- 2. The AELC does not function with a centralised structure of administration.
- 3. Congregations of the AELC are encouraged to form regional groupings, such as would enable them to provide mutual support and encouragement, and would better utilise their resources and maximise their mission efforts.

## PART C, THE SEMINARY COMMITTEE OF THE AELC

### 1, *Name of the Seminary*

The name of the Seminary shall be “The Seminary of the Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church”

### 2, *Confessional Basis*

The members of the Seminary Committee shall be members of the AELC, who subscribe to the confession of the AELC. They shall see to it that all those who give theological instruction shall hold and accept the confessional basis of the AELC.

### 3, *Membership, Voting-Rights, and Meetings*

- 3.1 Each member-congregation of the AELC shall have the right to elect one male voting representative to the Seminary Committee. It is recommended that each congregation appoint a proxy member for the Seminary Committee. All pastors shall also be members of the Seminary Committee. Pastors may attend meetings of the Committee and have the right to speak and vote, but pastors who are lecturing to students under the supervision of the Seminary Committee shall not be entitled to vote.
- 3.2 The Committee shall meet as often as it deems necessary to conduct its duties successfully.
- 3.3 Normally, meetings shall be held in conjunction with the Co-ordinating Committee. In joint meetings, the Chairman and the Secretary of the Co-ordinating Committee shall officiate.
- 3.4 When the Seminary Committee meets separately, its agenda shall be circulated before the meeting.
- 3.5 If a vote of the Seminary Committee is tied, the *status quo* shall prevail.
- 3.6 The Seminary Committee shall make the minutes of its separate meetings available to all member congregations of the AELC.

#### *4, Objectives of the Seminary Committee*

- 4.1 The primary objective of the Seminary Committee is to provide for the education of candidates for the public ministry of the Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church, and to be responsible for it.
- 4.2 The secondary objective of the Committee is to provide theological training for mature-age pastoral students, teachers, laymen, and church workers.
- 4.3 The Seminary Committee shall assure itself that all instruction given through the Seminary is in harmony with the confessional basis of the AELC.
- 4.4 No student shall be graduated from the Seminary and no pastor shall be admitted or continue unless he unreservedly agrees with the confessional basis of the AELC.

#### *5, Powers and Duties of the Seminary Committee*

- 5.1 Congregations shall recommend candidates for the ministry to the Seminary Committee, and the Seminary Committee shall approve the admission of suitable prospective candidates for Seminary study.
- 5.2 In the name of supporting congregations, the Seminary Committee shall appoint suitably qualified persons to serve as Seminary lecturers. Regular Seminary lecturers shall be only those who accept the confessional basis of the AELC. The expertise of other qualified people in non-theological areas (e.g. voice-production) may be used as required. Guest-lecturers shall function under the responsibility of AELC lecturers in their particular fields.
- 5.3 The Seminary Committee shall appraise or colloquise men before recommending them to the supporting congregations as lecturers.
- 5.4 The Seminary Committee shall oversee the allocation of particular subjects to particular lecturers.
- 5.5 If a student needs financial support, his need shall be placed on the agenda of a joint meeting of the Co-ordinating Committee and the Seminary Committee.
- 5.6 The Seminary Committee shall forward money donated for Seminary purposes to the Treasurer of the Co-ordinating Committee.

5.7 When a pastor of another Lutheran Church applies to join the ministry of the AELC, the Seminary Committee shall appoint a committee to conduct a colloquy. Only when the Seminary Committee is satisfied with the results of the colloquy may it recommend to the congregations of the AELC that the applicant may receive a call from a member-congregation or parish.

5.8 The Seminary Committee shall maintain contact with, and oversight of, AELC students who are studying elsewhere.

#### *6, Admission of Students to the Seminary and their Supervision*

6.1 Normally, matriculation (Grade 12) shall be the minimum level for admission to Seminary study.

6.2 An applicant for admission to study for the ministry shall present a written résumé of his life to his congregational pastor, and the applicant's local congregation shall endorse his application for enrolment.

6.3 On its acceptance of a student's enrolment, the Seminary Committee shall provide him with a list of required subjects, on the recommendation of the lecturers.

6.4 The Seminary Committee shall oversee students' academic progress.

6.5 During a candidate's course of study, his congregational pastor shall oversee his Christian life.

6.6 The Seminary Committee shall appoint one of its members to take a particular interest in the progress of each individual student.

6.7 The Seminary Committee shall receive and evaluate reports from congregations on students' practical work (e.g. congregational involvement, Sunday school teaching, and conduct of Bible studies).

6.8 The Seminary Committee shall request the Seminary-lecturers to report students' results regularly for review.

6.9 In the interest of preserving confidentiality on sensitive personal issues, the Committee may declare a minute as a "closed minute," provided that two thirds of the Committee-members agree. All members are required to respect such confidentiality.

## *7, Graduation, and Recommendation of a Candidate for Ordination*

- 7.1 When a student's preparation for the ministry is complete, it shall be the responsibility of the Seminary Committee to assess his fitness, to approve his graduation.
- 7.2 When a student is graduated, the Seminary Committee shall provide him with a transcript of the subjects that he has completed and prepare a certificate of graduation for him.
- 7.3 The Seminary Committee shall advise congregations when a candidate for the ministry is ready for ordination.
- 7.4 Candidates for the ministry shall not deliver sermons that have not been approved by a pastor of the AELC.
- 7.5 Students shall not administer baptism except in case of emergencies, and shall not consecrate the Lord's Supper before they are ordained.

## *8, Alterations to the Rules of the Seminary Committee*

The Seminary Committee shall have the power to amend, alter, or add to these rules by a simple majority of those entitled to vote. Its recommendations for changes must receive the approval of a simple majority of the members present to vote in their congregations when the question is put, and the alterations shall be in effect if two-thirds of the AELC member-congregations vote in the affirmative.

## *9, Elections of Office-Bearers of the Seminary Committee*

- 1.1 The Seminary Committee shall elect from its own members the positions of Chairman and Secretary in the first quarter of each year.

## **PART D, THE CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE**

### *1, Membership of the Co-ordinating Committee*

- 1.1 The Co-ordinating Committee of the AELC shall be composed of one lay delegate from each of the member-congregations. It is recommended that each congregation appoint a proxy member for the Co-ordinating Committee. All the members of the Co-ordinating Committee must be male members in good standing in one of the member-congregations of the AELC.
- 1.2 The Co-ordinating Committee of the AELC shall have a Chairman, a Vice-Chairman, a Secretary, a Treasurer, and two Auditors, who shall be elected from the lay membership of either the Co-ordinating Committee or the Seminary Committee. Their duties shall be as are outlined below.
- 1.3 All the pastors shall be members of the Co-ordinating Committee.
- 1.4 Any decision that the Co-ordinating Committee makes shall come to member-congregations as a recommendation only.
- 1.5 The Co-ordinating Committee shall have the power to co-opt the services of a qualified member of an AELC congregation to serve in a special aspect of its work, such as mission co-ordinator, or editor of a newsletter.

### *2, Elections of Office-Bearers of the Co-ordinating Committee*

- 2.1 Elections shall be held after February each year.
- 2.2 Office-bearers shall be elected annually, and may come from members of the Co-ordinating Committee and the Seminary Committee whom the congregations have appointed. The chairman shall hold office for no more than three consecutive years, and shall hold only one position at any one given time on either committee.

### *3, Attendance at Meetings of the Co-ordinating Committee and Quorum*

- 3.1 All voting members of congregations of the AELC are permitted to attend meetings of the Co-ordinating Committee. However, only congregational delegates are permitted to vote on recommendations that the Co-ordinating Committee makes to congregations.

3.2 For a quorum of the Co-ordinating committee, five lay-delegates shall be present, with at least one representative from each parish.

#### *4, Decisions of the Co-ordinating Committee*

4.1 Whenever the Co-ordinating Committee makes any decision without the prior approval of congregations, the decision comes into effect if not more than one third of member-congregations object within six weeks after the decision.

4.2 Issues that arise from submissions from congregations that are deemed to be of a doctrinal nature shall be referred to a pastors' conference.

4.3 Submissions from individuals shall be received as information only and shall be referred to congregations for discussion.

#### *5, The Vote of a Chairman of the Co-ordinating Committee*

The Chairman's first vote is as a delegate. His second vote or casting vote shall be used to maintain the status quo.

#### *6, Reimbursement of Expenses*

6.1 The Executive shall be given the authority to ask for reimbursement for expenses associated with their tasks for the Co-ordinating Committee. The basic rate of payment shall be made at a meeting of the CoC, with any unforeseen circumstances being looked upon favourably.

6.2 The Treasurer shall be authorised to forward up to \$400 per car to persons making an authorised trip on mission work.

DUTIES OF OFFICE-BEARERS OF THE CO-ORDINATING  
COMMITTEE

*1, Chairman*

The Chairman of the Co-ordinating Committee shall act as spokesman and contact person for the AELC, preside over meetings of the Co-ordinating Committee, preside over all meetings or doctrinal conferences conducted on behalf of the AELC, convene a pastoral conference or a doctrinal conference to deal with concerns that arise.

*2, Vice-Chairman*

The Vice-Chairman of the Co-ordinating Committee shall serve as chairman when the Chairman is absent or unable to fulfil his duties.

*3, Secretary*

The Secretary of the Co-ordinating Committee shall

Inform member-congregations of the date of a planned meeting of the Co-ordinating Committee at least four weeks in advance, requesting items for the agenda,

Call for agenda-items from congregations,

circulate the agenda to member-congregations at least two weeks prior to the date of the meeting of the Co-ordinating Committee,

keep full and accurate minutes of all resolutions and other proceedings of the Co-ordinating Committee meetings,

enter such minutes into a book for that purpose, which shall be open for inspection at all reasonable times to any member of an AELC congregation who previously applies to the Secretary for that inspection,

ensure the accuracy of minutes, and see that they are signed by the secretary who recorded them,

arrange for the chairman or person acting as the chairman to counter-sign the minutes at the next succeeding meeting of the Co-ordinating Committee, following the reading and approval of the minutes,

prepare such communications as the Co-ordinating Committee may direct,

forward all recommendations to congregations for decision,

keep current lists of chairmen, secretaries, and treasurers of member-congregations and attend to mailings as appropriate,

do other mailings and distributions as directed by the Co-ordinating Committee,

act as a contact person for the AELC.

#### *4, Treasurer*

The Treasurer of the Co-ordinating Committee shall

receive and disburse the funds of the AELC, including the drawing and signing of cheques for and on behalf of the AELC,

keep an accurate record of all funds received and disbursed,

make a full report to the Co-ordinating Committee at such times as the Co-ordination Committee may request,

submit the AELC books for regular audit,

present, on behalf of the Co-ordinating Committee, a statement of the AELC accounts to congregations,

maintain securely and safely the custody of the books, documents, instruments of title, and securities of the AELC.

#### *5, Auditors*

The auditors of the Co-ordinating Committee shall thoroughly examine the books of the Treasurer and report to the Co-ordinating Committee on their correctness.