

A VISION: WOMEN'S ORDINATION IN THE LCA

In the opening address at the Time to Soar Conference, Dr Pfitzner outlined a *'vision for the future of the LCA in which women are full participants in its life and work.'* After two decades of debate on women in ministry, the Commission of Theology and Inter-Church Relations concluded that there are no theological reasons to prohibit the ordination of women. Those present at the Adelaide conference agreed it was time to soar above the present difficulties and disappointments and regain a fresh perspective on future possibilities.

Reference was made to Dr Martin Luther King: *'if we do not dream of possibilities they are unlikely to become actualities'*. Participants agreed a firm commitment to changing the LCA's current position excluding women from the *Office of the Ministry* is needed in order to keep the dream alive by whatever means are available to us.

Apprehension hinders our vision for the LCA

In an audience which not only loved the LCA but was also sensitive to the fear which change may bring and how attachments to past cultural practices are playing a debilitating role in preventing change, it once more became quite clear during Time to Soar that:

- ❖ While Lutheran theology affirms men and women have equal dignity in the kingdom of God, **nevertheless**, in our LCA women are not permitted to play a role in public ministry.
- ❖ While Lutheran theology affirms the priesthood of all believers is a fundamental biblical truth, **nevertheless**, in our LCA women are excluded from holding the pastoral office.
- ❖ While women are equally as capable as men are of exercising a sacramental ministry, **nevertheless**, in our LCA, they are not permitted to do so and some believe they will desecrate the body and blood of Christ.
- ❖ While it is theologically permissible to ordain women, **nevertheless**, in our LCA there remains a fear amongst some that the church will be feminized in the process and men will abdicate their leadership responsibilities.
- ❖ While many other Lutheran Churches across the global Lutheran community ordain women, **nevertheless**, some in our LCA regards these Christians, our fellow Lutherans, as too liberal and not really Lutheran in their confession and practice.
- ❖ While it is acknowledged there is a shortage of pastors in the LCA, **nevertheless**, some believe women can never take the place of men.
- ❖ While some members of the LCA have never experienced an ordained woman leading worship, **nevertheless**, it is believed it would look wrong to see a woman in the pulpit.

Overcoming fear and embracing a vision for the LCA – where love comes to life

The role lay people played in bringing about the union of the two Lutheran Churches in 1966 to create the LCA has been an inspiration and encouragement for us to open up and broaden the debate throughout our LCA so that discussion about the ordination of both men and women is not limited to theological commissions, pastors' conferences and specially appointed committees. Every member of the priesthood of all believers has a right to have her or his voice heard without fear of recrimination.

It was noted that among those currently selected to facilitate the ongoing dialogue towards consensus there was not one woman's voice included as a contributor even though the LCA is blessed with theologically competent women who have pastoral hearts, a wealth of insight and an abundance of wisdom to offer the LCA.

It is our convictions that as our congregations begin to accept women in ministry and experience the way they fulfill their pastoral duties in our parishes, schools and institutions, we will grow to appreciate how much a gift and blessing women pastors can be to our LCA.

In response to the Time to Soar Conference participants agreed to:

A C T I O N

- ❖ Begin a concerted effort to invite fellow Christians in the LCA to declare publicly their support for the ordination of women and keep a vision alive wherein love comes to life.
- ❖ Encourage the leaders of our LCA to foster an open and inclusive discussion at all levels, including *The Lutheran*.
- ❖ Give expression to both unity and diversity in the LCA about this matter by considering the possibility that while some congregations may call a woman to be their pastor nevertheless the decision of other congregations not to do so will be honored and respected.
- ❖ Consider the possibility of individual congregations and schools of the LCA publicly affirming the ordination of female pastors already serving in our parishes and educational institutions.
- ❖ Begin a prayerful and inclusive dialogue examining anew whether the ordination of women is a fundamental theological question and church divisive issue in the light of the doctrine of justification by faith.

We were reminded *'our goal is to live under the Word that declares us saints and sinners, and to let the gospel have the last say over us, to live to the glory of Christ by faith in him. And that means, of course, that we seek to live to the glory of the triune God. True, but what we earnestly long for is the freedom of women in the LCA to glorify God in the service of God's people in pastoral ministry. Let's dream with joyful hope. God still works miracles!'*

WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW?

Since the Time to Soar in Adelaide, St Peters sponsored the All Saints conference at Indooroopilly. The keynote address, "A Church for All Times is a Church for Our Times" was presented by Sally Chandler, former Head of St Peters Lutheran College. She highlighted the disjunction between the Church and its schools and offered a model for dealing with this problematic issue.

- ❖ The All Saints Steering Committee was established to coordinate the work of congregations in Queensland and to liaise with groups in South Australia, Victoria and elsewhere to advocate the ordination of women.
- ❖ Informal groups and social networks involving pastors and laity are now very actively canvassing on this issue.
- ❖ Formal and informal approaches are being made to church leaders to embrace inclusivity and broaden the discussion base to include laity and women.
- ❖ A view of the LCA which believes that, for the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments is affirmed. Therefore reassurance is being given to congregations that the call process would mean those congregations who are not yet comfortable with calling a female pastor to the Office of the Ministry are under no obligation to do so. Our love for the LCA thereby enables us to maintain our unity in Christ while at the same time accepting diversity of practice without compromising the doctrine of justification by faith alone.
- ❖ Neal Nuske wrote an Open Letter which develops the view that the work of the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament is neither conditional upon, nor limited by, nor validated by the gender of the pastor.
- ❖ Synod resolutions from St Peters, St Stephens and St Andrews have been provided to all Pastors and congregations.
- ❖ The General President has assured us that all resolutions will be presented at Synod.

The full texts of Dr Pfitzner's presentation, Neal Nuske's Open Letter and Sally Chandler's keynote address can be found on www.wmn.org.au, and katieandmartin.wordpress.com.au. This summary has been prepared on behalf of the All Saints and Time to Soar groups of laity and clergy who support women's ordination.