

An Open Letter to the LCA Regarding the Ordination of Women

Dear Members of the LCA,

My name is Jake Zabel and, for those who don't know me, I am an Australian Lutheran who was formerly a member of the *Lutheran Church of Australia*. I am writing this letter out of concern for the LCA and its members.

While both inside and outside the LCA I've seen the synod constantly struggling with conflict and controversy that is damaging. This is affecting not only the LCA itself, but also the mission of the Church, which is to preach the Gospel.

The LCA suffers from ongoing fights and division amongst its members, particularly concerning the issue of the ordination of women. In recent years the synod has voted four times to change the position of the LCA to allow women to be ordained. Each time the vote has failed to reach the necessary 2/3s majority needed to change the doctrinal position of the synod. Following the last vote in 2018, which saw an increase in the votes against this change, I have seen a negative reaction from those in favour of the ordination of women. I've seen congregations holding "lament and hope" services aimed at grieving the failure to change the position of the LCA to allow the ordination of women. More recently, pastors and congregations have participated in a "Call for Action" service, calling on lay women to lead the Sunday worship service and even preach the sermon. Now according to the LCA's teaching women are permitted to lead lay-reading services, on the condition that they read sermons prepared by the pastor (DSTO Vol. 2.F: Women in the Church: *Should women serve as lay readers in public worship?*)¹. However, on several occasions pastors and congregations of the LCA have defied the official position of the LCA and allowed women to lead and preach in services other than lay reading services. Women have been permitted to preach their own sermons while the pastor sat in the congregation. This is evident in the following cases:

St. Stephen's Adelaide 30/12/2018:

http://www.ststephensadelaide.org.au/sermons/a-reflection-on-the-word?fbclid=IwAR1l_mGQstQX293VFYD9mPGDuJnhvNiacfBz5k4wpsTH42qFI0pZQdV3bU

Our Saviour (Redeemer Lutheran School Rochedale):

<https://soundcloud.com/oursaviourlutheranchurch/20181202-luke21-25-36-caitlin>

<https://soundcloud.com/oursaviourlutheranchurch/20181014-am-rachael>

<https://soundcloud.com/oursaviourlutheranchurch/20181014-pm-tiffany>

¹ And while not explicitly stated in the DSTO document I have been advised that when this document was written it was understood that women were only meant to lead a lay reading service when "there were no suitable men available."

St. Paul's Box Hill 6/1/19:

<https://www.stpaulsboxhill.org.au/index.php/resources/preachit/message/stp-1182>²

Mawson lakes Community Church³:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Am8-HLWkYzI&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR0wbJX1Kr6v5xYNOAiC0E2yNauAcM5JTAVmtHJd-pefP8Q09zSGhLFHo5E>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-28_bAeFJw

In some cases, the women were even permitted to consecrate the elements of Holy Communion (see pictures in the appendix). This is contrary to the teaching and practice of the LCA which says that only an ordained minister can consecrate the elements for Holy Communion (DSTO Vol. 1: Sacraments: *Concerning the sacrament of the altar*).

In the LCA's Rite of Ordination, pastors are required to "uphold the public teaching and practice of the Lutheran Church of Australia and to accept the pastoral and doctrinal oversight of the bishop." The current official public teaching of the LCA is that women are not permitted to serve in the office of the ministry (*Theses of Agreement* 6.11). However, there are many pastors and congregations in the LCA who have violated this vow by upholding and promoting teachings contrary to the public teaching and practice of the LCA. There are pastors and congregations who publically advocate for the Ordination of Women in opposition to the public teaching and practice of the LCA. This is evident in the following cases:

See the church website for *St. Stephen's Adelaide*:

<http://www.ststephensadelaide.org.au/wo-working-party.html>

See the sermon from 14/10/2018 by the pastor of *Holy Cross Belconnen*:

<http://belconnen.lutheran.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/194/2018/10/Job-23-My-Complaint-is-Bitter1654.pdf>

It is disheartening to see this kind of rebellious behaviour coming from pastors and members of the LCA.

Therefore, I am writing this letter as a "Plea for Peace" for all those in the LCA who promote the ordination of women.

This is my plea:

The public teaching and practice of the LCA is that only men can be ordained to the Office of the Ministry. This is the LCA's official position. As pastors and members of the LCA you are called to hold to, uphold and promote the position of the LCA. You are not called to publically preach or teach counter to the position of the synod. You are not called to rebel against the decision of the synod and you are not called to change the position of the synod to fit your own personal position.

If you cannot accept the position of the LCA, if you cannot accept the decision of the synod, then the proper reaction is to leave the synod, not to try and force a change through rebellious action and endless voting.

² Note how the sermon from 30/12/18 refers to the male leader as "lay reader Anthony" <https://www.stpaulsboxhill.org.au/index.php/resources/preachit/message/stp-1181> but the sermon from 6/1/19 does not refer to Sue as a lay reader

³ This is a LCA congregation, you can find them on the LCA *Find a Church*

I speak from personal experience. I was a member of the LCA and studying for the ministry, but there came a point in my studies when I found that I just did not agree with the teachings of the LCA and I could not in good conscience take an ordination vow that said I held to the public teachings and practices of the LCA. Thus, I left the LCA and sought out a synod whose teachings and practices I could hold to.

I am reaching out to all those in the LCA who do not agree with the LCA's position to do likewise. Rather than trying to change the entire LCA to match your beliefs, withdraw from the LCA and seek out a Church that matches your beliefs.

To my knowledge there are three Lutheran groups in Australia who permit the ordination of women and would be more than welcoming to new members:

- *Living Water Fellowship Wagga Wagga* www.livingwaterwagga.org.au/⁴
- *Living Waters Community Church Mildura* www.livingwaters.net.au/
- *Living Grace, Toowoomba* www.livinggracechurch.org.au/

There are many of the non-English speaking Lutheran Churches that are not officially members of the LCA.

(Note: to my knowledge these groups permit the ordination of women, but you would have to speak to them yourselves to clarify this).

Otherwise, you could seek to start a new Lutheran synod that permits the ordination of women. I think the *Lutheran World Federation* would be more than happy to assist a church plant in Australia.

My point is this: If you cannot accept the LCA's position that women cannot be ordained to the Office of the Ministry, then you should leave the synod rather than trying to change the position of the synod to match your own personal position.

Jake Zabel
11/01/2019

⁴ A member of the Lutheran Churches in Mission for Christ

Appendix:
Further evidence of women serving
in leadership positions in the LCA



Nadine Williams

Wonderful service and I took pix to show women in charge of worship. It is such a natural step towards fairness and equity for women wanting to serve God as pastors in the Lutheran Church



4 d Like Reply



Nadine Williams

And here is our preacher Tanya Wittwer I believe, delivering her message to the congregation.





Tanya Wittwer ▶



Yesterday at 09:33 ·

St Stephen's 30th December. Bella opened our worship, Yvonne declared us forgiven, Beth, Bella and Gladys shared God's word with us, Helen spent time with the children, Tanya preached, Emma led the prayers, Kara, Hui Hui and Susan served us, Anna blessed us and Tanya sent us on our way.





Sue Westthorp is with Kate Burke at St Paul's Lutheran Church, Box Hill.



Yesterday at 18:20 · Box Hill, VIC ·

Kate Burke leading worship at St Paul's this morning



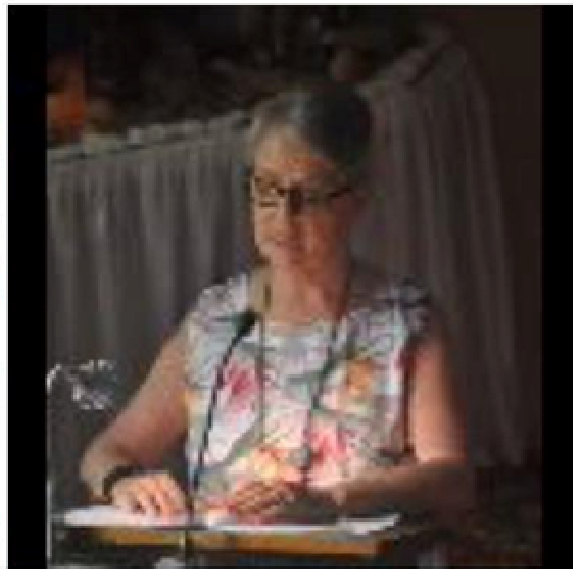


Judy Judd

2 hrs ·



8:30 am at Bethany SA. Diane Trenberth led the prayers, Jayne Pfeiffer read the message and the women involved in leading the other parts of the service at 8:30 am.





Judy Judd is with Heather Slade and Kerry Kroschel.



2 hrs ·

11:00 am worship at Bethany SA. Lynette Nitschke worship leader, Karen Pietsch gave the message and all the women involved in leading the worship.





Chris Mann shared a link.



1 hr ·

At Mawson Lakes Community Church the sermon was preached by Heather Eckert.



YOUTUBE.COM

December 30 Message Mary, the wise leader by Heather Eckert

Like

Comment

15



Andrew Vanderwal



33 mins · 📷

Anna Watson delivered the message at Victor Harbor on Sunday and various women participated - as they often do - with Bible readings [including the Gospel reading], music, distributing Holy Communion, and the 'words of dismissal' to the pastor. Unfortunately many of the photos didn't turn out very well because of tricky ambient lighting for the photographer.



👍❤️ 18



Danielle Robinson

1 hr

Today, several Lutheran Churches around the country embraced the priesthood of all believers by encouraging women to lead in all aspects of worship, particularly those roles usually filled by men. I was blessed to have been selected to preach at Living Faith Murrumba Downs. Definitely not my first rodeo, but my first preaching in front of not one, but five ordained Pastors. May God unite us all in Priesthood.

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2 Comments



Liz Winderlich I was there.... so was the Holy Spirit...Thank you God for this gift of a woman whom you have called and of a congregation blessed by her message and leading of worship.

Like · Reply · 1h



Brenda Jericho 🗨️ Out in the sticks, so unable to attend any of these services - would love to hear more/of the others ... ???!

Like · Reply · 43m



Write a comment...

