

A Reflection on my Lay Preaching journey

By Dr Alison Short

I felt called to ministry in the church soon after my confirmation in early teenage-hood, but of course this was impossible! I was a woman; it was not even worth thinking about. I already understood Luther's concept of vocation, and this was to guide my career choices and the underlying meaning and purpose throughout my life, entering a new health field and making a difference locally, nationally and internationally with service, writing, research and education. At the same time, I engaged in many roles within the church: playing music, flowers, Sunday school teaching, lay reading, delegate, chairperson. But God kept niggling, poking me in the ribs about my interest in theology and applying the Word. Then two things collided – 1) attending the NSW/ACT Synod as Lay Delegate and feeling invited into the new ALC Discover Program, as outlined by the Principal of ALC, and 2) the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. I spent my five-hour drive back to Sydney praying, asking, discerning – could this be me? Was I really being invited to study? With overseas conference attendance just cancelled at work a couple of days beforehand – what else would I do with all this extra time?

How much longer would I wait? Was, in fact, the time now?! After considerable consultation with all concerned, not the least of whom were my husband and family and finding a local mentor – I committed to this new direction. And then things changed even more – suddenly we were in lockdown, and everything was online. Vocation? Where were my feet, where was I planted, what did I need to do? As it turned out, I developed new training materials for students in my secular tertiary day-job, incorporating resilience and a broad sense of spirituality for their learning and development; a later review showed their appreciation of this. I completed my Diploma in Theology (ALC/University of Divinity) in 2022. I thought that this would be enough – but still God poked and niggled. And when it became clear that our congregation would be in (pastoral) vacancy, I again talked with the Bishop, where he recommended the ALC Lay Preacher Training (online). I was able to find a very supportive Pastor/Mentor, even if in another region, and we set about making it all work with a combination of in-person, email, phone and Zoom interactions to support my learning and development. In fact, I have thoroughly enjoyed the ALC LPT training and the skills and knowledge it has fostered, in order to make a difference for my congregation and the people in my community. I am very thankful for the support of my Pastor/Mentor, the Bishop, and various and sundry other people (Australia and overseas, Lutheran and other) who reviewed and gave feedback to my draft sermons. As part of this training, I had to write and deliver two sermons, one each on an Old Testament and New Testament text of my choice. I chose to deliver each sermon twice, once in another region and then in my home congregation in Sydney, with the full support of my Pastor/Mentor.

My first sermon delivery was incredibly scary – in fact even submitting my script for review a couple of weeks beforehand was so challenging! How could I dare to stand up and preach in a church that from my birth had told me I wasn't eligible? And then, 50 years after my initial sense of call, I had done it, preached my first sermon! How did it feel? As I reflected at the time, "It felt like what I was born to do!". Now, after a second sermon with more challenges and further

excellent mentoring, I feel ready to start the journey and think towards the future. And I think I hear God saying in the distance, "What took you so long? Where have you been?" To which I say: girding my loins, preparing myself, finding my way, developing my skills, serving the people.

What next? Truly, God only knows. To him be the glory, Amen.

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