

Giving voice to the people of God

Synod: Your voice and your views are Valued!

"The processes and rules are not designed to silence you. If you feel this is the case, then it's good and proper to question what's actually going on. Be encouraged to question and be encouraged to share openly your views."

It seems to me that the processes of decision making of LCA are - or at least should be - and always have been designed to give voice to and value the views of the bulk of its members, its lay people. The documents of the newly constituted church brought together by our forebears in 1966, that describe who we are and how we walk together in Synod, demonstrate this. They go to great lengths to provide ways for its people - disciples of Jesus, members of the LCA, people like you who sit in the pews - to make our voices heard in the actions and decisions of Synod.

Of course, the documents recognise the importance of pastors' views, but our church has always sought to empower the 'people in the pews' in ministry and in decision making. In my home congregation, St Paul's, Box Hill, Victoria, I'm looking forward to hearing the views of people in my home congregation of on the matters pertaining to gender equity which we will be discussing in our Lenten Synod discussions and studies coming up soon.

You see, our constitutions (Congregational, District, and Church wide) encourage and call us all to be people of the Word and put ourselves under the authority of God as God speaks to us through the Word. The one Article we cannot change in any of our constitutions is Article II which firmly puts us in and under God's Word. It's our shared Confession of Faith and guides us as people who thank God for speaking to us in this living Word.

The Theses of Agreement written when the LCA was formed encourages us to always be ready and diligent to study God's Word. For example,

*"Like all confessional statements, the Theses of Agreement are always under the authority of the Word of God, and therefore there must always be a readiness to submit them to the critical scrutiny of God's Word and accordingly confirm them, or amend or repudiate them when further study of God's Word shows them to be inadequate or in error."**

We're called to come together to the Word and to speak from the Word, and act based on the Word of God. We don't need to be a pastor to do this. And we are free to speak with confidence knowing that we can do this openly. That's how the founders planned it, I reckon: for people from the pews to have voice.

So too our constitutions give us the call and encouragement and right to speak at our congregation meetings, at our District Conventions and our Church-wide Conventions of Synod. Sometimes people see them as setting boundaries and limits, but we can also view them as a springboard to bounce from, in loving service and obedience. The very first people mentioned in our constitutions as making up the Church are you and me ... we, together, as baptized members and children of God walking together.

And our constitutions give us the call and encouragement and right to speak to the Church in making proposals and decisions (albeit according to specific by-laws and rules of business to help us do this in an orderly God-pleasing way) together. We do so under the Word of God but are free to speak openly as we listen to God.

It's no wonder we call ourselves Synod...which comes from some Greek words which mean 'to walk together'. As people who walk together with our Lord Jesus in the LCA/NZ we are empowered to be people who can openly listen and speak freely our views in our walk together. I've become concerned over recent times that some people feel and have been marginalised, that they have no voice in our church. Not only does this hurt me, it's not what God wants for his people and I believe not the intent of the LCA/NZ and those who penned the Theses of Agreement and the Constitution. They wanted to give voice to the whole body ... to you and to me and to us as synod walking together. The processes and rules are not designed to silence you. If you feel this is the case, then it's good and proper to question what's actually going on. Be encouraged to question and be encouraged to share openly your views. For this is the church of God in action.

Back in 1966 the LCA came into being and gave voice to the people in the pews by agreeing to gathering together in convention of the Synod made up of 2/3 lay and 1/3 pastor delegates. Nothing has changed in this regard. Your voice can be heard. Your views are valued and can make a difference.

So, please continue to come to the Scriptures and listen. And come with other people from congregations throughout New Zealand and Australia, pastors and lay people who may even have pews like yours. Walk together and be heard. In the LCA I know at its best, your voice and your views are valued and needed."

Neville Otto,

Box Hill, Victoria.

*'The Permanent Status of the Theses of Agreement', Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions, LCA NZ (DSTO), page A31