

## **An open letter to the College of Bishops and the General Church Board of the LCANZ**

Date: 9 September 2022

Dear Bishop Paul Smith, Assistant Bishop Neville Otto, Bishop David Altus, Bishop Lester Priebbenow, Bishop Mark Vainikka, Bishop Mark Whitfield, Bishop Mike Fulwood, Bishop Robert Bartholomaeus,  
and members of the General Church Board Pastor Tim Stringer, Kim Baumeler, Paul Argyle, Charmaine Harch, Tim Wiebusch, Mel Zerner and Peter Zweck,

Christ's grace and peace be with you.

This is a pivotal time for our LCANZ. You have been in numerous meetings over the past months that will continue well into 2023 for the purpose of discussing issues surrounding the ordination of women alongside men in our church. This includes the ordering of ministry and discussing more generally what the future of our church looks like with declining numbers in church membership, the increasing lack of male clergy and the changes in our society, just to mention a few factors. We have been keeping you and your meetings in prayer during our weekly prayer gathering, and you continue to be in the private prayers of many.

The purpose of this open letter is to highlight the roles culture, morale and safety play within the broader LCANZ community, such as ALC, committees and commissions, the church-wide and district offices and local parishes as well as district and church-wide gatherings such as Synods and Pastors' Conferences.

Church culture, morale and safety are key contributing factors relating to all communication and relationships within the church. Poor workplace culture, morale and safety are demonstrated by: outbursts of anger, undermining behaviour, passive aggression, feeling unsafe in conversations, and in voicing an opinion, to name a few. The importance of addressing church culture, morale and safety continually and intentionally is crucial within the church structure as this fosters a culture where there are open and honest conversations. People then feel safe to express their opinions and there is a culture of shared learning and shared responsibility in which not just one voice dominates.

Sometimes, the debate on women's ordination and the role of women in the church cannot be facilitated safely without people fearing that simply talking about this issue will bring about division. It is essential that the church culture provides a safe environment in which robust discussions are safe for all participants, especially women. The fear of discussing an idea that is not currently endorsed by the LCANZ is real in many places and needs to be replaced with the safety of standing on common ground in Christ while holding a diversity of opinions. This is the freedom we have in the Gospel as Christians who are bound together in Christ.

### Opportunities:

In reflecting on the above, we encourage you as the CoB and GCB to intentionally foster a culture within the LCANZ where all women and men feel, and are, safe and respected. Let us foster a church culture where the vulnerable and all members are safe and feel able to explore and be who they are in Christ and where people are respected for their differences of opinion. Let us foster a church culture where different points of view are encouraged and valued. Let us foster a church culture where discussions about fears and challenges are encouraged. Let us foster a church culture where we could all say that the LCANZ enjoys a healthy culture and morale and is a safe church for everyone.

### What next:

By embracing the ordination of both men and women, the LCANZ will join the majority of Lutheran Churches around the world in creating a church environment where each man and woman can openly serve in the way they are gifted, equipped and called by God. It will provide a foundation for the church to support and embrace all its members, men and women, in all possible areas of ministry roles.

If the focus of creating a safe church culture is intentionally embraced in church leadership, this will also be reflected in local parish life. In thinking about how to address this, we can intentionally foster a church culture that supports a regular forum where those people on LCANZ committees (for example the CTICR, the CSBQ, the CoB, the GCB) could come together with any interested people from the LCANZ community to discuss questions from the people. During this time, no one would speak more than others, no-one would hold more power than others, everyone would feel safe and listened to, and it would be OK to express fears and frustrations. There would be no other agenda than to listen and learn from each other, to encourage people to see through someone else's lens, to be empathetic with each other. Diverse representation of LCANZ members would have a chance to face their fears of rejection, judgement and of not being accepted as part of the church community, and instead feel safe despite differing views from others. Facing these fears, discussing together and even finding solutions along the way is part of a church with a healthy culture and morale, and is a safe place.

In this way, we can continue to be a church relevant to the lives of our members and share the life-giving Gospel in a meaningful way. To enable this, our church structure needs to have all positions in the church equally open to men and women who are called and gifted. This allows all our people to feel valued and respected.

Thank you for taking the time to hear and consider our voices. We will publish this open letter on the public pages of Streams in the Desert (<https://www.streamsinthedesert.com.au>) and Women at the Well (<https://www.watw.com.au>) and would like to publish your response on these platforms with your permission.

In God's grace and peace

Signatories

1. Maria Rudolph
2. Libby Jewson
3. Cathryn Hamilton
4. Liz Winderlich
5. Margaret Modra
6. John Zeppel
7. Helen Lockwood
8. Tanya Wittwer
9. Kathy Matuschka
10. Sue Westhorp
11. Joy Christian
12. David Christian
13. Geoff Burger
14. Steen Olsen
15. Robert Voigt
16. Jeff Silcock
17. Dean Zweck
18. Bob Kempe
19. Vic Pfitzner
20. Shelley Koch
21. Stephen Haar
22. Maurice Schild
23. Peter Lockwood
24. Louis A Moss
25. Jordan Moore
26. Dania Ahern
27. Brian Ahern
28. Marg Simpfendorfer
29. Jo Freckelton
30. David Freckelton
31. Monica Christian
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33. Deborah Myers
34. Peter Pfitzner
35. Ian Graue
36. Greg Bensted
37. Peter Bean
38. Anna Watson
39. Jennie Jones
40. James Jones
41. Margaret Mickan