

Hot Topic #1: Who's got the power?

For the last two decades, the issue of women's ordination has been construed as a primarily theological 'debate' about whether the ordination of women is 'right' or 'wrong'.

As 'good Lutherans', we look first to scripture to determine what guidelines are given regarding women becoming pastors in the church in general.

However, there are a couple of sticking points:

- **Firstly**, there is no direct equivalent of the term 'pastor' in the Greek New Testament. What church fathers developed centuries ago - within the context of a patriarchal society - was a 'construct' drawn from various instructions given to Jesus' disciples and terms used by the authors of the various letters set out in the New Testament.
- **Secondly**, there are differing interpretations of the relevant passages. The LCA/NZ is now 'stuck' with different members holding to two differing interpretations, and while a majority support the ordination of women, a formal vote at Convention of Synod of 2/3 in favour is required.

While other denominations in Australia and internationally, and other Lutherans around the world, have moved past this and are now ordaining women, the LCA/NZ has been 'stuck' for some considerable time.

So we now really have a second set of questions to answer: what do we do when we are 'stuck', and how do we move on from a fruitless and sometimes adversarial debate?

You will probably be aware that our College of Bishops and General Church Board have held a series of joint meetings to discuss the ordination issue. Recently, I was made aware that the majority of letters and emails from LCA/NZ members to the CoB and GCB consisted primarily of people's opinions on whether the ordination of women is right or wrong, with apparently only one or two addressing the second set of questions.

There seems to be something of a misunderstanding that the CoB and GCB have the power to somehow 'fix' this issue: **It is important to realise that because the ordination issue has been declared a matter of doctrine, the College of Bishops and GCB DO NOT have the authority to enact change. of or by themselves.**

In reality, according to our Constitution, the key decision making body of the LCA/NZ is our triannual meeting of both lay and pastoral delegates at our Convention of Synod.

By Law, as set out in our Constitution, Synod Delegates are comprised of 2/3 elected lay members from congregations and parishes, and 1/3 of elected pastors.

In the LCA website you will see that the decision-making power of the church is clearly identified as being held by 'the people in the pews, rather than church leaders' (par. 4, <https://www.lca.org.au/about-us/structure-governance/>)

That's why this website is for YOU! It is up to us, the 'people in the pews', to be raising this issue for polite, respectful and diplomatic discussion and action in our homes, our schools, our congregations, our Men's Sheds and Women's Fellowships, our church councils, our Ministers' Fraternal, our Youth Groups, and so on.

It is an issue that affects the future of our church, and therefore all of us, and WE are the ones who will be nominating and electing Delegates to vote at Synod.

WE are the ones who can also address the second question: what solutions can we come up with and forward to our CoB and GCB that move beyond just stating our personal opinion on whether we think the ordination of both women and men is right or wrong, but suggest practical, realistic strategies for addressing the greater issue of what to do when we disagree.

May God give us the grace to prayerfully seek solutions that will enable us to truly 'synod': to walk forward together and bring love to life.

Brenda Jericho for the Streams in the Desert Community.