

# Contents

Editorial 50

## Articles

Roger Whittall Reflections on the Australian Lutheran–Catholic dialogue on the Augsburg Confession 54

Steen Olsen Good news and godly action: Anglicans and Lutherans working together in God’s mission 59

Peter Lockwood A chronicle of joy: plotting the path to full eucharistic agreement between the Uniting Church in Australia and the Lutheran Church of Australia 70

Jeff Silcock Where East meets West; International Lutheran-Orthodox conversations 2000–2018: a personal reflection 83

Geraldine Hawkes Receptive Ecumenism: a journey in patience, love and humility 93

## Reflections

René Pfitzner The sliding doors of denominational affiliation 103

Emma Strelan From the Lutheran Church via Tabor College to the Uniting Church 105

Mark Juers What makes the grass on the other side of the fence greener? 106

Philippa Lohmeyer-Collins The fellowship of the church and the encouragement of believers 108

Leigh Newton Reflecting on leaving the LCA NZ 110

# Reflecting on leaving the LCA NZ

Leigh Newton

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I left the LCA NZ some eight years ago after decades of frustration and despair, waiting for women's ordination. Despite a post-war evolution in how society viewed women and girls, the church has allowed a disproportionate voice from a minority to maintain a dystopian gender inequality. After observing a debate on women's ordination at Synod under the theme of, 'Where love comes to life', the irony was painful when the major debate was not about the work of love but of a minority imposing its rigidity and fear on the church.

But the dissatisfaction was broader than women's ordination. Another minority with disproportionate influence in the church is the clergy. No matter the quality of clergy, it is inappropriate that they make up roughly 33% of Synod delegates. Shouldn't Synod ensure better representation of the complexity and diversity of the church? The Norwegian Lutheran Church's system of electoral parties would give a more genuine representation on the floor of Synod. Anything less creates a majority of ignored, disenfranchised members, leading to people walking away.

I think of the LCA NZ as a fearful church. Despite the theology of the suffering servant, those who speak for the church are reticent to take a timely, public stance on social and world matters lest they be seen as political. Without such engagement, the church, by default, creates an impression of respectability, timidity and sentimentality. However, we are not created in the image of a respectable, timid God. We are created in the image of a God who speaks to the outcast, mends the broken and lifts the fallen. We are called to develop the virtue of courage and speak passionately to governments that are often blinded by their focus on the next election. Church statements do not go unnoticed by parliamentarians, and we should not ignore our potential to impact the national debate on any topic of compassion or justice. The imperative to follow in Jesus' footsteps has profound implications for how we relate to the world.

One of the reasons I joined the Uniting Church is its track record of courageous, prompt engagement with matters of justice in society and the world. With ongoing loss of forest, insects, birds, mammals, reefs, permafrost, polar-ice and topsoil, and ever-increasing global temperatures, the planet is precariously positioned on the edge of tipping points from which there is no return. What does the Church have to say about global warming, which is likely to cause millions of deaths this century? Where is the church encouraging us to take action against the predatory delay of governments and corporations as they resist reducing their carbon emissions? How has the Church engaged with the issues of the sixth great extinction that we are currently witnessing?

Our silence supports the status quo. It is poor leadership to leave justice-action to individuals.

If the primary purpose of the church appears to be personal salvation, then matters of social justice can easily be forgotten or become just something that we hope our weekly giving helps to address.

Another reason for finally leaving the LCANZ is that the church seems structurally unable to be inclusive of the LBGTIQ+ community. Given the almost-impossible super-majority required for a major change in theology, the current stalemate on women's ordination makes it clear that it will take something extraordinary for different sexualities to be embraced within the church. The demonstrated lack of empathy is a searing indictment on the church's timid quest for respectability. In the meantime, unspeakable damage will continue to be inflicted on many young people.

*Leigh Newton is a retired primary school teacher and singer/songwriter who, from the days of his Australian Christmas songs, has attempted to reflect on faith from within the contemporary Australian culture and the challenges that our evolving society faces. Working for justice on many fronts, including environmental activism, remains a central part of living his faith.*