

Way Forward: Rebellion # 6.

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” (Hosea 4:6)

[Please, verify the accuracy of the information found in this paper and in the Way Forward proposal.]

On 26th of April, 2024 the LCA College of Bishops and the General Church Board released their draft proposal for our future.¹ It would require a very lengthy commentary to address every theological and logical mistake in that proposal, therefore, instead this paper will focus on answering a very simple question – **what does this proposal mean?**

The answer is as simple as the question. When stripped off of the pious language of ‘striving for unity in one church’, of ‘being pastoral’ and finally ‘offering a way forward that is not divisive’, of claiming that this is a new and a very different solution to anything we have encountered before, what we are left with is essentially – **the same effort to change the LCA teaching on the office of the public ministry.** That’s it. So simple.

The effort which the LCA Synodical Convention **has rejected already 5 times.** Let this be clear – this proposal despite its promising and assuring language is essentially the same, its main focus is on changing the LCA current teaching. As the Executive Summary of the Way Forward proposal itself clearly states: “The key components of the Framework to enable two practices of ordination with the Church are: 1. **Changing the teaching of male-only ordination.**”

Moreover, if this proposal was endorsed by the LCA Synodical Convention in October 2024, it would lead **essentially to the same outcome** as any of the previous 5 proposals that were rejected, namely, our current Scripture based teaching would be replaced with something that has no foundation in the Bible whatsoever. **What does this mean then?** That we are ignoring the answer the Holy Spirit has given us **5 times.** We could call this... **“Rebellion # 6.”**

Let’s see how we got to this point.

Spiritual battle never ceases.

False teachers have been in the Church since the beginning.² The enemy fights in the Church. The tempting voice “did God really say it” (Gen 3) never goes silent. That is to be expected. When we rise to counter these temptations the Triune God blesses His faithful people, as He draws us deeper in the Word of God, searching for His answers and also in closer fellowship with Him.

Please, remember that **no church has ever** come up with the idea that she needs to ordain women in the office of the public ministry by reading the Scriptures. No one! These ideas always come from outside, from the culture around us, from women’s rights movements, from feminism’s battle for equality, from anti-discrimination legislation, etc.

How many times have we heard in the LCA Synodical Conventions that we have to change our church’s teaching for the sake of equality, justice, fairness and that we should not discriminate against women? However, there is not a single verse in the Bible which would describe God’s good and wise instructions for the office of the public ministry as unjust, unfair or discriminatory.

Regardless how many times the proponents of those worldly ideas insist that they faithfully submit to the authority of the Word of God, the way they think, the arguments they use, and the ideas that they promote do not come from the Word of God, they come from the world.

¹ Find it on <https://www.lca.org.au/wayforward/>

² Jesus and the apostles repeatedly warn us against the dangers of false teachers and teachings. Please, read this carefully: Matt 7:15-23, 24:24, Acts 20:28-31, 2 Pet 2:1-3, 1 Tim 1:3-7, 1 Tim 6:3-5, 2 Tim 4:1-3, 1 John 4:1-6, etc.

When these worldly ideas demanded to be heard, the LCA responded by digging deeper in the Holy Scriptures and praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We did it in 2000. We did it in 2006. We did it in 2015. We kept listening to the Word of God. The same answer every time.

Between 2015 and 2018 we spent 3 years, more than \$100,000, involving our best theologians, holding numerous workshops around Australia, trying to find a Biblical foundation for the ordination of women in the office of the public ministry. The result was... nothing! There was no foundation to be found in the Word of God. None!³

Why abandon the current teaching that is solidly based in the Word of God⁴ for something that has no foundation whatsoever in the Holy Scriptures?! It doesn't make any sense! Thus, by God's grace, the LCA faithfully remained in the teaching grounded in the Word of God.

Leaving the Scriptures behind.

Then Bishop John Henderson with the wisdom of Caiaphas (John 11:49-51) in his report to the Synod in essence said that if we want to get what we want, that is, women's ordination, we cannot get it by searching the Scriptures; that approach will not let us do what we want.⁵

Perhaps, that was the crucial moment in the history of the LCA, as we chose to leave the Scriptures behind. In 2020 the College of Bishops had shared three potential scenarios for the LCA future: [1] a single LCANZ synod – one teaching, two practices, [2] a single LCANZ synod – status quo (current teaching upheld), [3] Multiple Lutheran synods.

Preparing for 2021 General Convention the so-called Box Hill proposal suggested that we vote again for **the 5th time** to change the LCA teaching – “for the sake of the gospel and the mission of God that we share in the LCANZ, that Theses of Agreement (T.A.) 6.11 be removed from the Theses of Agreement.”⁶ No listening to the Scriptures anymore... In the same way the so-called Queensland proposal suggested that we “work through the theological, constitutional, and governance issues that would be involved in establishing one church with two different practices of ordination, and establish a detailed framework through which this could be accomplished, such as by establishing a geographical or non-geographical LCANZ ‘District’ that teaches and practices the ordination of both women and men to the office of the public ministry.”⁷

The General Pastors Conference should have known better, but we didn't. In our naivete we dreamed that, perhaps, we could get this burden off our shoulders without listening to, or rather, acting against the Word of God, that we could deal with this issue by administrative means.

We voluntarily gave up the power that restrains all lawlessness, the Word of God, we opened the gates of hell hoping that this “generous step” will appease those who wanted to sideline the Word of God. It doesn't work that way. Once the Word of God was out of the way, things escalated quickly. The General Pastors Conference in 2022 “graciously” advised to give equal footing to those who by all means wanted to see women's ordination becoming reality in the LCA by suggesting that the QLD proposal is the one that goes before the Synod.

But that wasn't good enough. The General Church Board overrode the GPC advice and instead chose to go with the Box Hill proposal, to remove the TA VI, 11, leaving the QLD proposal as a

³ Find here the Draft Doctrinal Statement which wasn't accepted either by the General Pastors Conference, nor the Synodical Convention in 2018: <https://www.convention2018.lca.org.au/ordination-women-men/>

⁴ Read this essay to explore the reasons why God has ordered the office of the public ministry the way He has: <https://pastorsblog.com.au/2021/07/13/called-to-give-themselves-up-for-the-church/>

⁵ Book of Reports, Synodical Convention 2021-2022, page 55, section 15.

⁶ Ibid., page 4, Agenda item 2.2.4.

⁷ Ibid., page 51, Agenda item 2.2.9.

backup if the Box Hill's proposal didn't go through. It didn't. When considering changing our teaching on the office of the public ministry without any Scriptural support, the faithful of the LCA, guided by the Holy Spirit, for **the 5th time** voted 'no' to the change. That was a good Friday. Then came Saturday. Stretching the LCA bylaws, another proposal with the same essence was put before the Synod, the QLD proposal.

Several pastors who wanted to uphold the LCA current teaching had also decided to play the same game and had prepared "a better administrative solution" in a form of amendment to the QLD proposal. It was along the lines of Scenario # 3 from what the COB had proposed: "Two synods that share resources". That would, indeed, make sense. However, that amendment was not even allowed to be presented before the Synod. Perhaps, the Lord Himself stood against us.

Not only that attempt failed, but Bishop Mark Vainikka insisted to add the point "c" to the proposal that "it is the expectation of this General Convention of Synod that both women and men will be ordained *in a District* of the LCANZ during the 2024-2027 synodical period". Let's get this done by administrative means! And the majority said 'yes'!

In October 2023 the COB and the GCB released three potential frameworks – "Confessional Communities", "Congregations Decide" and "District Alignment", none of them was workable, but all of them made it clear that everyone will have to choose which side to take.

Finally, on 26th of April, 2024 the COB and the GCB unveiled the proposal that they want to put before Synod in October. This comes to mind: "The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" ... (Rev 16:17-19)

What kind of proposal is this?

Thanks be to God, that now it has been revealed so clearly where and how we are being led. In previous General Conventions we try to find true unity looking at what the Word of God says on this matter. This proposal calls such practice an "all or nothing" approach.

This proposal complains that our current teaching on the office of the public ministry doesn't "accommodate the different theological interpretations and conviction held by the members of the Church." When the Triune God speaks to us in His Word, the Holy Spirit creates faith, He makes us wise for salvation and demands obedience to Him; He is not in the business of accommodating our different convictions. We should know that.

And if we want to remain in the Church of Christ, we shouldn't be concerned about accommodating different interpretations and convictions either, nor about "resolving" our situation so that everyone can do whatever they want, but about discerning the good and wise will of God in His Word and joyfully obeying Him. This proposal has all of that the other way around.

We could "commend" the authors of this proposal for their determination. In a blink of an eye, the QLD proposal has been changed by 180°. Original proposal sought to create "*a District*" [!] for those who want women's ordination. In 2023 Synod it evolved to "*one or more Districts*". In this proposal it already is about the **whole LCA**, while "pastorally" offering to create a virtual "safe place" ["Conference"] for those who still uphold Biblical teaching. That was quick!

Yet the Way Forward proposal promises to accommodate everyone, to deliver unity and fellowship that is not disturbed by divisions, and all of that in one "big and happy" church. Except, it does none of that! As we chose not to listen to the Word of God in this matter, what is left but administrative power games where the winner does take it all.

That is exactly what this proposal does. It proposes that we accept with ease what the Synod rejected in Melbourne just last year, namely, removing the TA VI.11. As if that would silence God's voice. Sure, we can try to remove the TA VI.11, (we actually would need to remove most of TA VI),

but that can't be done on a whim, it would require proper procedure. But we can't remove 1. Cor 14, and 1 Tim 2 and 3, and Tit 1, and Mt 10, and Acts 1, etc. The Word of God remains forever.

But then, according to the Way Forward proposal, every Christian in the LCA will be expected to embrace the new confession as the women's ordination becomes the law of the land in the LCA. And who could then object to it, and on what grounds?

Moreover, we are repeatedly assured, contrary to the LCA experience of the last 25+ years, that there is nothing divisive in this proposal. Perhaps, it is a conviction of those who with this proposal hope to sideline the Scriptures and silence those who want to obey the Lord's command.

But for those who want to remain faithful to the Word of God and to the vows that we have made before God and our congregations, in our confirmations and ordinations, those Christians, congregations and pastors will be forced to accept teaching and practice that we know to be contrary to the Word of God. We will be forced into altar and pulpit fellowship with those who openly disregard the Lord's command, we will be forced to obey our superiors and leaders who ignore the Word of God, but demand our obedience.

May the Holy Spirit help us to see that behind the smoke screen of pious language and false promises this proposal attempts at one stroke to silence and marginalize all those individual Christians, pastors, and congregation who want to follow Christ and not culture, who want to listen to the Word, instead of listening to the voice of the world. That is what is at stake.

It is essentially **the same effort to rebel against the Lord's command for the 6th time**. This is "**Rebellion # 6**". What is different this time is that we have deliberately decided not to listen to the Word of God anymore and the length we are going to hide the fact that we are essentially pursuing the same agenda for **the 6th time**. Is that the Spirit of truth guiding us?

What shall our way forward be?

The judgment begins with the house of God (1 Pet 4:17). We fully deserve whatever happens. How long have we allowed false teachers to spread false teachings, to rebel against the church's teaching with no consequences? How long have we been indifferent to the Word of God, how long have we elevated external unity and pleasing people above the truth of the Gospel and true unity in confession? May the good Lord help us to see the seriousness of our situation!

Perhaps, this proposal is one more expression of God's grace and patience, one more chance given to us to see where we are heading and what is at stake. What shall we do? As it has always been the case for every Christian, first, we need to return to the Lord with repentant hearts, seeking His forgiveness for our lukewarmness and for our disobedience, praying that in His mercy He would not spit us out for His mouth or forsake us.

Then, we need to ask for His Holy Spirit to enlighten us with the Word, so that we can clearly discern what is true and good and beautiful. Whatever our way forward, for individual Christians, congregations of the LCA, or pastors, it should be based on what the Word of God instructs us, and not trying to resolve our situation by administrative means.⁸ It is His Church, not ours.

And then we need to pray for wisdom and courage, so that fully trusting in our God and desiring to joyfully obey Him in everything, we could remain in Jesus and in His words, for without Him we can do nothing (John 15).

Lord, have mercy! Christ, have mercy! Lord, have mercy!

⁸ This first paper helps to consider how serious our situation is, and where we are heading:

<https://pastorsblog.com.au/2023/10/29/the-lca-where-are-we-and-where-are-we-going/>

This paper helps to consider our future: <https://pastorsblog.com.au/2024/04/29/way-forward-to-walk-or-not-to-walk/>