



THE GIFT OF GOD
– it's grace that unites us

POPULAR REPORT

21st Convention of General Synod of the Lutheran Church of Australia

ADELAIDE SA • 4-7 OCTOBER 2024

GATHERING

Almost 380 lay and pastor delegates, along with church officials and staff, and almost 150 volunteers, met at Concordia College in Highgate, SA, from 4 to 7 October for the 21st Regular Convention of General Synod.

THEME AND LOGO

*For it is by **grace** you have been saved, through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is **the gift of God** – Ephesians 2:8*

- The hand of God holding us emanates from the cross, which is the means through which God has reconciled us to himself.
- Grace flows to us through the cross and from the cross – it is God who moves towards us. The people are passive – we cannot earn grace; it is God's gift.
- God's grace holds us together as one body. We are joined together in his embrace, united for now and eternity as his dearly beloved and baptised children.

RESPECTFUL CONVERSATIONS

'Bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ' (Galatians 6:2).

The bishops have thanked delegates for their respectful conduct, which followed on from the same respectful conduct of the pastors at General Pastors Conference in the week before the Convention. The bishops also expressed their thanksgiving to our gracious God for our Church's faithfulness to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In their pastoral message to the church, the bishops confirmed that the tone of the discussion in making the significant decision on ordination of both women and men was 'respectful and gentle and measured'. The delegates 'showed their deep love for the Church and an appreciation for what the decision meant, especially for those who did not vote in favour' of the proposal.

WORSHIP AND PRAYER

Every day of Synod commenced with either a worship service or devotion, in which our bishops and chaplains pointed delegates again and again to the Convention text and theme: 'It's grace that unites us.' A team of chaplains, led by Bishop Emeritus Robert Bartholomaeus, were available through Convention for confidential care and prayer. We know that all across Australia and New Zealand, people in their congregations, small groups and families, were surrounding Synod in prayer.

- [Opening service sermon](#), NSW–ACT Bishop Richard Schwedes
- [Opening Sunday sermon](#), Bishop Paul Smith
- [Closing service sermon](#), Assistant Bishop Neville Otto

The Synod worship services may be viewed at www.lca.org.au/synod-livestreams

ORDINATION OF BOTH WOMEN AND MEN

On Saturday, 5 October, after rigorous but respectful debate, Synod resolved to permit the ordination of both women and men as pastors in the LCANZ. In making this decision, Synod removed our Church's teaching that has previously prohibited women from serving as pastors.

This is a significant decision, with many matters that need to be worked through. Our bishops have promised that the resolution of Synod will be properly addressed pastorally and relationally across the church, and so each district bishop will be reaching out to the communities and pastors in his district.

The bishops have given this counsel to the people of the church:

'We counsel our people, and especially pastors, to sit with the decision for the next days and to not act precipitously or in anger. We acknowledge that this outcome has caused suffering for the church. We weep with those who weep, and we rejoice with those who rejoice. We, too, are hurting and are wounded healers. We believe that Psalm 46 speaks into the situation in the LCANZ at this time, and we counsel people to be still before the Lord, as we reflect on what has happened and process the implications and implementation of the decision of General Convention.'

[Read the story.](#)

FOCUS ON MISSION

A significant amount of the Convention agenda was devoted to hearing stories of mission activities and new initiatives in New Zealand and Australia and internationally. On the first day, delegates heard from congregations who are engaged in mission in their communities and were able to rejoice with the 10 congregations who were the inaugural recipients of seed funding and major grants under the new Local Mission Fund.

[Read the story.](#)

During this session also the Congregational Life Resource Hub was launched. This collaborative project between the Churchwide Office and District mission directors is bringing together in one place resources to support mission and ministry in congregations, as well as serving those who serve in governance and administration roles.

At the Friday night Synod dinner, delegates were encouraged by the witness of 10 young adults from Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and Australia, guests of Synod, who shared their personal reflections on what the Synod theme 'the gift of God – it's grace that unites us' means to them. Their participation in Synod was supported by Erin Kerber, Interim Assistant to the Bishop – International Mission.

[Read the story.](#)

The LCANZ's heart for mission was reinforced through presentations by the Council for Local Mission, Finke River Mission, Lutheran Education, Lutheran Women of Australia and the LLL.

SALE OF NORTH ADELAIDE PROPERTIES AND RELOCATION OF CHURCH HOUSE

In presenting their report, General Church Board members outlined to delegates the reasons for the sale of the properties occupied by Australian Lutheran College and the Churchwide Office, and the purchase of a building in the Adelaide CBD, which will become the new home of Church House in 2025. As part of the transition, members of the Church will be invited to reflect on the legacy and thank God for the good gifts he has provided through these properties.

NEW TRAINING AND ACCREDITATION AUTHORITY

A Training and Accreditation Authority will be established in the LCANZ. The body will assess training and accreditation needs across the Church and ensure that effective strategies are in place or developed to respond to them.

Synod approved the establishment of the body proposed by the General Church Board and following a presentation by Bishop Emeritus Greg Pietsch, who led the Ministry Future Project established by the College of Bishops. He said that, as a result of this churchwide research, the LCANZ is in a better position to understand the ministry personnel learning needs across the Church and to respond accordingly in developing training and accreditation opportunities.

[Read the story.](#)

ELECTIONS

(1) LCANZ Assistant Bishop

Synod elected Pastor Stephen Schultz as Assistant Bishop of the LCANZ. Pastor Schultz has been serving the SA-NT District in the role of Assistant Bishop for Mission since 2018. Prior to that, he served as pastor of two South Australian parishes: St Michael's Hahndorf (2002–2017) and Bethlehem, Adelaide (1997–2002). As LCANZ Assistant Bishop he succeeds Pastor Neville Otto, who did not stand for re-election.

[Read the story.](#)

(2) General Church Board

All six General Church Board (GCB) members who stood for re-election will be serving the LCANZ in the 2024–27 synodical term, after Synod voted them back in for another term. New to the board is Kelly Matthews, who takes the place of retiring GCB member Mel Zerner. Mel

served on GCB, formerly known as the General Church Council, since 2009 and is also retiring from the LCA's Finance, Audit and Risk committee, which he joined in 2014. GCB members, including new Assistant Bishop Stephen Schultz, were installed into their important office during the closing service of Convention.

[Read the story.](#)

SYNOD OFFERING

At the time of writing, \$9484.25 has been contributed to the General Synod offering, which will support the Lutheran Study Centre (LSC) in Pematangsiantar in northern Sumatra, Indonesia.

Many churches in Indonesia have expressed a desire to deepen their understanding of Lutheran theology and to identify more closely with the Lutheran tradition. With 13 Lutheran synods in Indonesia (mostly in North Sumatra) and a total of more than 6 million members, it is one of the greatest concentrations of practicing Lutherans around the globe. Being a Lutheran community in a predominantly Islamic country means access to theology can be difficult at times.

There is still time for congregations and individuals to contribute to the Synod offering.

[Read the story](#), which includes ways to contribute.

2025 GENERAL PASTORS CONFERENCE AND CONVENTION OF GENERAL SYNOD

The resolution to allow the ordination of both women and men to be pastors in the LCANZ included the expectation that the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations, together with the LCANZ's Pastors Conferences and Districts, will finalise a doctrinal statement on ordination in 2025. A special online General Pastors Conference and online Convention of General Synod will be convened to allow for this statement to be adopted, as well as to attend to some of the matters referred from the 2024 Convention.