

# Lutheran Church of Australia and Ecumenical Schools

## A. Preamble

1. Definition: We understand an ecumenical school to be one where ownership and management is by a group of congregations of different denominations and where the ethos and practice of the school reflect those denominations.
2. We understand the reasons for considering taking part in an ecumenical school to be:
  - a) the inability of the LCA to establish a school by itself.
  - b) the opportunity to provide Christian education as part of a joint witness in an area.
  - c) another denomination invites Lutheran participation in a school which is located in an area where there is a strong Lutheran presence in the community.

## B. The LCA Position

- 1) A Lutheran school is an agency of the LCA in mission and ministry, in outreach and service (see *The LCA and Its Schools*), and consequently expresses the character of the LCA, and is accountable to the LCA. Accordingly, it is difficult for a school to share this function with another denomination and retain its distinctiveness as a Lutheran school.
- 2) The gospel is at the heart of the Lutheran school, and informs the total life and practice of the school. Lutherans have a particular understanding of the school which centres in Christ. Theological principles at work in the school context include relationship between law and gospel, understanding of church and state distinctives, and word and sacraments as means of grace. Therefore compromise on such matters is out of the question if the integrity of a Lutheran school as a confessing school is to be maintained. (see *Theses of Agreement Articles 1 & 2*).
- 3) Lutherans recognise as gift the unity they have with all those who possess a saving faith in Christ. Expression of this unity in appropriate ways that do not compromise the truths of scripture as characterised in the Lutheran confessions is always task, especially between church bodies. Such expressions of unity are seen in such areas as welfare, world relief, industrial chaplaincy activities. Because of the nature of the Lutheran school, compromises associated with ecumenical activities in this area would take compromise into the area of confessing the gospel. This is a problem for the LCA.
- 4) The very nature of the Lutheran school requires significant resources linking church and school and theological education of educators and principals. The LCA is presently struggling to meet these ideals with present resources. Accordingly, it is felt that limited Lutheran educational resources should be allocated where they can maximise their effectiveness in achieving the desired outcome of people growing towards the fullness of what they are capable in Christ which, we believe, can be most fully achieved in a Lutheran school.
- 5) Accordingly, the LCA does not favour participation in ecumenical school arrangements. However, there may be situations in which the LCA can work cooperatively with other denominations in structures that are other than that of the ecumenical schools scenario as defined. Such cooperative ventures require careful planning.

**C. Possible ways in which the LCA can work in cooperation with others:**

Congregations and districts of the LCA can work cooperatively with other denominations in the following ways:

- a) establishing a Lutheran school and involving other denominations by:
  - non-Lutheran membership of the board
  - intentionally establishing working relationships with their congregations and pastors
- b) when another denomination establishes a school, Lutheran support could be by:
  - encouraging enrolments
  - encouraging Lutheran membership on the school board
  - supporting fundraising.
- c) reaching agreements with other denominations whereby they establish schools in some areas and Lutherans in others. This is a recognition of the fact that in most provincial and outer suburban areas there is often space for only one non-Catholic, non-government school.
- d) two schools sharing resources – land, library, computers, even perhaps the same football team. However, this course of action would have to be gone into with careful consideration.
  - most staff distinct
  - joint agreement on usage clearly spelt out
  - the Lutheran school is able to operate in accordance with the statement *The LCA and Its Schools*.