

Lutheran Church of Australia

THE LUTHERAN SCHOOL AS A PLACE OF MINISTRY AND MISSION

Statement of principles

1. The Lutheran school is a place of education. It is registered by the state to carry out this task. The LCA expects that each school will carry out its educational charter to the best of its ability. To that end the school appoints staff (Lutheran and other Christians) to enable it to fulfil its responsibility of providing quality education. The Lutheran school as school, therefore, works in the Kingdom of the Left.¹
2. The Australian government allows churches to own and run schools. The Lutheran school is a school; at the same time, it is a school of the LCA. As such the LCA expects the Word of God with the gospel of Christ at its heart to inform all learning and teaching, all human relationships, and all activities of the school. It is expected that the principal of a Lutheran school is a practising member of the LCA and is the 'spiritual' leader of the school². The LCA expects that pastors will be called to exercise a ministry of Word and sacrament within the school. Therefore, according to LCA teaching, the church is also in the school (Augsburg Confession, Article VII).
3. The LCA is a church in mission. Thus the Lutheran school at the same time as it works in the Kingdom of the Left is also working in the Kingdom of the Right. Young men and women and staff are challenged regularly with the gospel and the Spirit does his work, as some are encouraged in their faith and others are brought to faith.
4. When the LCA came into being, the situation within which Lutheran schools now operate was never envisaged and the extensive development of Lutheran schools was not foreseen. The Lutheran school was seen as an auxiliary of the congregation and this view is embedded within the constitution. However, many Lutheran schools have limited connection to a congregation and, vice versa, many congregations have little or no connection to Lutheran schools in their midst. There is no longer a close connection in some congregation-school relationships. In that light, how do we address the reality that the Word is doing its work, young men and women are coming to faith within the school but feel little or no connection to a congregation of the LCA. There is a need not only to introduce young people to Christ but also to a local congregation.

The LCA Statement *The LCA and Its Schools* describes schools 'as an integral part of the mission of the church'. The school's mission field is 'the world of the school'. For mission to occur, the gospel must be proclaimed with a view to conversion (evangelistic preaching); baptism must be administered; and the Lord's Supper will be available for the health of the baptised. Hence the College of Presidents took the decision in the mid 1990s that pastors in the school may administer the sacrament of Baptism and may provide the sacrament of Holy Communion responsibly within the school.

Worship involving Word and sacrament should be distinguished from daily school devotions. The former is voluntary, a gospel invitation; the latter might well be compulsory. This distinction is in turn linked to a changing role for school pastors. They are increasingly called to minister to the families of students especially in sickness and tragedy. They are increasingly asked to preside at weddings of old scholars and then baptisms. Therefore, many school pastors no longer have a significant teaching load within the curriculum of the

school. Rather they function as a pastor to the 'world of the school' – to principal and staff, to students and their families and to old scholars and their families.

5. *The LCA and Its Schools* statement notes the 'spiritual leadership of the principal' and the importance of the school pastor functioning as a 'pastor' within the school and as such exercising a ministry of Word and sacrament. We rightly have some difficulty with the idea of the school as a 'faith community' but our difficulty with that terminology dare not be the means of avoiding the reality that in many instances there is a worshipping community within the Lutheran school.

Pastors in the LCA continue to serve worshipping communities where a group of people in a locality are gathered from time to time to hear the Word and to receive the sacraments. This grouping of people is not ready to organise itself into a constituted congregation of the LCA. Nonetheless, such groups are part of the people of God, they hear the Word and receive the sacraments, they grow in their faith and they serve as Christians in the world. They are recognised by the Church as part of the Church. They may be 'on the way towards constitutional membership'. Worshipping communities within school communities fit into this situation.

6. The current context of the Lutheran school requires us to find ways to keep contact with those within school worshipping communities when their connection to the school is no longer relevant. We also need to provide support and supervision for those who lead these communities (particularly in the areas of worship and communion practice, pastoral decision making, hymnody).

Implications for practice

A number of implications and responsibilities result from the principles stated above and the following are highlighted:

1. LCA

- affirms the fact that its work is undertaken in and through schools by appropriate constitutional and pastoral/doctrinal statements and rites,
- ensures that there is an intentional program of spiritual formation for all school staff, ministry personnel and principals,
- provides training, support and oversight for LCA pastors in schools.

2. Congregations

- support Lutheran schools,
- are involved in and committed to ministry which enables transition from a worshipping school community to a local worshipping community

3. ALC

- prepares pastors who can minister in the mission field that is the school,
- provides resources and courses in support of spiritual and vocational formation of principals and school staff.

4. School governance

- ensures that the school operates in accordance with LCA policies, including *The LCA and Its Schools*, *The role of the pastor in the Lutheran school*, and *Statement on school worship*,
- is required to have a membership that is consistent with the LCA Policy re membership of non-Lutherans on governance boards in special circumstances

5. Principals

- act as spiritual leaders of the school (refer Endnote 2),
- understand the LCA's expectations of its schools through an intentional formation program,
- must be active members of the LCA
- ensure that there is a core of Lutheran and other Christian staff in the school for the sake of Christian witness.

6. School pastors

- focus on supporting the Christian witness of staff and students in the school,
- equip principal, staff and Christian students for their witness and ministry through prayer, Word and sacraments,
- are involved in the discipling and baptism of those who come to faith,
- shepherd the disciples into permanent faith communities.

7. Staff

- are affirmed by the LCA as being involved in important ministry,
- understand the ethos and identity of Lutheran schools,
- are sustained for their Christian witness in the school by a ministry of Word and sacrament,
- participate, as required, in the necessary spiritual formation programs developed by LEA and delivered by the regions

¹ In Lutheran theology, the way in which God operates in the world is described through the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. He works through either the Left Kingdom (through law, reason, order, human institutions), or the Right Kingdom (through gospel, sacraments, forgiveness, church as a worshipping and witnessing community).

² Supporting document: The principal as spiritual leader in the Lutheran school [M Bartsch: September 2014]