

THE ROLE OF THE PASTOR IN THE LUTHERAN SCHOOL

[This document relates to all pastors who carry out their ministry in the school – either full time or in the context of their parish ministry]

1. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1.1 Congruence with the office of the public ministry

It is expected that every Lutheran school has a school pastor so that the connection between the school and the mission of the church is reinforced and supported. In some instances the school pastor will also be the pastor of the local congregation. In other instances, especially in the secondary schools, larger primary schools and composite schools, there will be a pastor/s called to serve specifically within these schools.

A school pastor will exercise a ministry that is congruent with his ordination vows. Thus such a ministry will be centred in leading the school community in worship and find full expression in the ministry of Word and Sacraments. The ministry of each school pastor will be further shaped by the particular context of each school.

1.2 The purpose and ethos of the Lutheran school

Through its schools the Lutheran Church of Australia offers a program of Christian education which

- serves students, parents, the church, the community, and the government, by providing a quality education for the whole person;
- strives for excellence in the development and creative use by all students of their God-given gifts;
- equips students for a life of service to God in the church and the community;
- provides an alternative to a secular, humanistic philosophy and practice of education;
- includes, as a core part of the program, a Christian Studies curriculum which has been developed deliberately and consciously from the perspective of confessional Lutheranism;
- involves the school community in regular Christian worship

1.3 Theological expertise

A pastor has specialised training in theology. By virtue of this training and his calling as a pastor, it is expected that the school pastor will be actively involved in school life and provide pastoral guidance in matters within the school that have to do with the faith – worship, pastoral care, the shape and content of faith life curriculum, ethical and moral issues, mission and apologetics.

2. THE CONTEXT

2.1 Nature of schooling

A school is a distinct educational and social institution which is concerned with providing education to young people. It involves communicating knowledge, understanding, attitudes and skills so that young people can live effectively in society. There is a set of structures, authority patterns and general procedures appropriate to such an institution. The pastor will need to understand these if he is to operate effectively in it. The context of the school is very different from that of the congregation.

2.2 Nature of the school team

A pastor operating in a school will be part of a team working together with principal and staff in a shared ministry that will vary according to the local context. Some will be full time in the school, whilst others will serve in the school as part of their parish ministry.

The school council is responsible for all that happens in the school. The principal is the agent of the council and is the spiritual leader of the school (See *Principal as spiritual leader* statement). This provides the context in which the school pastor works.

The pastor will be part of a team and will need to work on developing good working relationships with the school team in general and the principal in particular. There should be

no public criticism of the endeavours of each other, with a commitment to discuss differences in private.

Activities which might nurture an open relationship with the principal could include regular meetings which are sometimes formal and sometimes informal, common study of the Word, the Confessions and educational issues, prayer, and occasional shared recreational activity. Such activity would build the three critical areas of required mutual respect, namely theological, professional and personal.

This team spirit is also manifest as the pastor listens to the educational wisdom of the principal and the principal listens to the theological wisdom of the pastor. Open and honest discussions on issues that effect the life of the school and congregation will foster a good working relationship. Such discussions will be enhanced with respect for their confidentiality and also for each others views.

It is also recommended that the school pastor be regarded as a non-voting consultant to the school council, attending council meetings at the invitation of the chairman.

2.3 Nature of the school in relation to the congregation

There are some differences between a school of the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) and a congregation of the LCA, and this therefore requires a recognition that the pastor's role in a school is different from the pastor's role in a congregation.

Within the congregation a key focal point for worship, leadership, learning, administration and fellowship is the pastor. Within the school, the key focal point for the spiritual focus of administration, learning, leadership and responsibility is the principal.

2.4 Responsibilities and relationships

Those whom the Church ordains (rightly calls) are set aside for particular tasks which only they can perform. Simply stated they are to publicly proclaim the Gospel and administer the Sacraments. This is their responsibility and for it they must answer to the Church and to God. In practical terms they are responsible to those people appointed by the Church to have oversight of its activities in various spheres. Thus there is a clear responsibility to other people.

An ordained person acts within the proper structures of the Church. For all ordained pastors there is a clear responsibility to be answerable to the Bishop of the Church through the respective District Bishop in matters of doctrine. As well, they must be prepared to place themselves within the organisation to which they are called in service, accepting its structures and limitations on their freedom, so long as such structures and limitations do not prevent them from executing their particular role.

The pastor is responsible to the principal and comes under the jurisdiction of the school council except where a teaching of the Church is at stake. The District Bishop will determine if an issue concerns a teaching of the Church.

Where other differences occur between principal and pastor, as they inevitably will from time to time, it is important that they sit down to sort them out in a spirit of Christian love and concern for one another. If resolution does not come quickly it may be helpful to use the school's administration team to resolve the issue. This enables the issues to be placed in a wider context.

The principal and pastor will use commonsense and Christian maturity to discuss matters of disagreement and seek mutually satisfactory outcomes. They will not allow them to linger on, using whatever resource is appropriate. This is done for the sake of a healthy working relationship in the interests of the gospel.

The first avenue of assistance in this matter ought to be the school council via the council chair. Either party should have the power to raise a matter of concern. If the matter cannot be resolved locally the district bishop and regional director should be used to identify a mutually acceptable mediator to help principal and pastor work through the issues.

In the end the district bishop, with the agreement of the regional director, will need to determine future action.

3. FUNCTIONS OF SCHOOL PASTOR

What is expected of the school pastor needs to be agreed to. The *Letter of Call for School Pastors* lists the following as responsibilities of the school pastor:

- Preach and teach the Word of God as revealed in the Old and New Testaments in its truth and purity according to the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as contained in the Book of Concord, and administer the sacraments in accordance with their divine institution.
- Promote faithfully the spiritual welfare of everyone in the school community, ministering to them according to their particular needs and applying the Word of God in worship, teaching, and pastoral care.
- Help the Christians in the school community to discover and use for the common good the gifts the Holy Spirit has given, equip them for service, and encourage and support them in their Christian vocation.
- Encourage the Christians in the school community to fulfil their responsibility to witness for Christ and to be involved in the mission activity in their school and of their congregations in their local communities.
- Provide pastoral leadership within the school community and in particular give theological guidance to the principal and staff (eg, through the ongoing delivery of theological formation and induction programs).
- Keep practice in harmony with the Word of God, the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, and the Constitution and By-laws of the Lutheran Church of Australia.
- Serve as an example in Christian conduct by earnestly endeavouring to live in Christian harmony with the members of the school community, and with fellow pastors and their congregations.
- Carry out to the best of his ability the specific duties assigned to him by the principal or school council and at all times seek to promote the distinctive Lutheran aims of the school and to build up its distinctive Lutheran character.
- Participate in the church's program of continuing education for pastors in order to equip himself better for ministry and adopt a cooperative attitude with principal or school council in determining the courses which will best help him develop his ministry.
- Assist in the regular evaluation of the ministry and mission of the school, including your own role in that ministry and mission.
- Cooperate with and support all pastors and congregations in the area served by the school.
- Ensure that all official pastoral acts conducted within the school are promptly and properly recorded and that those statistics required by the Lutheran Church of Australia are promptly and accurately provided.

4. ROLES

In the role of the school pastor the following are applicable:

Worship

- Proclamation of the Word
- Administration of the Sacraments
- Resource person
- Prayer
- liturgy and hymnody
- School devotions – oversight and resources

Pastoral care

- Ongoing care and crisis care to:
 - Principal and staff
 - Students
 - Family
 - World of school
 - Community
- Teaming with other counsellors / carers
- Referring when expertise and limits are recognised
- Confession and absolution

Teaching

- Ongoing theological development of staff
- Resource for Christian Studies teachers
- Teacher of Christian Studies
- Discipling
- Mentoring
- Induction program co-delivery with the principal and other school leaders for all new staff
- Formation program co-delivery (eg, *Pathways*)

Mission outreach

- Equip and encourage others in their mission
- Prepare candidates for baptism
- Prepare candidates for confirmation
- Orientation of new parents

Leadership

- Develop understanding of the LCA, its identity and purpose
- Prophetic role – remind people of their Christian commitment
- Building of ethos and morality
- Building links between congregation and school(s)
- Building links with other ministries of the LCA

5. PARTNERSHIPS

The LCA is committed to its schools being key agencies in its mission to the wider community. Accordingly it identifies the school pastor as a key link in leading people from the world of the school into a permanent worshipping community. To assist this process the following have been identified:

- a) The full time school pastor should be regarded as a pastor who works in cooperation with supporting congregations and pastors
- b) Where the pastor is not a full-time member of staff he should be regarded at the school as a partner in ministry, rather than a visitor to the school. This will be reflected in seeking to include him where possible in all aspects of the school life
- c) The pastor-principal relationship is critical in facilitating mission. The following are suggested as exemplars of good practice:
 - The working through of a shared vision for ministry and mission
 - Mutual supporting of one another's ministry
 - A mechanism for principal, school pastor and congregational pastor(s) to plan joint ministry
 - A commitment that principal and pastor will model partnership in mission
- d) The district bishop and regional director need to also model this partnership in ministry working together and mutual encouragement
- e) District bishops and regional directors should ensure that it is clear which congregations are supporting which schools and they should ensure that there is orientation of principal and pastor where there is a change in personnel. Partnership in ministry should not be left to chance.

6. DESIRABLE CHARACTERISTICS OF A SCHOOL PASTOR

- a) pastoral skills and understandings which will enable him to exercise pastoral care both for young people and adults;
- b) an ability to work as a member of a team;
- c) a degree of maturity of Christian faith which will give integrity to his ministry with students, staff and parents;
- d) an open and warm personality which demonstrates a loving concern for others;
- e) an experience of life either in the parish or as a mature student.
- f) professional qualification in Religious Education or Education if class room teaching is generally a requirement of the position.

Glossary of Terms

School: The early childhood centres, P-12 colleges, secondary colleges, secondary schools and primary schools which operate in the name of the Lutheran Church of Australia.