

*P*athways:theological focus



Pathways: theological focus

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Pathways: theological focus

Foreword

The Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) operates schools in order to make available 'a formal education in which the gospel of Jesus Christ informs all learning and teaching, all human relationships, and all activities in the school' [LCA & Its Schools].

As teachers play a vital role in the ministry of the school, the LCA 'commits itself to the promotion and support of its schools by ... providing means and opportunity for the professional theological pre-service and in-service education of teachers' [LCA & Its Schools]. Through the accreditation process the LCA formally acknowledges teachers when they have completed its formation, developmental and study requirements.

Pathways is a three year professional development program that provides staff new to Lutheran schools with the opportunity to explore the life and practice of the school and their role in it. It does so through a focus on three separate pathways: spiritual, theological and vocational.

The **Pathways** program comprises three elements:

- **Pathways: spiritual focus**
This program has a spiritual focus providing participants with opportunities to explore and reflect on a Lutheran perspective on spirituality
- **Pathways: theological focus**
This program provides the opportunity for staff to develop their knowledge of Lutheran theology and the way it informs Lutheran education so that they can better understand the ethos of the Lutheran school. It has a greater emphasis on specific theological content as it provides participants with the opportunity to explore Lutheran theology and how it is lived out in a Lutheran school.
- **Pathways: vocational focus**
This program provides staff with the opportunity to focus on the practice of Lutheran schooling through reflection on how they individually contribute to the mission of the Lutheran school as they live out their vocation.

The work of Louise Mason and Malcolm Bartsch in the writing, development and production of this resource is gratefully acknowledged. Others have contributed to the developmental phase by providing helpful feedback.

This material is commended for use in Lutheran schools. It will enable staff to reflect on why the LCA operates its schools, their own theological understandings and how the spiritual focus of their school informs the education offered. This commitment to the professional development of its staff reflects the high regard in which the LCA holds all those who work in its schools.

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Pathways

Each one of us follows our own particular pathway through life. Sometimes our direction is determined by our conscious decisions as happens when we find ourselves at a point where our path divides and we have to choose which way to go. Sometimes we are simply stumbling along, not at all sure just where we are going. Sometimes our path may seem very lonely, but at other times we are moving along with a crowd. Sometimes our path is clear and well-worn, but at other times we struggle to see a path at all.

However, just as when we are walking in the bush we may find that a path we are following joins another and then later a third, so in our pathway through life we may also experience converging pathways. The **Pathways** program provides an opportunity for teachers in Lutheran schools to focus on and to explore three separate pathways which converge to form a clear and well founded direction for teaching in a Lutheran school. While each of us has our own individual combination, each of the following three pathways is fundamental for us:

- a spiritual pathway
- a theological pathway
- a vocational pathway

Pathways: theological focus

Over the past 25 years we have witnessed significant growth not only in the number of Lutheran schools in Australia, but also the populations that constitute those communities. God has blessed us richly through this development as opportunities for excellence in education and the nurture of faith have been promoted. Statistics make us aware that there is a growing number of Christian other than Lutheran staff who are unfamiliar with the specific theological culture associated with our schools. However, we recognise that their theological pathway to date brings to our communities a richness in variety and insight. This contribution should be recognised, affirmed and respected at all times. We remember there are many teachings and beliefs we hold in common with other Christian churches.

Our intention through this resource is not to convert new teachers to Lutheranism but rather enable them to appreciate the way Lutheran theology informs the education which is offered through our schools. This course is an introductory one that seeks to encourage further studies in the area and also enable staff to engage in an ongoing dialogue between education and theology. We recognise that many staff have little background knowledge in the theological and biblical areas, so this resource has been structured with their needs and others in mind. The use of options and choices in the various phases of the workshops should not only encourage the new learner but also those whose knowledge of theology is more advanced.

This resource ***Pathways: theological focus*** offers to staff the opportunity to explore Lutheran theology and recognise the way it informs our living within the Lutheran school community.

Purposes

The purposes of *Pathways: theological focus* are to:

- encourage and support participant's ongoing personal faith journey
- promote an understanding of the relevance and purpose of theology in the Lutheran school context
- assist in living out the Christian faith, using theology to inform thinking and decision making processes related to school life

Outcomes

The outcomes of *Pathways: theological focus* are for participants to:

- explore, reflect on and discuss ways in which school life and theology intersect
- engage with the central themes of Lutheran theology and consider the implications for the daily activity of Lutheran schools
- examine diversity in beliefs and practices, and consider the implications for staff in Lutheran schools
- apply theological understanding to a variety of settings as they relate to both professional practice and personal life

Pathways: theological focus

Doing theology in the Lutheran school

Pathways: theological focus invites the participants to 'do theology' in the context of the Lutheran school. 'Doing theology' may not be the way we initially think of theology. Theology is often seen more as an area of study. It can involve academic study, but doing theology is also the way in which we grow in our relationship with God as the Holy Spirit works in us. Theology is reflecting on and responding to the revelation of the triune God. In doing this, we recognise that although we have our own individual experiences of God in our lives, we are also part of the whole people of God and so share in doing theology together as we try to make sense of human life within the created world, helping us to praise and glorify God in worship and our daily life.

The Bible and Theology

God is a God who speaks. God's clearest speaking to us has been through becoming a human being in Jesus Christ [John 1:1-18]. However God also speaks through the written word in the Bible as the Holy Spirit works in and through that word. The Bible therefore becomes the basis for 'doing theology'. We speak of the Bible as the 'source and norm' for all theological teaching and learning. How we understand and work with God's revelation through the Bible is explored more fully in the first Encounter: *God's living word*.

The Bible and 'The Lutheran Confessions'

The Lutheran Church is a 'confessional church'. This means that it has a number of 'confessional statements' which confess or declare what the Lutheran church believes on the basis of God's revelation. As explained more fully in the notes to the first Encounter: *God's living word*, these statements have arisen from particular historical situations when the teachings of the Bible were being challenged. The most well known of these confessional statements is the Nicene Creed which is shared by Christian churches and which arose from disputes in the early Church about the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ.

During the time of the Reformation, there was great concern that the central and essential teachings of the Bible had become unclear in the medieval church. The major issue was that the teaching of 'justification by grace through faith on account of Christ' was no longer clearly taught and preached. People were confused about how they were brought back into a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Most people believed that somehow they had to earn God's favour through their own actions.

A number of confessional statements were developed by the Lutheran reformers in order to clearly state the essential teachings of the Bible. They were collected in 1580 into what is called 'The Book of Concord'. These statements are still regarded as defining what the Lutheran Church teaches today on the basis of the Bible. For this reason, pastors in the Lutheran Church vow to teach publicly according to the 'Lutheran Confessions' and teachers in Lutheran schools also make this promise when they are installed as teachers.

While confessional statements are useful summaries of the main teachings of the Bible, they are not on the same level as the Bible. The Bible is God's Word: the confessional statements summarise what the Lutheran Church believes God's Word teaches. They must be continually tested against the teaching of the Bible and understood in relation to the concerns which they were addressing at the time they were written.

Pathways: theological focus

Structure and approach

Pathways: theological focus has been designed and written with the participants of the program in mind. The participants will come to the workshops with vastly different life and school experiences and from a diverse range of religious and non-religious backgrounds. In many cases, on their beginning journey in Lutheran schools, they will be confronted with processes, structures and rituals they do not understand. Further, they will grapple with concepts, constructs and issues, about which assumptions have likely been made, as they try to make sense of what is going on around them. **Pathways: theological focus** is an introductory program that will provide participating staff with the opportunity to develop their knowledge of Lutheran theology and the way it informs Lutheran schooling. It has been assumed that completion of *Pathways: spiritual focus* sessions has preceded the undertaking of this course, as per LEA accreditation policy guidelines.

Pathways: theological focus consists of seven encounters: seven responses.

The encounter –

- begins with scenarios arising from the school context
- Identifies an area of theology that relates directly to the scenario
- comprises a biblical narrative providing insights into the theology under consideration
- expands aspects of the theology relevant to the focus
- raises questions that enable discussion

The response –

- addresses school issues related to the theology under consideration
- brings together personal experiences and theological perspectives in dialogue around discussion questions

The required time allocation for *Pathways: theological focus* is twelve hours in total. Spread over the seven encounters: seven responses this calculates out to 103 minutes for each encounter: response. Facilitators can use some flexibility in how they structure the time across the seven encounters: seven responses.

The seven encounters: seven responses that constitute **Pathways: theological focus** are based on a constructivist approach to learning. Multiple starting points, the biblical narrative, the theological aspect, options for personal exploration, and facilitator-led discussion enable and allow participants to build on their incoming understandings and personal experiences, thereby contributing to their overall developing understanding of the topics under discussion.

Throughout the **Pathways: theological focus** workshops, differentiation has been applied to content, process, environment and product. This means that facilitators and participants:

- make choices about how they approach, access and engage with the content
- choose the kinds of processes they wish to use to do that
- make choices about the spaces/places in which learning will take place
- choose products to record learning on short investigative trails

To cater for preferred learning styles and to further personalise the learning journey, Gardner's multiple intelligences have been used in the construction of the short trails for the development phase of each workshop.

Table 1 *The structural model*

<p>1 encounter: God's living word</p>	<p>Central understanding: the word of God informs our thinking and decision making as we live within the community of the school Key question: what role does the word of God play in a Lutheran school? Biblical narrative: Jesus in the home of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42) Theological perspective: word of God; revelation Response: to issues specific to the encounter</p>
<p>2 encounter: Two ways God cares</p>	<p>Central understanding: the nature of the Lutheran school community reflects the way in which God operates within that community Key question: what does it mean to live (and then work) in a Lutheran school community? Biblical narrative: Jesus is challenged by the Jewish leaders (Mark 12:13-17) Theological perspective: the two ways God cares Response: to issues specific to the two ways God cares</p>
<p>3 encounter: Learning and teaching</p>	<p>Central understanding: tension exists within the spiritual and secular sides of education; in curriculum and pedagogy we see the paradoxical relationship at work Key question: is learning and teaching different in Lutheran schools? Biblical narrative: Paul in Athens (Acts 17:16-32) Theological perspective: creation; continuing creation; wisdom Response: to issues specific to the encounter</p>
<p>4 encounter: Caring relationships</p>	<p>Central understanding: the love God has shown for us motivates the way in which we care for others Key questions: how does a Lutheran school promote the development of positive relationships? why is pastoral care given such prominence in a Lutheran school? Biblical narrative: healing of the paralysed man (Mark 2:1-12) Theological perspective: Triune God; sin and forgiveness; love and service Response: to issues specific to the encounter</p>
<p>5 encounter: Freedom</p>	<p>Central understanding: God's revelation of sin and grace is the theological basis for our understanding and practice of Christian freedom Key question: do Lutheran schools have a distinctive approach to behaviour management? Biblical narrative: the father and his two sons (Luke 15:11-32) Theological perspective: sin and grace; law and gospel; saint-sinner; freedom <i>from</i> and freedom <i>to</i> Response: to issues specific to the encounter</p>
<p>6 encounter: Strength in suffering</p>	<p>Central understanding: suffering is part of life's journey but God does not leave us to bear this alone; God gives us the strength we need through God's presence and the gift of others Key question: where do we find strength and support in times of suffering? Biblical narrative: the story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50) Theological perspective: theology of the cross; sin and evil; discipleship Response: to issues specific to the encounter</p>
<p>7 encounter: Worship</p>	<p>Central understanding: the primary action of worship is that God comes to us with the gifts of life; our calling is one of response to God and towards each other Key question: why is Lutheran worship central to life in a Lutheran school? Biblical narrative: Jesus meets his friends on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-34) Theological perspective: worship Response: issues specific to worship</p>

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Materials

Materials

Facilitator notes and guidelines

All materials are posted on the web (login to www.lutheran.edu.au and access *Resources/publications* then *Pathways*).

Facilitators are provided with a ring binder containing:

- an overview of *Pathways: theological focus* (rationale, purposes, outcomes, a statement on theology and Lutheran confessions, structure and approach, the structural model of the program, materials and delivery)
- workshop notes for each of the *seven encounters: seven responses*

Each set of workshop notes consists of:

- the encounter: central understanding, key question, biblical narrative, theological perspective, response
- facilitator theological notes
- purposes of the workshop
- plan for the workshop
- preparation notes for the workshop
- the workshop running sheets: four phases with options for facilitator choice and options for participant choice
- powerpoint slides
- resources
- handouts
- additional readings
- checklists and paperwork for record keeping

Participants

For each of the seven encounters: seven responses, participants receive:

- a set of theological notes
- handouts relevant for specific tasks
- resources specific to chosen options

It is suggested that participants be given a folder in which they store their notes, handouts and resources from each workshop.

Materials posted on the web will be able to be accessed by participants.

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Delivery

Delivery

The conceptual framework in table 2 is used throughout the seven encounters: seven responses.

Table 2 *Conceptual Framework for workshop delivery*

Workshop Flow Pattern	Phase	Time
Setting out...	Engaging phase	15 mins
Gathering pace...	Developing phase	40 mins
Multiple views...	Applying phase	40 mins
In a quiet place...	Reflecting phase	10 mins

Rationale for the conceptual framework

Setting out

This phase is designed to orient participants' thinking to the topic under consideration and to enable them to engage at a personal level through the sharing of similar experiences. The options provided cater for a range of learning styles and, where possible, participants should be given the choice to select their preferred option.

Gathering pace

This is the point where the encounter's main theological input takes place. It begins the process of building on participants' incoming understandings. Again, options for participant accessing of the information are given. So, too, are options for internalising the information. Facilitators can make choices about how much or how many choice they can cope with providing. Obviously, the more closely the activity relates to individual learning preferences the greater the impact for participants. Some options will require provision of materials in hard copy. If internet access is available the range of available options increases substantially. Participants could work in pairs, or individually at computers.

It is important to retain the interactive and inclusive style of the workshop and not move into a lesson of instruction.

Multiple views

In this phase a variety of perspectives is shared. Participants bring their incoming, emerging and growing understandings together with the knowledge gained from readings and short trail input. Discussion is a key principle as together the group wrestles with questions raised by the encounter. It is also important that all participants have opportunity to have their voice heard, and that the background of each participant is recognised and honoured. For this reason, a range of options for setting up discussion is given. This is the point at which the outcomes for Pathways: theological focus are largely realised.

In a quiet place

Opportunities for participants to reflect on their experience from engaging with the encounter are critical to making sense of and constructing new learning. Structured ways, means and prompts for facilitating this phase are given in the workshop notes.