

December 2023

Identity and gender in Lutheran schools and early childhood services

[A cover letter to accompany the *Created and Loved* guide for Catholic Schools when used in Lutheran Schools and ECS.]

In developing a statement on identity and gender that can guide Lutheran schools and early childhood services, the College of Bishops of the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand (LCANZ) enlisted the aid of the LCANZ's Commission on Social and Bioethical Questions, the LCANZ's Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations and the Board for Lutheran Education Australia.

The LCANZ College of Bishops and the General Church Board will work towards providing a guide specific for the LCANZ. In the interim, the LCANZ's College of Bishops and General Church Board commend the *Created and Loved* guide for Catholic schools as a suitable starting point to guide Lutheran schools and early childhood services (ECS) in matters of identity and gender. (The 'Created and Loved' guide can be accessed at <https://bit.ly/CreatedandLoved>.) Although the document uses some terms and relies on some concepts that reflect Catholic social teaching, and that are not commonly used or understood by Lutherans in Australia and New Zealand, the overall tenor of the document is in keeping with the teachings of the LCANZ. The comprehensive research that underpins the guide and the thoughtful and deeply caring tone in which the guide is written reflects the generosity of the Christian vision and is consistent with the mission of the LCANZ – to grow communities where God's love comes to life.

As schools and ECS currently navigate the complexities of working through identity and gender matters with students, parents, families and staff, we encourage an evidence-based and holistic biopsychosocial approach to the support of students. This approach includes respecting the vocation and expertise of health professionals. Furthermore, as Lutherans believe that God has given parents and caregivers the prime responsibility for the education of their children, a Lutheran school works as a team with parents.

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Lutheran schools and ECS are significant and valued communities and services within the LCANZ. Within these places, our staff are representatives of the LCANZ in their roles and offer pastoral and practical support to all students and their families. The *Created and Loved* guide reinforces the importance of schools and ECS as places where the love of God is witnessed through the care, respect and love shown by the staff to those in their care.

The pastoral principles and practical protocols included in the *Created and Loved* document offer guidance for the leaders of Lutheran schools and ECS in developing their own policies, procedures and decision making about the care of individual students with respect to identity and gender, that reflect their circumstances.

Created and Loved refers to Christian anthropology. Christian anthropology means what Christians understand by what it means to be humans in relationship with God. For Lutheran schools and ECSs, the book 'A God who speaks and acts' is an introduction to our understanding of what this means in learning communities.

Everyone has dignity because everyone is created in the image of God and is loved by God. A relationship with God gives human beings their fullest experience of what it means to be truly human, as they understand the gifts and blessings granted to them by their Creator. Yet all human experiences of disconnection and brokenness are evidence of the impact of what the Bible calls sin. Thankfully, God is still at work through the Christian message of transformation and hope for all. Each school community or ECS is a place of grace where Christ offers forgiveness as relationships are renewed and restored (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10).

Together with all Christian schools and services we believe that God is the Creator of all things, including humankind. Among all of God's living creatures, human beings are unique in being made in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). Through the Gospel, the Holy Spirit calls us, individually and as the Christian church, to live as children of the light (1 Thessalonians 5:5 & Luther's Small Catechism, Explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed). God's Word teaches us to care for everyone. In welcoming all to be employed or enrolled in Lutheran school communities, Lutheran education does not discriminate against any staff or student based on their personal attributes (e.g. race, culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, marital status, parental status, pregnancy etc).

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General Church Board

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Further Reading about Lutheran Schools and Theology:

Bartsch, M.I., 2013, A God who speaks and acts: theology for teachers in Lutheran schools, Lutheran Education Australia, Adelaide. Viewed 26 September 2023 at

<https://www.lutheran.edu.au/download/a-god-who-speaks-and-acts/>

Lutheran Education Australia, 2021, What is so special about a Lutheran School? Brochure produced by Lutheran Education Australia, North Adelaide. Viewed 26 September 2023 at

<https://www.lutheran.edu.au/publications-policies/brochures/>

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