

CHRISTIANS IN DIALOGUE

Authority in the Church

How our Church makes decisions

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AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

Anglicans, Lutherans, Roman Catholics and Uniting Church Christians each have their own distinctive style of leadership and way of making decisions. The material in this folder is designed to assist Christians in small inter—church groups to discuss their different traditions of leadership and decision making and to pray together. We hope that these discussions and prayers will lead us a little further along the road to Christian unity.

Each of the four sessions in Authority in the Church has an article to centre the discussion, a set of questions to help start discussion, and a set of prayer resources. Each set of prayer resources consists of a psalm in praise of God, a prayer for Christian unity, a Gospel reading, and an affirmation of faith. These prayer resources are offered to assist the group to pray. Someone should lead the prayer. Just how the prayer resources will be used is for each group to decide. They might want to add other elements to their prayer, or they might use the resources as they are set out. Some of the resources could be used at the beginning of a session and some at the end, or the group could decide to use them all in one period of prayer.

We would encourage those who use this material to continue to be active in promoting closer relationships among the churches.

This material has been prepared by the Christians in Dialogue taskforce which is sponsored by the Anglican Diocese of Brisbane, the Lutheran Church of Australia Queensland District, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane, and the Uniting Church in Australia Queensland Synod.



Leader's Guide

1. Gathering

People coming to a group for the first time will often have some anxiety –

- ◆ Will I know anyone?
- ◆ What will be expected of me?
- ◆ Did I switch off the oven?
- ◆ It is important to help them through this first awkward stage. Have all your preparations done well beforehand so that you are able to greet each person warmly on arrival, introducing them to one another, and perhaps having tea and coffee available.

2. Beginning

- A. When all have arrived get the session started by giving them a clear statement of what the group is about -
Welcome the group
- ◆ who we are;
 - ◆ why we're here;
 - ◆ when we will finish.

It might go like this: "Welcome to my place, and I'm delighted that each of you has been able to make it. We are a group of people from Churches gathered together to reflect and share our ideas on ... (*name of study*). Tonight we will be looking at Study One

- B. Then invite the members to introduce themselves saying:
- ◆ who I am;
 - ◆ why I'm here;
 - ◆ what I hope to get out of the program.

Lead yourself by giving a short response to each of the three areas. Then invite each of the others to do likewise. Don't worry if some respond to only one or two of the areas.

- C. Then distribute copies of the program.

Encourage participants to listen to one another's ideas with respect.

3. Opening Devotion

- A. You may wish to play some music quietly in the background and give the group a few moments to reflect on the opening devotion. Then call for volunteers to lead it.
- B. You might like to choose an appropriate song for the group to share

4. Reflection on the Topic

Invite a couple of people to read the teaching. Encourage the readers to pause between each section.

5. Discussion

Allow a few minutes of quiet time to reflect on the questions. Encourage participants to share responses to each question but there is to be no pressure put on anyone to speak. Be sure to make some response to each speaker if only to say e.g. "Thank you John". This makes sure the participant feels that he / she has been heard.

6. Closure

Thank the participants for their participation. Check to ensure venue is right for next session.

Closing Devotion

Cuppa

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AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

SESSION ONE : AUTHORITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND EARLY CHURCH

Authority of the Apostles

In the New Testament the apostles are seen as Christ's authorised representatives who are responsible for looking after the Christian community. They play a vital role in the history of the Church. It is now generally recognised that Christ did not draw up a blueprint for his disciples to follow in the organisation of the Church. Leadership probably initially focused on the twelve apostles. For some reason however their place in the centre of things diminished and apart from Peter and the brothers James and John, they soon disappeared from view. A much wider group than the twelve are also recognised as apostles in the New Testament. Paul, James the brother of Jesus, Barnabas, Andronicus and Junia, and probably Apollos and Silvanus are called apostles.

The apostles founded and lead churches, gathering together in fellowship those who responded to their preaching of the Gospel. In exercising authority over these churches they gave precise directions for the ordering of life in 'the communities. In first Corinthians we see Paul instructing the Christians at Corinth concerning disputes between members of the community (6:1—11), marriage, virginity and widowhood (7:1—39), the eating of food offered to idols (8:1—13, 10:14—33), the conduct of worship (11:2—34), preaching (14:1—40), and the collection for the church at Jerusalem (16:1—4). It is apparent from the New Testament that the apostles made decisions about Church structures as the need arose and that they felt guided by the Spirit in doing so. An example is the appointment of the seven to care for the Greek speaking Christians in Jerusalem who had complained that their interests were being neglected (Acts 6:1—6).

After the death of the Apostles local leaders took on the role of carrying on the work of those who had founded the communities. When these leaders in their turn wrote letters to their communities they did so in the name of the apostle who was the founder of their community. The letter to Ephesus and the letters to Timothy and Titus are written as though they came personally from Paul and they seek to carry on the apostolic tradition with the authority of Paul.

Household Churches

As the early Church spread from city to city the family household became the pastoral basis of the whole Christian movement. There is frequent reference to these house communities in the New Testament: the house of Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus (1 Corinthians); of Philemon in Colossae (Philemon 2), of Nympha in Laodicae (Colossians 4:15) etc. This is not surprising because the household was the basic unit of civic life in the cities of the time. These households had greater cohesion than our modern families have and included relatives, servants, friends, acquaintances, clients, and often people of the same profession. It is probably because there were different Christian house communities in the same city that factions developed. We see these factions causing confusion in the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1—4).

In the Graeco—Roman household the father was the unspoken authority, but, by contrast, in the Christian house communities there was a brotherhood and sisterhood of equal partners on the basis of the Christians shared baptism in Christ. Another difference was that the authority of the apostles and their fellow workers over the Christians was greater than the authority of anyone in the household.

Different Authority Styles

It would appear that from the earliest days some Christian communities were governed by a group of people called presbyters or elders. The Judaeo—Christian churches simply adopted this method of ordering the affairs of the community with which they were familiar from Judaism. The situation is less clear in the churches founded in Greece and Macedonia.

Paul was aware of a structured leadership in some of the communities to which he wrote. He tells the Christians at Thessalonica to ‘respect those who labour among you’ (1 Thess.5:12) and he includes the overseers and deacons in those to whom he sends greetings at Philippi (Phi.1:1). On the other hand when Paul writes to the Christians at Corinth he addresses himself to all the members of the community and makes no reference to any authority structure there. Given the dissension among the factions at Corinth, the obvious thing for Paul to do would have been to uphold the authority of leaders if they had been in place at Corinth. So despite the fact that Luke says of Paul that he established elders in each city, it seems more likely that in reality Paul was more flexible and accepted whatever way Christians in each city were ordering their communities.

Emergence of Bishops

It is in the Pastoral letters, those written to Timothy and Titus, that we see an office of leadership begin to appear. Increasingly the elders took over the roles exercised in earlier times by the prophets and teachers, and probably also by the household community leaders. From the various forms mentioned in the Pastorals there emerged a pattern of bishop, priest and deacon which became established in the Church by the end of the second century. The transformation from a local church ruled by a body of elders may have developed into first the elders taking it in turns to carry out their official duties. Eventually one elder in each church had the same authority over the community which had previously been exercised by the apostles and their representatives over several churches.

By the time of Ignatius of Antioch who died in 107 each local church was ruled by a single elder with the title bishop assisted by a number of other elders called presbyters and others called deacons. Ignatius exhorted the faithful:

‘You should follow the bishop as Jesus Christ did the Father.. nobody must do anything that has to do with the church without the bishop’s approval.. Where the bishop is present, there let the congregation gather, just as where Christ is, there is the catholic church. Without the bishops’ supervision, no baptisms or love feasts are permitted. On the other hand, whatever he approves pleases God as well. It is a fine thing to acknowledge God and the bishop.’

The threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon was to prove remarkably effective in providing pastoral care and leadership at the local level. The bishop’s responsibility included both community leadership and teaching. The pressure of false teaching made it imperative to provide an authentic tradition and an authoritative interpretation of the tradition. The bishop

became the guarantor of the tradition. By the time of the Council of Nicea early in the 4th century the authority of the bishop was so recognised as to be beyond question. Unfortunately with this development the Pauline concept of the multiplicity of charisms in each local church was lost.

As time went on the bishops absorbed the roles of teacher and prophet. They and the presbyters were drawn into full—time church work. As long as Christianity was a minority religion subject to periodic persecution by the imperial authorities it had been difficult to consider the ministry as a profession. When Constantine became emperor in 311 Christianity became the favoured religion of the empire. The Church rapidly grew in size and took on the divisions and structures of the empire. Clergy were given a privileged status. They were exempt from taxes and civil service. The priesthood emerged as a vocation, an office in parallel to local government officials in the empire. When the empire declined under the pressure of the Goths and Vandals, bishops assumed many of the functions of civil authority.

The Bishops of Rome

During this time the church of Rome became more important because a number of the bishops of that city were men of outstanding ability who accepted civil powers at the same time as they asserted their religious authority. Ever since the first century the church of Rome had claimed a special position in the Church. It was always difficult however to determine whether Rome's primacy was based more on its position as capital of the empire or because it was commonly believed that Peter and Paul had been martyred there.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Compare the way in which leadership seems to have been shared among the members of the early Christian communities with the way that leadership is exercised in your church today.
2. Compare the leadership styles of Paul and other New Testament leaders.
3. For many centuries the threefold leadership ministry of bishop, priest and deacon was common to all Christian communities. Why is it that this threefold ministry is not fully established in any of our churches today?
4. With the development of the Christian ministry from non professional to professional status during the time of Constantine, what was gained and what was lost in the life of the Church?

RESOURCES FOR PRAYER

Psalm of Praise Psalm 111:1—10 (GNB)

Praise the Lord!

With all my heart I will thank the Lord in the assembly of his people. How wonderful are the things the Lord does!

All who are delighted with them want to understand them.

All he does is full of honour and majesty;
his righteousness is eternal.

The Lord does not let us forget his wonderful actions;
he is kind and merciful.

He provides food for those who have reverence for him;
he never forgets his covenant.

He has shown his power to his people by giving them the lands of foreigners.

In all he does he is faithful and just; all his commands are dependable. They last for all time; they were given in truth righteousness.

He set his people free and made an eternal covenant with them.

Holy and mighty is he!

The way to become wise is to have reverence for the Lord.

He gives sound judgement to all who obey his commands. He is to be praised forever.

Prayer for Unity

Leader:

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son Jesus Christ, and for the gift of your Holy Spirit who raises us up and makes us one. We bring before you the brokenness of our world, and the divisions among those of us who call upon your name. Send afresh the gift of the Spirit who is love, so that through our growth in unity the world may believe.

All: Amen

Parable of the Sower Matthew 13: 1 — 8, 18—23 (GNB)

That same day Jesus left the house and went to the lakeside, where he sat down to teach. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it, while the crowd stood on the shore. He used parables to tell them many things.

“Once there was a man who went out to sow grain. As he scattered the seed, some of it fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some of it fell on rocky ground, where there was little soil. The seeds soon sprouted, because the soil wasn’t deep. But when the sun came up, it burnt the young plants; and because the roots had not grown deep enough, the plants soon dried up. Some of the seed fell among thornbushes, which grew up and choked the plants. But some seeds fell in good soil, and the plants bore grain: some produced a hundred grains, others sixty, and others thirty.”

“Listen, then, and learn what the parable of the sower means. Those who hear the message about the Kingdom but do not understand it are like the seeds that fell along the path. The Evil One comes and snatches away what was sown in them. The seeds that fell on rocky ground stand for those who receive the message gladly as soon as they hear it. But it does not

sink deep into them, and they don't last long. So when trouble or persecution comes because of the message, they give up at once. The seeds that fell among thornbushes stand for those who hear the message; but the worries about this life and the love for riches choke the message, and they don't bear fruit. And the seeds sown in the good soil stand for those who hear the message and understand it: they bear fruit, some as much as a hundred, others sixty, and others thirty."

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, Our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.

Amen.

AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

SESSION TWO - THE REFORMATION AND CHURCH AUTHORITY

The Authority of Rome

For the first three hundred years the Church was a relatively loose federation of local churches united in a common faith. From the earliest days, however, the church of Rome enjoyed a unique position. It became recognised as the symbol of orthodoxy and its bishops were often asked to settle conflicts of doctrine and discipline for the other local churches. The authority of the bishops of Rome developed only gradually. By the end of the third century he exercised authority over all the other local churches in what is now Italy. Eventually the churches of the West, those in Gaul and Spain, and to some extent Africa, recognised the bishop of Rome as the final arbiter in disputes.

It was Leo I (440-461) who was the first to lay claim to the fullness of authority in the Church and it was he who developed the theory of the relationship between the bishop of Rome and the apostle Peter. It was another seven hundred years before these claims were fully operative in Western Christendom. Gregory VII (1073-85) claimed near absolute authority in his governance of the Church. All bishops, clerics, and lay people including emperors were subject to his authority. At the end of the thirteenth century Boniface VIII (1294-1303) claimed that it was absolutely necessary for the salvation of all that they submit to the bishop of Rome.

Challenge to Rome's Authority

The Church in the East from its earliest days had an uneasy relationship with the church of Rome. There was an acknowledgement that the bishop of Rome had a spiritual primacy in the universal Church, but a resistance to the claims of Rome that it was the sole judge in matters of doctrine or that it possessed full authority in matters of discipline. By the middle of the eleventh century the Church in the East had formally rejected the Roman primacy.

In the West the papal authority had been increasingly threatened over the two hundred years prior to the Reformation. Kings and princes and local governments had been securing the right to appoint bishops and the immunity of church property from taxation was being eroded. Although the legal system continued to depend on church courts the papal right to hear appeals without interference was also under threat.

Luther Challenges Papal Authority

Although Luther's argument with Rome was originally about indulgences it soon turned itself into a debate about papal authority and its limits. The study of Scripture had convinced Luther that the idea of granting indulgences was wrong. Since it was the authority of the Popes which was the basis of the system of granting indulgences he eventually rejected the doctrine that the Pope was head of the church by divine right.

German feeling against the distant and vexatious control by Rome began to rise behind Luther. He called on the princes and magistrates of Germany to use their authority to reform the church. He saw reform to be impossible unless the Pope's power in Germany was

destroyed. Although Luther had not intended it, eventually a separate church was formed. Unlike the pre-reformation church where authority had been centralised in the Pope through the bishops, the Reformation brought into being a large number of territorial churches which were independent of each other and subject to the local lord both in civil and religious matters.

In the reformed German states and cities the first steps were comparatively easy. A German Bible was placed in the churches, priests were allowed to marry, monks were permitted to leave their monasteries, people were taught to worship with German hymns, church endowments were diverted from priests who celebrated private masses. Luther's liturgical reforms removed the sacrificial language from the mass, changed the language from Latin to German and increased the occasions of preaching.

Authority in Luther's Church

The German princes accepted it as a natural development to fill the vacuum left by the repudiation of papal authority, and throughout the empire the cities easily accepted the new ways and their councils undertook the reform and supervision of the parishes.

Luther asked John, the new Elector of Saxony, who was a convinced Lutheran, to order visitations of the Saxon churches. Out of these visitations arose a new church order. The prince exercised the old jurisdiction of the bishop by appointing a consistory. The consistory eventually became the agent of church government in Lutheran and Reformed churches. It was normally composed of lawyers and clerics appointed by the prince, and was regarded rather as a church court than a civil court, though the distinction had less meaning than it would have a century later. Sometimes the prince presided in person at its deliberations, or more often he acted by deputy. The visitors went out in the name of the prince and reported to him. The consistory exercised all discipline.

Reformed Church Authority

Calvin was a generation later than Luther. The problem in his day was not the overthrow of a papacy, but the construction of new modes of authority ~ Calvin recognised that what was needed was the authority of a church ministry. He believed that in organising the church at Geneva he must organise it in imitation of the primitive Church and so reassert the independence of the Church and the divine authority of its ministers. Calvin wanted the church to be responsible for the Christian life of the city so he arranged for church officers called elders. The pastors and the elders were to meet each week in consistory.

The pastors were to be responsible for presiding at public worship and preaching and instructing the people, while the elders were to keep watch over every detail of the life of the citizens in public and private. Like the councils of other Swiss cities, the council at Geneva, however, had no desire to give too much power to their clergy. At every turn they attempted to add provisos to ensure that the pastors might act only after reference to the city council. John Knox who described the strictly regulated life of the citizens of Geneva as 'the most perfect school of Christ that ever was on earth since the day of the apostles', introduced Calvin's reforms and church order into Scotland. In 1560 the Scottish Parliament repudiated the authority of the Pope and abolished the mass. It accepted a confession of faith drafted by Knox. Though the form of church government, where supervision would be exercised by a consistory and elders, was not given legal force, the presbyterian form of church government was slowly introduced into the parishes.

Church Authority in England

England was already a nation state before the Reformation began. The Tudor monarchy was strong. The English Reformation began as a political revolution which subsequently became a doctrinal reformation. By the force of his personality and the anti-Rome feeling in the country and in parliament, Henry affected the break with Rome and Papal authority. Henry himself remained a Catholic in doctrine. It was Elizabeth I, his daughter, who presided over the 'Elizabethan Settlement'. This was in essence a political settlement. Elizabeth was given the title Supreme Governor of the Church of England. In terms of church authority Papal supremacy was replaced by Royal supremacy.

There were those in England who wanted a more extensive reform of the church which would be based on the Swiss model. During the Civil War and under Cromwell these more radical reforms were put in place. In 1642 with the outbreak of the Civil War, Parliament declared bishops abolished and their land confiscated, and in 1645 Parliament forbade the use of the Book of Common Prayer. The restoration of Charles II in 1660 brought with it the restoration of the Prayer Book and the bishops. But it was impossible to return to the state before the wars and the English church remained both Catholic and Reformed.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is it that the Church of Rome and the Bishop of Rome became so significant in Christianity?
2. Share what you know about the Church in the East, their style of worship, how authority and leadership is exercised, the role of woman in the church etc.
3. The Reformation gave rise to independently governed national churches while the Roman Catholic Church remained centrally governed. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the two systems of government?
4. Some churches still have a relationship with the state. In some countries ministers of religion are paid by the state, and in some the state has a say in church appointments. Do you think it proper that the church and state are related in these ways?

RESOURCES FOR PRAYER

A Psalm of Thanksgiving Psalm 138: 1-8 (GNB)

I thank you, Lord, with all my heart;
I sing praise to you before the gods.
I face your holy Temple, bow down, and praise your name,
because of your constant love and faithfulness,
because you have shown that your name and your commands are supreme.
You answered me when I called to you;
with your strength you strengthened me.

All the kings in the world will praise you, Lord,
because they have heard your promises.
They will sing about what you have done and about your great glory
Even though you are so high above, you care for the lowly,
and the proud cannot hide from you.

When I am surrounded by troubles, you keep me safe.
You oppose my angry enemies and save me by your power.
You will do everything you have promised;
Lord, your love is eternal.
Complete the work that you have begun.

Prayer for Unity

Leader:

Lord Jesus Christ as we seek to do your will soften our hearts that we may repent of our sinful divisions, and calm the fears which prevent us from hearing the witness of others. Give us your spirit of kindness towards those who differ from us, and generosity to those who seek to draw near, that we may be healed and together glorify your name.

All: Amen

The Parable of the Weeds

Matthew 13: 24-30,36-40(GNB)

Jesus told them another parable: "The Kingdom of heaven is like this. A man sowed good seed in his paddock. One night, when everyone was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. When the plants grew and the heads of grain began to form, then the weeds showed up. The man's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, it was good seed you sowed in your paddock; where did the weeds come from?' 'It was some enemy who did this,' he answered. 'Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?' they asked him. 'No,' he answered, 'because as you gather the weeds you might pull up some of the wheat along with them. Let the wheat and weeds both grow together until harvest. Then I will tell the harvest workers to pull up the weeds first, tie them in bundles and burn them, and then to gather in the wheat and put it in my barn.'"

When Jesus had left the crowd and gone indoors, his disciples came to him and said, "Tell us what the parable about the weeds in the paddock means."
Jesus answered, "The man who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man; the paddock is the world; the good seed is the people who belong to the Kingdom; the weeds are the people who

belong to the Evil One; and the enemy who sowed the weeds is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvest workers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered up and burnt in the fire, so the same thing will happen at the end of the age."

The Nicene Creed (Agreed Version)

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, 'Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

SESSION THREE - AUTHORITY IN OUR CHURCHES

Authority in the Anglican Church

In Anglicanism ‘Authority is distributed among Scripture, Tradition, Creeds, the Ministry of Word and Sacraments, the witness of the Saints and the continuing experience of the Holy Spirit through his faithful people in the church. It is thus a dispersed rather than a centralised authority, having many elements which combine, interact and check each other’ (Lambeth 1948). It has been profoundly influenced by the trilogy of Reason, Scripture and Tradition. The Interaction of these elements has been illustrated during the debate and in the decision making process concerning the ordination of women in the Anglican Church. Some Anglican provinces ordain women: some do not. Diversity in Unity is an Anglican ideal.

The Anglican Church of Australia is made up of 24 dioceses. Anglicans have a strong sense of the local diocese and its centre and focus in the personal leadership of the bishop. They believe that the ministry of oversight exercised by the bishop in his diocese is a part of the Christian meaning of authority. He has the responsibility in church law to give authority to priests, deacons and lay ministers to carry out their ministry.

The Anglican form of governance is bishop—in—synod. Anglicans are ‘synodically governed and episcopally lead.’ The diocesan Synod is made up of the bishop, some or all of the clergy, and a specified number of lay people elected by each parish. While on most matters Synod votes as a whole, on some significant matters the vote may be by houses — laity, clergy, the bishop. While authority is focused personally at the local level through the bishop it is expressed nationally through General Synod. General Synod, presided over by the Primate, consists of the diocesan bishops and an equal number of clergy and lay people elected by their diocesan Synods.

The Anglican Church of Australia is one of 28 or so autonomous national churches. The Archbishop of Canterbury is the spiritual leader of the world wide Anglican Communion. He has immense prestige because of this office and he may exercise significant moral authority, but he can’t tell the Anglican Communion what to do. The Lambeth Conference, which first met in 1867, is a gathering of Anglican bishops from around the world. It meets roughly every ten years. It has a moral influence but it possesses no binding legal authority within the Anglican Communion. The Primates of each of the national churches meet regularly as does the Anglican Consultative Council. This body is internationally representative and is made up of bishops, clergy and lay people functioning as a kind of ongoing secretariat for the Anglican Communion.

Authority in the Lutheran Church

Lutherans hold that Jesus Christ is the head of the Church and that Jesus’ word to the Church and his will for it is revealed in the Holy Scriptures. As such, Scripture is the supreme authority for Lutherans. At the time of the Reformation Lutherans made declarations of belief which, under Scripture, are authoritative for them. These declarations are contained in the Book of Concord which still forms the basis of the church’s confession today. This common confession of faith, rather than any overriding structure, is the bond which unites Lutherans throughout the world.

The Lutheran Confessions draw a distinction between authority in the church which comes by divine command and authority which comes from human arrangement. The office of the public ministry is instituted by God for the purpose of ministering to the church through the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.

As long as the Gospel is properly taught and the Sacraments rightly administered the church in each place is free to order itself and to grant authority to persons and groups of persons as it sees fit. Accordingly, there is no centralised world wide authority in the Lutheran Church. Each country has its own self governing church organisation. In some countries, the Lutheran Church is episcopally governed. In others, a different form of church government is practised.

The Lutheran Church of Australia is made up of congregations which accept the church's constitution. Congregations have a high degree of autonomy in ordering their own affairs. Each congregation (or parish) chooses and calls its own pastor to preach and to teach the Gospel publicly, and to administer the Sacraments. Within the congregation, the pastor works with a committee elected by the local congregation to supervise the life of the congregation.

On a state level, congregations come together to form Districts. Districts are charged with the responsibility for oversight of work which a single congregation or parish could not undertake or do effectively on its own. Authority within districts is exercised by a Synod which meets annually. The ordained pastors together with lay people elected by each congregation form the Synod. A District President (always a pastor) is elected by the Synod. He is given authority to carry out the programme of the church in accordance with the policies established by the Synod. In addition, the President exercises oversight of the pastors and congregations within the District.

The highest constitutional authority in the Lutheran Church of Australia is the General Synod which meets every three years. The General Synod consists of elected representatives of the ordained pastors and elected lay representatives from the congregations. As on a District level, the General Synod undertakes work which congregations and Districts could not undertake or do effectively alone. It oversees the work of training pastors and other church workers and develops and maintains missions in Australia and abroad. Like the District Synod, the General Synod elects a President to plan and co—ordinate the work of the Church in accordance with General Synod policies and decisions. The General President is always a pastor and serves as the spiritual leader of the Church. At both district and national level, the President is assisted by a Church Council, a Finance Council and other elected officers.

Authority in the Roman Catholic Church

Roman Catholic teaching concerning church authority is based on the belief that God gave Christ all authority and that through the Scriptures the authority of Christ is conveyed to the church which is thus given the capacity to teach the faith and to order its life.

Roman Catholics believe that God has given the bishops special gifts for the benefit of the church which gives them the authority to teach and to govern. For Roman Catholics this service of leadership is intrinsic to the nature of the church. The bishop appoints parish priests as his representatives to pastor local congregations. Since the early centuries bishops have come together for councils to decide on matters of faith and to order the life of the church. The Roman Catholic Church continues to hold these councils whose decisions are binding on all Roman Catholics when they concern fundamental matters of faith and church order.

Early in the spread of Christianity the bishops of prominent cities were expected to have the oversight of other bishops in their region. The Bishop of Rome was one of these. Eventually he was expected to assist all the bishops in the West to promote in their dioceses right teaching, holiness of life, brotherly unity and the church's mission to the world. The meaning of papal authority and the administrative structures through which this has been exercised has varied considerably through the centuries.

All Roman Catholics are bound by their church's Code of Canon Law. Since the Second Vatican Council the Roman Catholic Church has been working to replace the legal outlook of the nineteenth century by a more pastoral understanding of authority in the church. The revised Code of Canon Law published in 1983 directs that structures for consultation should be set up at every level of the church. Many parishes now have councils to advise the parish priest. Most dioceses have held assemblies or synods with elected representation from the clergy and lay people to advise the bishop.

There are 25 dioceses in the Roman Catholic Church in Australia. The bishops meet twice yearly in conference. In recent years the Australian bishops' conference has developed a leadership style which allows it to speak on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church in Australia with considerable authority. While decisions made by the bishops' conference have no binding force on individual dioceses the cohesion these conferences give to the church in Australia helps to balance the centralised authority of the Pope and the Vatican administration.

Authority in the Uniting Church

The Uniting Church holds that Jesus Christ is her only king and head, and that all authority in the church is his. His authority is mediated to the church through the Scriptures as interpreted in the community in the light of its tradition under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Government is by a series of inter—related councils each with authority to fulfil specific responsibilities.

Each Uniting Church congregation meets in council twice a year to review its activities and to elect its elders. The council of elders has specific pastoral and disciplinary responsibilities associated with the congregation. Each year the parish meeting meets to elect its representatives to other church councils, and to consider policy and financial matters. The parish council oversees the life of the parish.

The Presbytery is the district council with the responsibility of overseeing the parishes and the ordination and oversight of ministers in its area. The Synod is the regional council. Between Synods the Synod Standing Committee with the assistance of a full—time Secretary and Heads of Departments have the responsibility for the administration of the church in the region. Responsibility for matters of doctrine, worship, government and discipline lies with the national council, the Assembly. It has the obligation to seek the concurrence of the other councils on matters of importance in the life of the church. It usually does this by disseminating discussion papers as it did before the renewed deaconate was established in the church by the sixth Assembly in 1992.

In councils beyond the parish level representation by ministers and lay people are equal and efforts are made to have young people on all councils. The Chairperson presides over a presbytery, Moderator over a synod and President over the assembly. These office bearers

may be lay people or ministers, male or female. The leaders of these councils speak for the church at each level. Their short period of office, and checks and balances in the system prevent them from acting with personal authority except in a limited way.

However, there is a growing understanding in the church that authority needs to be exercised personally. In Queensland this has led to Presbytery Chairpersons being appointed to full—time positions. In 1993, for the first time, Queensland Synod will have a full—time Moderator, appointed for an extendable three year term.

QUESTIONS TO HELP DISCUSSION

1. Anglicans have the Archbishop of Canterbury, Roman Catholics have the Bishop of Rome, both of whom have a significant role as Christian leaders. What are the advantages of a universal spiritual leader?
2. Two of our churches are the result of recent mergers of previously independent churches. Have there been difficulties in the design and functioning of authority structures in the Lutheran Church of Australia and the Uniting Church in Australia?
3. Anglicans and Roman Catholics have bishops who are recognised as the leaders in their dioceses. Lutherans and the Uniting Church also have regional leaders. What are the advantages, if any, in having a strong personal leadership in a regional church?
4. The need for order on the one hand and the freedom of the Gospel and the exuberance of the Spirit on the other hand are in constant tension. How much variety can there be before church authority breaks down?

RESOURCES FOR PRAYER

Psalm of Praise

Praise the Lord!

Praise his name, you servants of the Lord,
who stand in the Lord's house,
in the Temple of our God.
Praise the Lord, because he is good;
sing praises to his name, because he is kind.
He chose Jacob for himself,
the people of Israel for his own.

Psalm 135: 1—7, 13—14 (GNB)

I know that our Lord is great,
greater than all the gods.
He does whatever he wishes
in heaven and on earth,
in the seas and in the depths below.
He brings storm clouds from the ends of the earth;
he makes lightning for the storms,
and he brings out the wind from his storeroom.

Lord, you will always be proclaimed as God;
all generations will remember you.
The Lord will defend his people;
he will take pity on his servants.

Prayer for Unity

Leader:

Lord, you gather us together in your Church. In spite of our divisions you enfold us in the kindness of your heart. Teach us to be humble. Grant us your powerful Spirit that we may serve others, and your quiet Spirit that we may hear what you are saying to us now. Make us aware that we belong to you. Breathe into our lives, as individuals and communities, the breath of your gentleness and strength.

All: Amen.

The Parable of the Widow and the Judge Luke 18: 1—8 (GNB)

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to teach them that they should always pray and never become discouraged. “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that same town who kept coming to him and pleading for her rights, saying, ‘Help me against my opponent!’ For a long time the judge refused to act, but at last he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or respect man, yet because of all the trouble this widow is giving me, I will see to it that she gets her rights. If I don’t she will keep on coming and finally wear me out!’

And the Lord continued, “Listen to what that corrupt judge said. Now, will God not judge in favour of his own people who cry to him day and night for help? Will he be slow to help them? I tell you, he will judge in their favour and do it quickly. But will the Son of Man find faith on earth when he comes?”

A CONTEMPORARY AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

We are not alone, we live in God’s world. We believe in God: who has created and is creating, who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by the Spirit. We trust in God. We are called to be Church: to celebrate God’s presence, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope. In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

AUTHORITY IN OUR CHURCHES

SESSION FOUR - DECISION MAKING IN OUR CHURCHES

The Ordination of Women

The different ways in which our four churches make authoritative decisions concerning important questions of belief and church order is well illustrated by the manner in which each church has responded to the question of the ordination of women.

The Uniting Church and Women's Ordination

The three churches which united to form the Uniting Church in Australia were ordaining women at the time of union in 1977, although they had not been doing so for very long. The Congregational Union in South Australia ordained its first woman minister in 1927. After first addressing the question in 1929 the Methodist Church in Australasia ordained its first woman minister in 1969. The Presbyterian Church of Australia first formally addressed the question only in 1957, and ordained its first woman minister in 1974.

In 1991 the General Assembly of the Uniting Church saw fit to issue a document '*Why Does the Uniting Church in Australia Ordain Women to the Ministry of the Word?*', In the introduction it is stated that the document is not a discussion paper but rather it is for the information of the church and it is in response to the concerns which exist about the ordination of women in the church. There are no strong moves for the church to change its mind on the ordination of women.

The Anglican Church and Women's Ordination

The Anglican Church of Australia and the whole Anglican Communion has been debating the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood for some time. The first woman to become an Anglican priest was ordained by the bishop of Hong Kong in 1944 during the Second World War. However the Lambeth Conference of 1948 declared that women's orders were against Anglican tradition and would gravely affect the internal and external relations of the Anglican Communion. Florence Li Tim Oi was pressured to relinquish her ordination. The Lambeth Conference of 1968 however decided that the theological arguments concerning the ordination of women were inconclusive and the Anglican Consultative Council in 1971 resolved that Anglican bishops could ordain women with the approval of their national church. Suddenly debate and action on this issue intensified in the Anglican Communion and within the next few years women were ordained in the Anglican Churches of Canada, New Zealand and the United States.

The question has been vigorously debated in the Anglican Church of Australia in Diocesan and General Synods since the 1970's and on each occasion the vote in favour of the ordination of women has increased. It has been a long and complicated process stemming from the nature of the church's national constitution and the

'federation' of the church's structure. The decisive vote was taken by the General Synod in November 1992. It was then up to each diocese to ratify the canon if it so wished. By the end of 1992 the dioceses of Adelaide, Rockhampton, Brisbane, Bathurst, Canberra and Newcastle had ordained women to the priesthood. The Archbishop of Perth had ordained women in February 1992 before the General Synod decision.

The Roman Catholic Church and Ordination of Women

In response to a growing interest in the question of the ordination of women among Roman Catholics the authorities in Rome issued a statement on the subject in 1976. Some Roman Catholic theologians and Roman Catholics involved in the women's movement wanted the tradition of the priesthood being exclusively male to be reconsidered. The question had become more pressing because of the diminishing number of Roman Catholic priests. Roman Catholic scholars who had been studying what the Scriptures said about the ordination of women agreed with scholars from other churches that Scripture was inconclusive on the question.

The official position of the Roman Catholic Church on the possibility of the ordination of women was made clear in the 1976 statement. The Roman Catholic Church does not consider itself authorised to ordain women to the priesthood and this is the regulation written into the church's 1983 Code of Canon Law. The statement said that to ordain women would be contrary to the church's apostolic tradition which is based on the maleness of Christ, and because Christ chose only men to be the twelve apostles. The statement said that the priest, when he celebrates the eucharist, stands in the place of Christ and that since Christ was male it is necessary for the priest to be male. The statement pointed out that the Orthodox churches have the same understanding of this tradition restricting the priesthood only to men.

The Lutheran Church and Ordination of Women

Since 1938 when the Lutheran Church in Norway first authorised the ordination of women the Lutheran churches of Europe had been increasingly willing to ordain women. The question became a matter of serious debate for American Lutherans in the 1960's. Two of the three biggest Lutheran churches in the United States accepted the recommendations of their theological advisory bodies that Scripture was inconclusive about ordination of women and they began to ordain women to the ministry. The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, the other large church, rejected this advice and in 1971 deferred fellowship with the other Lutherans until they stopped ordaining women.

Australian Lutherans have always insisted that candidates to the ordained ministry be male. When the two separate Lutheran Churches in Australia joined in 1966 to form the Lutheran Church of Australia they declared in the *Theses of Agreement* that:

“Though women prophets were used by the Spirit of God in the Old as well as the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 14: 24,35 and 1 Timothy 2: 11—14 prohibit a woman from being called into the office of the public ministry for the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments.

This apostolic rule is binding on all Christendom; hereby her rights as a member of the spiritual priesthood are in no way impaired.”

Australian Lutherans have been influenced both by their roots in Europe, particularly Germany, and by their connection with American Lutherans, particularly with the Missouri Synod. Theological opinion coming from Luther Seminary in Adelaide and from the General Synod's Commission on Theology and Inter—Church Relations has played an authoritative role in the formulation of doctrine and in the ordering of the Lutheran Church in Australia. Significantly the Commission in 1992 issued a substantial study document titled ‘Women and the Ministry’. It insists that Lutherans must settle the question of the ordination of women from scripture alone. It makes a thorough examination of the two texts quoted in the ‘Theses of Agreement’ giving the different opinions held by scholars about their meaning for Christians today. It offers a series of discussion questions to lead people to a careful understanding of the argumentation. It clearly sets out the documented position of the

Australian church. Unlike the document issued by the General Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia which justifies the practice of ordaining women in that church, it leaves the question open for decisions to be made in the future.

Conscience and Dissent in the Church

There have always been some Christians who dissent from church teaching. The councils of the early centuries were concerned with clarifying doctrine in the face of conflicting positions by groups of Christians. Once the councils had made their decisions the dissenters were labelled heretics. The churches of the Reformation were established because of widespread dissent with Rome on a number of issues. The multiplicity of Christian Churches today (there are over 300 of them members of the World Council of Churches) is the result of dissent in one form or another with existing churches.

There is concern in the Anglican Communion that those Anglicans who in conscience cannot agree with the ordination of women will leave the Anglican Church. The 1988 Lambeth Conference set up a special commission whose mandate was to discover how Anglicans can live in the highest possible degree of communion with one another despite the differences of principles and practice on the ordination of women. In its report the Commission was careful to limit the extent of the expression of dissent which would be permissible. It recommended that dissenting priests and congregations must not go so far as to refuse lawful recognition to their bishop or to say that they were out of communion with him.

Since the Second Vatican Council in the 1960's there has been discussion within the Roman Catholic Church concerning the possibility of dissent from Rome's teachings. Roman Catholics are expected to accept all that is officially taught by the Pope and bishops concerning faith and morals. Some Roman Catholic theologians have argued that for serious reasons a Roman Catholic can dissent from a specific teaching of the Pope. Infallible papal teachings are those formally declared to be truths which can't be changed and which Roman Catholics must believe. Papal teachings are declared to be infallible only very rarely.

A debate concerning authority and the need for it to be recognised by ministers and lay people is currently underway in the Lutheran Church of Australia and the Uniting Church in Australia.

A change in the opinion of church members over time can lead to a change in a church's teaching, as we have seen with the ordination of women in the Anglican Church. The Roman Catholic Church's teaching concerning ecumenism is another example of church opinion bringing about a change in official church teaching. Before the Second Vatican Council there was a prohibition on Roman Catholics being involved with other churches. The growing opinion within the Roman Catholic Church that this teaching should be changed culminated in the Vatican Council changing the prohibition to an exhortation to Roman Catholics to become involved in the ecumenical movement.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What influence have women had in the decision making process in your church?
2. Give other examples, apart from the ordination of women, which illustrate the decision making process at work in your church.
3. The Anglican and Uniting Churches ordain women and the Lutheran and Roman Catholic Church don't. Explain how the churches have come to different conclusions on this 'question.
4. How is dissent managed in your church? Why are people, at times, excluded from your church?

RESOURCES FOR PRAYER

Psalm of Praise: Psalm 145:1—13 (GNB)

I will proclaim your greatness, my God and king;
I will thank you forever and ever.
Every day I will thank you;
I will praise you forever and ever.
The Lord is great and is to be highly praised;
his greatness is beyond understanding.

What you have done will be praised from one generation to the next;
they will proclaim your mighty acts.
They will speak of your glory and majesty,
and I will meditate on your wonderful deeds.

People will speak of your mighty deeds,
and I will proclaim your greatness.
They will tell about all your goodness
and sing about your kindness.
The Lord is loving and merciful,
slow to become angry and full of constant love.
He is good to everyone and
has compassion on all he made.
All your creatures, Lord, will praise you,
and all your people will give you thanks.
They will speak of the glory of your royal power
and tell of your might,

so that everyone will know your mighty deeds
and the glorious majesty of your kingdom.
Your rule is eternal, and you are king forever.

Prayer for Unity

Leader:

God the giver of all good gifts, you have gathered us in common prayer. May your Spirit continue to move us to reconcile our differences and triumph over our divisions. Make us one with those with whom we share, so that together we are freed from all distress and find eternal salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Parable of the Good Samaritan

Luke 10: 25—37 (GNB)

A teacher of the Law came up and tried to trap Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to receive eternal life?”

Jesus answered him, “What do the Scriptures say? How do you interpret them?”

The man answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and love your neighbour as you love yourself.”

“You are right,” Jesus replied; “do this and you will live.”

But the teacher of the Law wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbour?”

Jesus answered, “There was once a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him, and beat him up, leaving him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down that road; but when he saw the man, he walked past on the other side. In the same way a Levite also came along, went over and looked at the man, and then walked past on the other side. But a Samaritan who was travelling that way came upon the man, and when he saw him, his heart was filled with pity. He went over to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them; then he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Take care of him,’ he told the innkeeper, ‘and when I come back this way, I will pay you whatever else you spend on him.’”

And Jesus concluded, “In your opinion, which one of these three acted like a neighbour towards the man attacked by the robbers?” The teacher of the Law answered, “The one who was kind to him.” Jesus replied, “You go, then, and do the same.”

A New Testament Affirmation of Faith

CoI.1: 15—20 (GNB)

Christ is the visible likeness of the invisible God. He is the firstborn Son, superior to all created things. For through him God created everything in heaven and on earth, the seen and the unseen things, including spiritual powers, lords, rulers, and authorities. God created the whole universe through him and for him. Christ existed before all things, and in union with him all things have their proper place. He is the head of his body, the church; he is the source of the body’s life. He is the firstborn Son, who was raised from death, in order that he alone might have the first place in all things. For it was by God’s own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God. Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son’s sacrificial death on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven.