

A church where *love* comes to *life*

Colleen Fitzpatrick

One of the things that I treasure about the LCANZ is our tag line—Where *love* comes to *life*. What an aspirational statement! Even more winsome are the mission: ‘...so that people everywhere may know Christ and his love’, and the values that we aspire to: ‘Shaped by the gospel of grace; blessed by relationships; united by Christ; inspired by compassion; marked with integrity’.¹

In 2018 I worked on a project for the Committee for Ministry with the Ageing. The aim of the project was to revise the *One loving God* document so that it reflected the LCANZ theology of caring and to articulate an ethos statement for our aged care and community services. The ethos statement, *Called to transformative Action*,² articulates why the LCANZ is engaged in caring ministries—but surely each of us who belongs to the church is also being called to care and to live by our church’s mission, vision and values. I believe that they are the base on which to build the church that has the multicultural mindset needed to thrive in the 21st century and beyond.

To me, ‘multicultural’ is not about ethnicity—culture is much more complex than that. It embraces ideas, customs, language, food, social behaviour and much more.

What does a church with a multicultural mindset look like? How would I recognise the required mindset?

Shaped by the gospel of grace—as an undeserved gift from God; as a life-changing and life-giving Word; in equipping us for action.

Grace is an undeserved gift which was given to me in baptism. It does not depend on a theological opinion about who should and shouldn’t be saved (or ordained). It sees beyond the way I live my life into my heart and soul.

The Holy Spirit is active in moving in people’s hearts to lead them to know this—despite anything that you or I do or don’t do. I knew a woman who had fled for safety to Australia after seeing her husband massacred in her war-torn homeland. She was a devout Muslim, but often found her way into her local Catholic church where she would sit close to a statue of Jesus and weep. I believe that it was God’s life changing and life-giving grace that kept drawing her back there.

We need to be equipped with the gospel of grace so that we can welcome all comers into our church so that they can hear the life-changing, life-giving Word.

Blessed by relationships—in service to each other; in respect for each others’ gifts; in witness to our communities and the world.

¹ Lutheran Church of Australia, *Our Direction 2018–2024—Summary* (V1.0 January 2019).

² Lutheran Church of Australia, *Called to transformative action—the ethos underpinning Lutheran aged care and community services* (2019), retrievable via [Ministry with the Ageing - Lutheran Church of Australia \(lca.org.au\)](https://www.lca.org.au).

I worked in a foster care program for many years. We found that the best way to recruit families into the difficult role of providing care to children was through word of mouth—through relationships. Relationships are precious and it is only through relationships that we can bear witness to our faith. Such relationships may be casual exchanges on a bus ride into town or longer term with family, friends and neighbours. The way that we relate can help to plant the seed of faith. I would suggest that respectful relationships, helping and serving others provides a powerful witness within our community. ‘Share the gospel at all times and if necessary, use words,’ is attributed to St Francis of Assisi.

United by Christ—in our confession of faith; in working together and sharing resources; inspired by compassion; in actions and words; favouring people who are poor and marginalised.

We know that we are all created in God’s image—each and every one of us. How then can we sit in judgement about who is ‘in’ and who is ‘out’ of God’s kingdom? There is so much that can unite us. And if we are united by Christ, His servant heart has to become ours. May our love for Christ open our hearts to welcome strangers into our midst and to walk with them so that they can see how wonderfully their Creator has made them.

Marked with integrity—for effective witness, for excellence in service, for stewardship of God’s gifts.

I don’t hear the word stewardship used much any more, but for me, if we are good stewards, we are mindful of how we use the gifts we have been given—including our time, and our possessions and money, the environment and all the good things that God has gifted to us. We give to God from the best that we have to honour God’s goodness to us.

What will it take to help my church move away from being a European migrant church?

I’m excited to hear about little shoots of new growth within the church. There are new churches being planted within the LCANZ that have a different look and a different feel about them. The pandemic showed us different ways of being church together—and the increasing use of technology has opened new ways of being together.

Our institutions—schools, aged care and community services bring us into contact with people who may otherwise never have come across Lutherans or maybe even Christians. It is important that we ensure that we are open to sharing the gospel in the way that we include staff, students, and all of the people that we serve so that they can experience for themselves the good news of the gospel.

And maybe we need to come back to spending time together studying the bible, praying and encouraging each other in their faith journey.

My prayer is that our church is a joyful place where differences are accepted and celebrated, where we learn from one another, where no-one is excluded. It is a church where our mission, vision and values drive and sustain our people. It is truly a church where *love comes to life*.

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