

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

VOLUME 2

SHOULD WOMEN SERVE AS LAY READERS IN PUBLIC WORSHIP?

*Adopted by the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations, 26 March 1993.
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The Commission cannot at this time approve the practice of women serving as lay readers in worship. We recommend that the church does not adopt this practice. The reasons for this judgment or opinion are as follows:

1. When a layman conducts a lay-reading service, he is functioning in the place of the pastor as leader in worship. He serves in this role by appointment by the congregation and under the authorisation and supervision of the pastor. In other words, his function and work falls within the area of service with the word. It is carried out on the authority of the pastor as an extension of the ministry with word and sacrament.
2. Some would argue that, since a lay reader functions in the place of the pastor and since the pastor is really responsible for the service, it should not matter whether the lay reader is a man or a woman. However, leading in worship is more than merely a function; it presumes an authoritative role in the worshipping community. The present theological position of the Lutheran Church of Australia is against women serving with this kind of authority. Therefore it would not be appropriate for women to act as leaders in public worship.
3. We also believe that the church would be acting unwisely if it were to adopt this practice at a time when a church-wide study is being undertaken on women and the office of the ministry. Adopting this practice at this time would inevitably be seen by many either as pre-empting the church's decision on this question, or as a strong statement in favour of women undertaking a leading role in the liturgical community.
4. We believe it is wise at the present time for the whole church to become seriously involved in the ongoing discussions and debate and to await the consensus which we hope to achieve on this matter. Any action which could be seen as pre-empting the final decision, should be avoided.

Note: As a general principle the church has always recognised the need to take emergency measures to meet needs in emergencies.