



The 2026 LCAQD Convention of the Synod

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Introduction

The Lutheran Church of Australia Queensland District (LCAQD) Convention of the Synod gathered at St Andrew's Lutheran College, Tallebudgera from Friday 5 June to Sunday 7 June 2026.

It began on Friday morning with music and songs from St Andrews Lutheran College.

LCAQD Bishop Mark Vainikka and St Andrews Principal Luke Schoff welcomed delegates. College students delivered an Acknowledgment of Country by video.

Opening worship was led by First Assistant Bishop Ben Hentschke. His poetic address touched on the many open doors the church has, from ministry, schools and mission and from Coast to Country, which come to us through God's grace.

Bishop Mark constituted the Convention of the Synod.

Guests

Following the Friday morning opening worship, the following leaders greeted the convention:

- **Archbishop Shane Mackinlay**
Brisbane Archbishop, Catholic Church
- **Right Reverend John Roundhill**
Representing Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane
- **Reverend Catherine Solomon**
Uniting Church of Australia
- **Reverend Stewart Pieper**
Director of Services, Queensland Baptists
- **Captain Bradley Whittle**
Assistant Divisional Commander Qld, Salvation Army
- **Fr David Mahrous**
Coptic Orthodox Church
- **Dr Kate Power**
General Secretary, Qld Churches Together

Adoption of previous minutes

Minutes from last Synod were adopted with amendments.

Synod offering

This year's Synod offering was directed to the United in Hope Far North Queensland Lutheran Ministries Appeal to enable ministry support to the parishes of Cairns, Hope Vale and Wujal Wujal.

LCAQD Strategic Charter 2026-31 officially launches

Bishop Mark officially launched the *2026-31 Strategic Charter* for LCAQD, which focuses on five doors:

- Open Door to Spiritual Renewal: Strengthening lives of faith through prayer, baptism, and Holy Communion.
- Open Door to the World: Living out an incarnational faith, joining God's mission beyond our Church walls.
- Open Door to the Church: Ensuring our communities remain welcoming places of grace and belonging.
- Open Door to Collaboration: Partnering across local, national, and international ministries for greater impact.

- Open Door to the Future: Building sustainable foundations for ministry to the next generations.

The Charter is not meant to be a detailed strategic plan, but a shared mission compass for the Communities of Grace that make up LCAQD, including congregations, schools, ministries and members of the entire church.

"The church does not belong to us, it belongs to God," Bishop Mark said.

"The church's place in the west is changing rapidly.

"But in a restless and anxious culture, people are searching for hope."

The Strategic Charter has been developed through a collaborative process and refined through engagement with Synod Delegates, Congregations, LCAQD departments and key ministry partners.

"This Charter is your work," Bishop Mark told delegates.

"It gives us five ways of asking where God is already moving among us."

The five Open Doors will be used as the themes of upcoming Synodical terms, with this year's theme being 'Open Door to Spiritual Renewal'.

During the Convention, Assistant Bishop for Mission David Schmidt, supported by Bishop Mark and FAB Ben, ran a two-part workshop for delegates to discuss key parts of the Strategic Charter and encouraged them to share it with their communities.

LCAQD Synod is committed to implementing the following projects as related to the Strategic Charter:

- Mission Regions – help local congregations, schools and agencies in shared mission within their communities.
- Communities of Practice – connect people with shared ministry focus to learn, improve and strengthen capabilities together.
- Ministry Resourcing – implement the Ordination Way Forward, nurture safe and welcoming ministry environments, develop ordered deacon/elder pathways and strengthen mission capacity.
- Pastoral Care for Pastors – provide pastors and spouses with Gospel-centred care, renewal and support for healthy ministry through regular and confidential check-ins, trusted carers and renewal spaces.
- Reforming Convention of the Synod – implement clearer processes for real participation, useful deliberation and decisions that lead to action.

The Strategic Charter can be viewed at gld.lca.org.au/who-we-are/

Reception of Gold Coast Cantonese (Lutheran) Community Church

A new church plant, the Gold Coast Cantonese (Lutheran) Community Church was received as a member of the LCA and LCAQD during the morning session. The community recently celebrated its second birthday.

Pastor Ronald Lee and members of the new congregation attended as Bishop Mark prayed for the congregation and asked for God's blessing over them.

Governance Change Program update

FAB Ben and District Transformation Committee Chair John Hoffman updated delegates on the Governance Change Program (GCP), which was endorsed at the Convention of the Synod in 2022.

FAB Ben said 'One church. One purpose. Many ministries.' remained the guiding principle for the important program, which is building LCAQD's governance maturity through safeguards and policies.

Like many other agencies, the District is subject to legislative, regulatory and compliance requirements.

District Church Board is focused on two key areas for subsidiary boards, including New Lutheran Services (NLS) and New Lutheran Education Queensland (NLEQ):

- Transparency and reporting
- Approval and intervention

"These are the guardrails that ensure freedom and accountability travel together," FAB Ben said. In 2027, Synod delegates will be asked to approve a draft constitution, with ongoing consultation opportunities planned.

The constitution will include:

- The role of the Bishop as both oversight and non-voting for subsidiary ministry board meetings, with automatic invitations to attend those meetings, but no entitlement to chair.
- DCB will appoint board members to NLEQ and NLS, and the majority must be active communicant members of the Lutheran Church; otherwise, they must be Christian.
- Clauses about amendments to NLEQ school and assembly rules.

The draft constitutions for NLS and NLEQ will also be brought to Synod in 2027 for approval ahead of their incorporation being completed.

Property trust reviews continue for the District, and this work must be completed before any real property is transferred.

Work is also ongoing around resourcing for the District, with sufficient funding needed to sustain and strengthen its missional and operational needs.

Stay up to date with progress on the Governance Change Program at qld.lca.org.au/governance-change-program/

LCAQD department reports

Written reports from LCAQD departments are published in the Book of Reports, and departments were asked to provide video reports ahead of the Convention of the Synod in lieu of in-person reporting to the Convention.

All council chairs and departmental heads were available to respond to questions, and verbal reports were moved and accepted.

The videos for each department can be viewed at <https://qld.lca.org.au/events/synod/> (under Book of Reports & Video Reports tab).

Lutheran Education Queensland

Lutheran Education Queensland Council Chair Andrew Stanke joined Executive Director Tanya Crooks to present the report.

LEQ has a long history of educating Australia's young people and is also a proud employer of highly qualified and talented education professionals.

A focus on inspiring learning for life supports the church's long-term mission, and LEQ's learning communities are key missional touchpoints for engaging families and communities across Queensland.

LEQ serves more than 80 learning communities, from schools and colleges to outside school hours care and early years services.

This includes almost 30,000 students led by 3000 staff.

LEQ is strengthening its contribution to LCAQD's mission through ongoing formation initiatives, aligned governance, and system-wide collaboration.

Strategic priorities focus on enhancing educational quality, deepening Lutheran identity, and supporting leaders across the LEQ Office, schools and early years services.

Governance improvements include clearer frameworks, strengthened accountability, and more consistent support for principals and service leaders.

Highlights include:

- Formation initiatives aim to build leadership capability, embed Lutheran theology and practice and ensure mission alignment in daily educational life.
- The Shared Services model is improving operational efficiency, financial stewardship, and service delivery across the system.

Earlier this year, Tanya announced her retirement after 25 years serving Lutheran Education in Queensland and this was noted during the session.

Lutheran Youth of Queensland

Lutheran Youth of Queensland Council Chair Janelle Anderson and Executive Director Darren Pope presented their report to delegates.

They spoke about the newly developed *LYQ Strategy 2030*, which clearly defines vision, mission and values through a collaborative process.

Leadership and governance have been strengthened through enhanced financial rigor via a new Finance Manager role and ongoing Council leadership.

LYQ also demonstrated strong financial governance despite operational pressures and IT transformation and achieved an unmodified audit opinion.

A brand refresh was highlighted, including a unified, future focused logo and visual identity across all ministry areas.

The 70-year milestone of ministry at Luther Heights was celebrated. Strong forward bookings are reported, which demonstrates confidence in camping, program and hospitality services.

Similarly, holiday camping and events continue to expand, including Christian Life Weeks and ongoing regional partnerships.

This year, LYQ reached more than 2,000 students through Leadership and Learning workshops, camps, and new initiatives such as Mini-Momentum and Pit Stop Leadership.

Schools and congregations have been supported to develop leadership and faith through LYQ Lift and LIFT Conference, which offer short-term intensive and long-term tailored programs.

Young Adult ministry has been boosted by dedicated staffing through modest funding, while LYQ Specific Ministry Pastor candidate Sarah Hoff-Zweck has joined in a full-time role as LYQ Ministry Lead.

This was Darren's last LYQ report to Synod as he will soon join LLL as Head of Mission Engagement.

Lutheran Services

Chair of the Council for Lutheran Services Jenny Danslow highlighted key initiatives and achievements for Lutheran Services over the past year, alongside CEO Nick Ryan.

Lutheran Services successfully completed its five-year strategic plan and began operating under the *New Horizons Strategic Plan 2030*.

A new organisational structure was implemented, which included a new Mission, Identity and Culture branch, Executive Director and the first Community Services Chaplain.

From a financial perspective, Lutheran Services achieved its third consecutive surplus (\$3.3 million FY25) and invested \$18.3 million in maintaining and enhancing communities.

Residential aged care and retirement living occupancy remain above industry average.

Lutheran Services was chosen as the new owners and stewards of Cabanda Care at Rosewood, while Salem Aged Care in Toowoomba celebrated 90 years of service.

The inaugural Lutheran Services Staff Awards were held this year, recognising how team members make a difference every day for those who are supported by the organisation.

Churchwide entities, department presentations & reports

On Friday afternoon, presentations and reports from churchwide entities and departments were received from:

- LCA NZ Bishop's report by Churchwide Bishop Rev Paul Smith
- Churchwide Office report by Executive Officer of the Church Brett Hausler
- Lutheran Education Australia (LEA) by Executive Director Jodie Hoff
- Australian Lutheran College, by Director of Applied Learning Emma Graetz
- Lutheran Media, by Manager Liam Hensel
- Australian Lutheran World Service (ALWS) by Community Engagement Manager Aaron Glover
- International Mission by Erin Kerber

Rite of Welcome to new pastors

Two new pastors were welcomed to the Queensland District at the Friday afternoon closing service:

- Rev James Leach (St Paul's Lutheran Church, Caboolture)
- Rev Stephen Hibbard (Cleveland Lutheran Parish)

Friday night dinner function

During the Friday night dinner function, Principal of St Andrews Lutheran College Luke Schoff was joined by St Andrews' founding Principal, Wolf Stuetzel (1992–1999).

Together, they shared insights into the St Andrews journey, in a conversation facilitated by Lutheran Education Australia Executive Director, Jodie Hoff.

District Bishop's report

On Saturday morning, Bishop Mark Vainikka reflected on his written report.

He said the Convention's theme of *Open Door to Spiritual Renewal* reflected on baptism and was an important and right theme.

"For Luther, Baptism was not simply a past event, but a present and ongoing reality," Bishop Mark said.

"Renewal in the church does not begin with a strategic charter, it does not begin with programs, it does not begin with structures, it does not begin with anxious activity.

"Renewal begins with Christ, it begins with repentance, it begins at the font, it begins with the Holy Spirit."

He reflected on Synod being a journey taken together.

"It is not an event, it is not a meeting, it is not a governance structure. It is part of our identity as a church.

"We are people who walk together."

Bishop Mark also spoke about the *Strategic Charter 2026-2031* and how it is an invitation for mission that begins with God, not with us.

He reminded delegates that congregations and pastors who have joined Lutheran Mission Australia are still our brothers and sisters in Christ and that baptism into Christ has not been undone.

"Christ remains the Lord of his church," Bishop Mark said.

He was thankful for those who had been called to pastoral ministry, especially those from Queensland as signs of renewal.

He noted the median age of pastors in Queensland is 55 and that many congregations are struggling to maintain full-time ministry.

"But people are longing to hear absolution and to gather at the altar."

The College of Bishops is developing a 2027 proposal to ordain deacons, which Bishop Mark said may provide a faithful and sustainable pathway for ministry.

During his address to delegates, Bishop Mark also reflected on diversity and migration in the current social context, the Listening and Learning Tours around the District, the work happening in Far North Queensland, and the ebb and flow of church life.

He thanked the many people who support the work of Church Office and church life, including the leadership team of Bishops, executive and support staff – including Lutheran Services, Lutheran Education Queensland and Lutheran Youth Queensland, District Church Board, Bishop Paul Smith and his EA Bronagh, as well as congregations and pastors.

He said so much happened quietly, "but the Lord sees it all".

District Church Board report

District Church Board (DCB) Chair Michael Klatt spoke to his report and commented, "How blessed are we to be in this place?"

He thanked DCB members for their contributions over the past year, and noted that DCB was accountable to the church, as well as God.

"DCB makes decisions on your behalf during the Synodical term," Michael said.

"Not a week goes by without a challenge confronting DCB and Church Office, but we do our best to respond to those."

Michael reflected on the reconciliation process with the Redeemer Lutheran College community, saying it was essential to ask the Holy Spirit for guidance in decision making and governance to be better servants of the church.

"We carry out our obligations with grace, and where we have made mistakes, we are learning."

A review of DCB processes and culture has been commissioned, while the Governance Change Project's end is in sight.

Michael said he hoped this would then allow DCB to focus more on ministry and mission.

Endorsed DCB proposals

- A request that LCANZ make constitutional and by-law changes to effect transparency of voting within the LCANZ and its districts.
- LCAQD by-law changes about the nomination of the First Assistant Bishop.
- Assigning oversight of Young Adult Ministry to Lutheran Youth of Queensland, including financial support and a requirement to report quarterly on how the funds are used in

alignment with the Strategic Charter, with feedback from young adults (including those who serve in LYQ ministry).

Commission for Mission report

Assistant Bishop for Mission, Pastor David Schmidt spoke to his report, saying it was an “honest look at where I think the District is at.” He spoke about declining baptisms, confirmation and first communions and attendance.

“Many congregations are smaller than they were, and they carry more pressure than they once did, and there are fewer younger families connected to the life of the church,” Pastor David said.

“The deeper question before us is not simply, ‘How do we get the numbers back up?’ but ‘What is God calling us to now?’”

Pastor David said mission began with God, and the Church was invited to participate in what God is already doing.

He said the Strategic Charter gave LCAQD a shared framework for engaging in Christ's mission to the world, helping congregations, schools, agencies, and ministries align around one purpose while serving through many ministries.

“This calls us to clearer mission and purpose, stronger belonging and participation, deeper engagement with younger generations, more collaborative leadership, and sustainable stewardship for mission,” Pastor David said.

“It's not just a slogan; it gives us direction.”

Congregations were invited and encouraged to choose one focus that could be considered faithfully.

“Not everything at once, but one clear focus where prayer, people, leadership, and resources can align,” Pastor David said.

He said this could be supported by shared practices such as Communities of Practice and Mission Regions.

Pastor David cited examples in Oakey, Gladstone and Toowoomba where shared ministry was happening through courage and trust.

“Choose one faithful focus... to help us join more fully in God's mission.”

St Andrew's Lutheran Church, Brisbane Diversity by Design project recap

The 2025 LLL Mission Outreach Grant was awarded to St Andrew's Lutheran Church, Brisbane.

Congregation member Karyn Cullen spoke about the project's work over the past year to encourage diversity across ethnicities, gender and generations to address declining membership.

Lutheran Women of Queensland (LWQ) report

Secretary Colette Mangan presented the LWQ report on behalf of President Val Kath.

LWQ's annual retreat was held in May and themed “Women in the Wilderness”.

Approximately \$19,000 was distributed to other parts of the church, while a new project “Sewing the Gospel” is supporting women in Papua New Guinea.

Despite a declining and ageing membership, Colette spoke about the friendship and fellowship enjoyed by members as they meet and study God's word.

Lutheran Laypeople's League (LLL) report

LLL CEO Karen Pienaar and Board Chair Steve Podlich presented to delegates.

Karen said LLL supported congregations, schools, aged care and communities to share the gospel.

By investing with LLL, individuals contribute to the wellbeing and sustainability of their own church and local community.

She said LLL had observed a decline in investments during the transition to a Religious Charitable Development Fund as the product offering had changed, which mostly impacted individuals.

A new donation platform, which offers a secure cashless platform for offerings and donations to congregations, will be launched later this year.

A Charitable Donation Program is also being piloted and will allow interest from individuals and organisations to be donated to Christian communities.

This will help LCAQD communities to flourish into the future.

Mission Outreach Grants 2026

LLL has recognised three congregations this year for the 2026 Mission Outreach Grant, with a total contribution of \$50,000 to be shared between:

- St Marks Lutheran Church, Caloundra: for an intergenerational outreach project
- St Paul's Lutheran Church, Caboolture: for a community coffee ministry
- Immanuel Lutheran Church, Buderim: for a community playgroup.

This is an increase from \$25,000 allocated in previous years for mission projects.

Synod Art Competition

The Synod theme 'Open Door to Spiritual Renewal: Reborn in Water, Renewed by the Spirit' (based on Titus 3:5), was represented creatively through the fourth Synod Art Competition sponsored by LLL Australia.

A record 77 submissions were received, with winners notified prior to Convention.

Winning artworks will be displayed at Lutheran Church House at Milton for 12 months and can be viewed online at qld.lca.org.au/events/synod/

Age group	Prize	Winner
Prep (up to 5 years)	\$250 cash prize	Poppy Whetstone
Primary school (6-9 years)	\$450 cash prize	Anneke de Jong
Middle school (10-12 years)	\$650 cash prize	Claire Kim
High school (13-17 years)	\$850 cash prize	Evie Halliday
Open category	\$1,250 cash prize	Juliane Dwyer
Seniors (65+ years)	\$500	Tanya Burkitt

Congregational proposals

2032 Brisbane Olympic Games (Nazareth Lutheran Church of South Brisbane)

Nazareth Lutheran Church proposed that DCB coordinates and supports media and advertising to proclaim the Christian message in the lead-up to and during the 2032 Brisbane Olympic Games, highlighting Lutheran congregations and other Christian denominations. An alternative motion was proposed that this be referred to be to DCB to work with the congregation, which was carried.

Reinstate publishing LCA NZ Yearbook (Redeemer Lutheran Church, Laidley)

Redeemer Lutheran Church proposed that General Church Board be urged to reinstate the annual publishing of the LCA NZ Yearbook for its operational value but also for historical archival purposes, with costs to be offset by various methods. The motion was defeated.

District Pastors Conference proposals

Recognition of years of service

District Pastors Conference proposed that LCAQD Convention of the Synod establish a permanent agenda item to acknowledge ordained and non-ordained ministry workers for notable years of service to the Church.

The motion was carried.

Code of Conduct

District Pastors Conference proposed amended processes and care regarding the LCANZ's updated *Standards of Ethical Behaviour and Code of Conduct*, including further consultation and reviews, and that it be suspended from further implementation until that work happens.

The motion was carried.

Elections

Due to the ongoing Governance Change Program, all positions elected for DCB, Councils and Committees at the 2026 Convention of the Synod are for a singular synodical term only (i.e. 2026-27). This does not apply to the Bishop roles.

New obligations came into place in November 2025 requiring clinical care experience for one member of boards that oversee aged and residential care.

LCAQD District Church Board

Role	Elected
Bishops	Bishop Mark Vainikka First Assistant Bishop Ben Hentschke Second Assistant Bishop Luke Spilsbury
Chair	Michael Klatt
Treasurer	<i>Vacant</i>
Secretary	Malcolm Ehrlich
Lay Members	Elaine Krenske Garth Hunt Susan Kloeden Ruth Radke
Pastor Members	Rev Timothy Spilsbury

LCAQD Council for Lutheran Services

Role	Elected
Lay Members	Jenny Danslow Theresa Stolz Anna Renner (elected to meet obligations to have at least one member with clinical care experience) Victor (John) Neldner Dr Darryl Muller
Pastor Member	Rev Edwin Shoesmith

LCAQD Council for Department for Lutheran Education Queensland

Role	Elected
Lay Members	Andrew Stanke Dr Emily Ross Paul (Ray) Ebert Rod Krenske Grant Cummins
Pastor Member	Rev Roelof Buitendag

LCAQD Council for Department for Lutheran Youth Queensland

Role	Elected
Lay Members	Janelle Anderson Dawn Schelberg Greta Mattias Christian Hansen Taylor Pukallus
Pastor Member	Rev Nick Mullen

LCAQD Constitutions Committee

Role	Elected
Lay Members	Jakob Reinbott Malcolm Quinlan Emma Bones Jane Edwards
Pastor Members	Rev Geoff Schefe Rev Don McCall Rev Jing Luan

Risk, Audit and Finance budget and financial reports

District Executive Officer Trevor Ruthenberg introduced Annelie Maritz, the new Finance Manager for the District, and a shared resource with LYQ.

Annelie spoke about the District's financial position, including revenue of \$6.96m (including a one-off asset donation from Coopers Plains congregation after it closed, and increased rental income) and expenses of \$3.942m.

Net assets have increased around \$3m from last year, while a concerted effort to put cash into term deposits with LLL this year has boosted cash reserves.

LCAQD budget and administration

Trevor spoke of the historic survival-focused approach, which had a limited scope for forward planning or to secure the long-term viability of the church.

"This is the first time I've seen us looking well into the future in 20 years in senior church leadership roles," he said.

"We are starting to see green shoots and pressure on funds will ease in coming years."

The District budget has a cash reserves target of at least one year of operating expenditure to be available for contingency and emergency purposes, and to ensure resilience in the long-term.

Other highlights include starting to fund the Strategic Charter 2026-2031, using depreciation reserves for the first time to fund Church House maintenance and having appropriate resourcing for human resourcing and professional standards for the District.

Worship

Worship services and devotions were held throughout the Synod program.

Devotions followed the Synod theme 'Open Door to Spiritual Renewal: Reborn in Water, Renewed by the Spirit' (based on Titus 3:5).

During the **In Memoriam**, led by Malcolm Ehrlich, Synod delegates and visitors remembered faithful servants of the church who have passed away in the past 12 months, including:

- Pastors Aubrey Podlich, Marinus Hofman, Leon Philippi, Aldal Wagim, Rob Erickson, Peter Benz, Howard Schilling, Thomas Jantke, Lou Pfeiffer, Graham Harms
- Mrs Olga Roennfeldt and Mrs Margaret Neldner.

The **concluding service** on Saturday afternoon provided an opportunity to reflect on the journey that began with the Friday morning worship. The District Church Board was installed during this closing service.

The **Sunday morning worship** with Holy Communion was graciously hosted by St Andrews Lutheran Church Tallebudgera. In his sermon, LCAQD Bishop Mark Vainikka reminded us that, despite uncertainty about its future and changing cultural circumstances, the church's hope does not rest in human plans, strategies, or achievements, but in God's mercy and action. Drawing on Titus 3:4–7, Bishop Mark emphasised that God saves, renews, and sustains his people through the Holy Spirit, not because of anything they have done, but through grace. Synod is therefore not merely a place for decision-making, but a gathering where God's people seek to discern and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, just as the early Church did at the Council of Jerusalem.

Using Ezekiel's vision of restoration in exile and the District's new Strategic Charter with its 'Five Open Doors,' Bishop Vainikka reminded us that Jesus himself is the true door and that God is already at work in the world. Christians are called to trust the Spirit, who brings life where things seem lifeless and opens new possibilities for mission and growth. Signs of spiritual hunger and renewed faith in Australia and beyond encourage us to pray for revival, confident that the Holy Spirit continues to renew congregations, strengthen their witness, and give hope for the future.

Thank you

Thanks were offered to everyone who helped make the 2026 Convention of the Synod a success, including our wonderful volunteers.

DCB member Cheryl Steinhardt offered a vote of thanks on behalf of all delegates and attendees.

Finally, St Andrews Lutheran College Principal Luke Hoff, along with college staff, volunteers and students, were thanked for the College's significant contribution to the successful preparation and running of Convention.

Conventions of the Synod 2027 and 2028

We look forward to seeing delegates in Greater Brisbane on 4 to 6 June 2027 and Ipswich on 9 to 11 June 2028.