



Australian Lutherans: A statement on Lutherans and Jews

29.09.1996 | Council of Presidents of the Lutheran Church of Australia

In keeping with similar approaches of Lutheran churches in other countries recognising the need to address the prejudices inherited from the past. September 1996

**Council of
Presidents of
the Lutheran
Church of
Australia**

Lutherans and the Jews

The statement by the Council of Presidents of the Lutheran Church of Australia on Lutherans and Jews is in keeping with similar approaches in other Lutheran churches overseas, recognising the need to address the prejudices inherited from the past. The statement is presented by the Presidents in their pastoral concern for the well-being of the church including its attitudes towards others.

Judaism, like Christianity, is one of the world's living religions. Although Jewish people have

settled around the world, the state of Israel and the city of Jerusalem still hold a central place in the faith and the life of most Jews. Jewish people have lived in Australia from the earliest times of European settlement, as have Lutheran Christians.

We need to recognise that Christians over the centuries have often mistreated and persecuted the followers of Judaism and so have failed to live by the faith they profess. We Lutherans must also acknowledge that the anti-Jewish writings of Martin Luther were used by persecutors of Jews to justify their position and practices, and could be used by anti-Jewish extremists by tearing them out of their historical context.

Here in Australia, Lutherans have often been unaware of Luther's anti-Jewish writings and of their impact. Fortunately, perhaps because of greater tolerance under the mateship banner, and perhaps because both Lutherans and Jews were minority groups, there have

been very few occurrences of direct confrontation between Lutherans and the Australian Jewish community.

It is true, however, that before and during World War II, our Lutheran church papers naively and uncritically published German propaganda against the Jews. It is also true that the stress in Australian Lutheranism on the doctrinal gulf between Judaism and Christianity has led to instances of unloving attitudes by Lutherans towards Jewish people here. Unfortunately there are still some Lutherans who, through ignorance, envy or fear accept bigoted information put out by extreme right-wing groups about Jews; for example, that Jews control the international finance markets, or that there is a conspiracy among leading Jews to take over the world through a one-world government.

We declare that all forms of anti-Semitism are contrary to the Christian way of life. We urge the members of the

Lutheran Church of Australia to repent of and to confess our silence over the Holocaust and other such attacks on Jews, and our sins of prejudice against and misunderstanding of the Jewish people. We also thank God for those of both faiths in Australia who have modelled the way of peace, love and friendship in the past.

We call on members of the Lutheran Church of Australia to make the following commitment:

- to respect and defend the rights of the Jewish community to observe the faith of their ancestors;
- to live out their Christian faith by showing love and understanding towards Jewish people;
- to engage in open and honest dialogue with Jewish people about our common Old Testament

- heritage and
our
distinctive
religious
beliefs; and
- to oppose in
word and
action
religious
bigotry of
whatever
form both
within the
church and
in the wider
community,
and to join
with
members of
other faiths
in working
for harmony
and
tolerance in
Australian
society.

At the same time,
since we believe
that Jesus is the
saviour of all
people, let us all
continue to confess
him publicly as
God's promised
Messiah.

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