

Intersections

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SPRING 2024

Intersections

Faith, Learning, and the Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education



IN THIS ISSUE

Vocation as Action in the Affirmative

Intersections is a publication by and largely for the academic communities of the twenty-six institutions that comprise the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU). Each issue reflects on the **intersection** of faith, learning, and teaching within Lutheran higher education. Published by the NECU, **Intersections** extends and enhances discussions fostered by the annual Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education Conference, together lifting up the vocation of Lutheran colleges and universities. It aims to raise the level of awareness among faculty, staff, and administration about the Lutheran heritage and church-relatedness of their institutions, especially as these **intersect** with contemporary challenges, opportunities, and initiatives. **Intersections** publishes pieces on vocation from perspectives in all areas of Higher Education at Lutheran colleges and universities, including students. We publish artwork, short reflections of 500-600 words, and features of 1500-2500 words. We're especially interested in the following: insight from your research, teaching, or advocacy; your perspective based on your campus/position/location; and student perspectives on any of the above.

On the cover:

Kerr Stadium at Roanoke College in Salem, VA, where the NCAA Division III Championship games for soccer were held in December 2023. In consecutive days both the California Lutheran University's Women's Soccer Team and the St. Olaf College's Men's Soccer Team won their respective national championship titles. Both St. Olaf and Cal Lutheran were awarded National Coaching Staff of the Year by the United Soccer Coaches. See the feature on student-athletes and team culture on p. 28.

Call for Artists

Submit your artwork for the cover of Fall 2024 *Intersections* "Vocation: Educational Access—Lutheran Roots, Contemporary Practices" to the editor, Colleen Windham-Hughes: windhamh@callutheran.edu. We can accept high resolution files of photographs, digital art, paintings, drawings, sculpture, fiber or mixed media pieces.

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COLLEEN WINDHAM-HUGHES

FROM THE EDITOR

Vocation as Action in the Affirmative



One of my professors in grad school sometimes said to us, “We are always practicing at the borders of our incompetence.” It was meant as an expression of kindness and compassion—a way to affirm the difficulties we would undoubtedly experience while simultaneously affirming the

need to show up and continue to practice there at the borders, i.e., to commit to presence and action in the face of uncertainty and felt incompetence.

Life lived in the framework of vocation or calling often asks us to practice at the borders of our incompetence—trusting our experience, training, convictions, and commitments to each other as neighbors to guide us through various challenges. Every small yes to the callings we experience, every action toward good without security of success, every effort made in the direction of life, is action in the affirmative.

In this issue you will find many kinds of action in the affirmative. Colleagues at Susquehanna University have co-written a thoughtful and helpful piece that connects university history to current commitments. It narrates for us the work that goes into forming a new division that reflects the university’s mission and values. A piece by Mark Ellingsen makes the case that Lutheran reforms have always taken actions in the affirmative. And a piece co-written by a professor and two students at Cal Lutheran

draws upon *Rooted and Open*, among other sources, to make the case that ELCA colleges and universities are uniquely equipped to respond to challenges like AI because of the qualities of service to neighbor, critical thinking, wisdom, humility, and hope.

Two of our colleagues at Augustana, Rock Island, sat down to talk about commitment to diversity as a necessary component of vocation-centered education. In the words of Eric Rowell, Assistant Director of Admissions and Diversity Outreach, “We help our students find something that allows them to feel whole, and to be able to contribute to the good of society.”

Two pieces focus on different kinds of contributions to the good of the society. Student Ken Flores writes of the slow work of reformation and transformation, connecting internal work to the work of institutions in society. Another piece showcases the team cultures of our soccer champions (Cal Lutheran Women’s and St. Olaf Men’s) and the contributions of student-athletes to liberal arts and sciences education.

And Jeremy Myers of the Riverside Innovation Hub at Augsburg University shares the practices they use with congregations in the ongoing work of discerning institutional vocation. Their adaptation of Ignatian Examen, along with the team processes to follow up with actions affirming low-hanging fruit, moonshots, and coffee conversations, will help groups on any campus sort through experiences and refocus shared work.

Here’s to large and small actions that affirm vocation in Lutheran higher education!

Colleen Windham-Hughes, PhD, MDiv, is Associate Vice President for Mission and Identity at California Lutheran University. Contact Colleen for conversation about this issue or your ideas about upcoming issues: windhamh@callutheran.edu

LAMONT ANTHONY WELLS

FROM THE PUBLISHER

Navigating Affirmative Action, DEI Policies, and Lutheran Vocational Identity

In the ever-evolving landscape of higher education, institutions across the United States find themselves at a crossroads, addressing critical issues that will shape their futures. In recent years, the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU) has leaned into our foundational roots to strengthen our resolve in addressing multiple challenges. Among these, the debates surrounding affirmative action, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies, and the preservation of religious and vocational identities, such as that of the Lutheran tradition, stand out as particularly pressing.

Affirmative Action in Flux

The landscape of affirmative action in higher education is currently in a state of uncertainty. Recent legal challenges and Supreme Court rulings have prompted many institutions to reevaluate their admissions policies. The crux of the debate lies in balancing the desire for diverse student bodies with the legal constraints on considering race as a factor in admissions. As a result, universities are exploring alternative approaches to achieve diversity, such as increasing outreach to underserved communities and emphasizing holistic review processes that consider a wide range of applicant experiences and attributes. In this publication of *Intersections*, we draw from varied perspectives of engaging affirmative practices, sociological viewpoints, and theological responses.

Rev. Lamont Anthony Wells is the Executive Director, Network of ELCA (Lutheran) Colleges and Universities (NECU). As an international human rights activist, he focuses on enhancing and expanding access to education in equitable ways among global populations.

DEI Policies Under Scrutiny

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives have become central to the mission of many higher education institutions. Each NECU institution has experienced positive results and significant success in myriad ways of achieving diversity on its campuses. These practices and policies aim to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all students, particularly those from historically marginalized groups. However, several NECU schools are facing challenges from various quarters about DEI efforts, including political pressures and debates over academic freedom and free speech. Across the tumultuous landscape, Lutheran institutions are navigating these complexities by fostering open dialogues, adapting their approaches to be more inclusive of diverse perspectives, and ensuring that DEI efforts are integrated into the fabric of their academic and administrative structures.

Amidst these broader trends, Lutheran-affiliated institutions are grappling with how to maintain their distinctive vocational identity. The Lutheran tradition emphasizes a holistic approach to education, integrating faith, learning, and service. In a time when higher education is



increasingly focused on career preparation and immediate job outcomes, Lutheran institutions are striving to preserve their commitment to forming individuals who are not only skilled professionals but also thoughtful citizens and ethical leaders. This involves fostering a campus culture that encourages spiritual growth, critical thinking, and engagement with the world's complex social and ethical issues.

As NECU institutions navigate these challenges, they are also embracing opportunities for innovation and transformation. Our strategic plan opens us to an alignment with strong liberal arts education in concert with competitive STEM programming that meets the needs of this present age and the future to come. Our efforts to augment technology play a pivotal role in reshaping teaching and learning, with the rise of online education and digital resources expanding access and enabling new pedagogical approaches.

Partnerships between several NECU colleges and employers are becoming more common, providing students with practical experience and a smoother transition to the workforce. For instance, Tim McCarthy (Wittenberg University '02), has served as the first Professional-in-Residence for his alma mater. McCarthy,

former owner of the Raising Cane's Ohio franchise, volunteers a significant amount of his time to help guide students through the transition into career exploration as a young professional. Drawing from the core values taught in Lutheran education institutions, He hopes to encourage budding entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs to continue their development of community and national projects that serve the common good as sources of America's future success.

In conclusion, the state of higher education is marked by a dynamic interplay of challenges and opportunities. Affirmative action, DEI policies, and the preservation of Lutheran vocational identity are just a few of the issues that NECU institutions are addressing as they strive to fulfill their missions in a rapidly changing world. This coming summer at the Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education Conference (VLHEC), we will grow deeper in our collective understanding of each of these topics as we navigate a path forward that will require a commitment to embracing diversity, fostering inclusivity, and maintaining a clear sense of purpose and amplifying the Lutheran identity. I hope to see you at VLHEC in Minneapolis, July 8-10, 2024.

SAVE THE DATE

Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education Conference

Augsburg University, Minneapolis, Minnesota | July 8-10, 2024

TOPIC: Educational Access: Lutheran Roots, Contemporary Practices

Forming the Division for Access, Equity & Belonging at Susquehanna University

In 2024, Susquehanna University turns 166 years old. The longevity of the institution is anchored in the ideal of access and opportunity even as the recipients and delivery of such access and opportunity has shifted over this century and a half. Access to education was a fundamental value for Susquehanna University from its founding and continues to shape our thinking and institutional commitments. Susquehanna's founder, The Rev. Benjamin Kurtz, approached the village of Selinsgrove (located on the Susquehanna River forty-five miles north of Harrisburg) and found it willing to offer land and support in exchange for the education of its sons and daughters. Bolstered by local boosters, the Missionary Institute was founded (1858) to provide a free education to equip young men of limited means who wanted to become preachers.

Susquehanna Female College was founded simultaneously but incorporated separately. The two were combined in 1898 and adopted the name Susquehanna University. The institution served students who would enter the ministry as well as secular professions. In this, they were representative of the time in which they were founded. It was not until 1928 that the faculty voted to eliminate the granting of graduate degrees and the seminary closed in



1933. Only the baccalaureate-granting College of Liberal Arts, the heart of the institution, remained.

The theological concept of vocation was a central pillar of the Protestant Reformation in Europe (1517). In the Medieval Catholic Church, the concept of vocation was restricted to "ecclesiastical professionals," priests, monks and nuns serving the church. Martin Luther democratized vocation, rooting it in the calling of all the faithful to serve God and neighbor in daily life. Such an understanding of vocation emphasized faith that was active in lives of love and humble service. The vocation of the priest is no

Susquehanna University, located in Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania, was founded in 1958. Pictured above are members of the Division for Access, Equity & Belonging. From left to right: Dr. Maria Muñoz, interim chief inclusion and diversity officer; Rabbi Nina Mandel, director of Jewish life; Rev. Scott Kershner, chaplain and director of religious & spiritual life; Dena Salerno, senior director of diversity and inclusion; Amy Davis, associate director of diversity and inclusion

more or less holy than that of a baker or housekeeper. Service to God was demonstrated by supporting the life, health and flourishing of one's fellow human beings. As Luther's central ideas are often summarized, "God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does." From its founding, Susquehanna was animated by this Lutheran sense of vocation to be of service to the world. Whether in the creation of the Missionary Institute to train young men of modest means for lives in the pastorate, to the creation of the Womens' College and the Classical Institute, the institution that would be incorporated as Susquehanna University was animated by a faith that sought to make a difference in the world by removing barriers to educational access. Many barriers remained, but these ideals continue to be central institutional values as we assess how to increase access and remove barriers today.

"In locating Susquehanna University within the broader history of affirmative action, providing opportunity and access to higher education, has and must remain central to its mission."

In locating Susquehanna University within the broader history of affirmative action, providing opportunity and access to higher education, has and must remain central to its mission. The commitment to provide education to the children of the Susquehanna Valley's farming community and women during the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, to students of color (African American students in particular) during the mid-20th century, reflect the legacy of Susquehanna's mission to provide access to education. It is still unclear as to why Susquehanna University was one of the last institutions of higher education in the United States to graduate African American students. The Black History of Susquehanna University (BHSU), an institutional project headed by interim chief inclusion and diversity officer, Dr. María L. O. Muñoz, seeks to not only understand this part of its history, but also tell the histories of Susquehanna University through the lens of Black faculty, staff, and alumni.

While there is no evidence that Susquehanna ever institutionalized affirmative action policies in the student admissions process, in 1969, the Central Pennsylvania Synod voted to support efforts by Susquehanna University and Gettysburg College to recruit Black faculty and other personnel.¹ Some efforts continued into the next decades. According to Donald Housley, President Joel Cunningham appointed Philip Winger as an affirmative action officer in 1987, with respect to faculty and staff hiring. The method for how the hiring process was carried out is described as one where if an insufficient number of candidates from a minoritized population were in the hiring pool, such a search was to be halted. Beyond that, there is little discussion as to what that process entailed.²

A few years later, just as Susquehanna completed its 150th year, Lisa Scott arrived at Susquehanna as the inaugural Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) in 2009. In 2014, she was appointed Vice President for Student Engagement and Success, and the CDO role remained vacant until Michael Dixon was hired as Chief Inclusion and Diversity Officer in 2019. According to current President, Jonathan Green, who was inaugurated in Fall 2017, he found an institution that was decentralized in terms of diversity and inclusion with departments and offices duplicating efforts. During one meeting in 2017/2018, several faculty and staff were discussing their efforts in the classroom and in the co-curricular; with faculty and staff, and students. It became clear to President Green that the work was disaggregated and not institutionalized. He recognized the need for change but viewed the absence of a Chief Diversity Officer as a barrier to building a division that would support faculty, staff, and students in a holistic approach to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice work.³ Once Michael Dixon arrived to serve as the Chief Inclusion and Diversity Officer (CIDO) during Fall 2019, the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic after March 2020, delayed the development of the office that came to be named the Division for Inclusive Excellence until 2022.

Under Dixon's guidance, the Division of Inclusive Excellence (DIE) was launched in January 2022. It combined the Center for Diversity & Inclusion, Office of Jewish Life, and Office of Religious & Spiritual Life under the leadership of the CIDO. In August 2023, DIE was

renamed to Division for Access, Equity & Belonging (DAEB) with the Center for Diversity & Inclusion (CDI) and the Center for Spirituality & Meaning (CSM) as dual offices that anchor the work of equity and belonging.

While the institution's chaplains have always been ordained Lutheran ministers, the chaplaincy was charged with supporting and advancing religious diversity within the pluralistic campus community. These commitments took a significant step forward with the hiring of a full-time director of Jewish life in 2009, and the designation of a university-owned house as a center for Jewish community life. This change signaled an awareness that Jewish identity can be both religious and ethnic/cultural. Students who identify as Jewish remain a significant minority in terms of numbers on campus, but many who do identify are interested in connecting with Jewish life in a more holistic way, beyond religious affiliation. Working in tandem with the chaplain, the Director of Jewish Life not only greatly enhanced the experience of Jewish students but advocated for the importance of religious diversity broadly within the institution. Prior to this, support for Jewish students relied on the volunteerism of a small number of Jewish faculty and staff. In addition, during the 2010s, religious life at Susquehanna came to focus increasingly on interfaith engagement. This focus on religious diversity set the stage for Religious & Spiritual Life, and Jewish Life being part of the newly created Division for Access, Equity & Belonging. In another step toward deepening our commitments to religious and spiritual diversity and the support of all students in an increasingly pluralistic campus, Religious & Spiritual, and Jewish Life came together in the summer of 2023, to form the Center for Spirituality & Meaning.

Collectively, DAEB is principally responsible for the strategic direction and vision for diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, and justice at Susquehanna University. While the recently created DAEB "houses" both intercultural centers, it is simultaneously a space for potential inconsistencies around institutional vision, strategy, and resources in the equity work at SU. A large part of equity work is a clear articulation of the disparate representation, experiences, and outcomes for minoritized communities, captured in consistent data and punctuated by narratives

on climate. Because effective equity efforts aim to allocate resources and opportunities as needed to create equal outcomes for all, a division dedicated to these efforts should be guided by a clear and transparent assessment of such a distribution across the institution. These will go a long way in the shift in organizational culture and help grow intercultural competence.

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The DAEB is poised to begin this assessment work and is also positioned more broadly to influence DEI efforts across the institution. Whereas in former iterations, DEI work was under the purview of Student Life and confined to student-facing programs, the DAEB has the latitude to assess and develop SU's infrastructure through faculty/staff initiatives. The DAEB, for example, piloted and maintains a faculty/staff professional development series, the Building Inclusive Excellence Curriculum (BIEC), to expand intercultural knowledge and opportunities for critical dialogue around social justice issues. Additionally, the division, in collaboration with the Faculty Affairs Committee and Human Resources, has implemented a robust equity search advocate process and training to bolster equitable search practices and address the systemic barriers which disparately impact hiring people from underrepresented communities. Philosophically, the expansion into embedded DEI work as a holistic endeavor denotes progress and reflects the long-term vision of the institution. In these ways, the division's work follows the

philosophy behind affirmative action in providing opportunities for access in the faculty and staff realm.

However, the centralization of DEI efforts can also preserve the status quo when the division that guides these efforts may not be sufficiently funded and empowered. If Susquehanna is to address and manage the demographic cliff (decline in overall number of university aged young people) and the demographic shift (rising number of eligible university aged people from minoritized communities), it must continue to provide adequate funds to create the infrastructure and spaces to support both recruitment and retention. To that end, when charting a long-term institutional business strategy, DEI work must be taken into consideration in a way that is “measurably and sustainably embedded into its every dimension.”⁴ Similarly, a fully empowered DAEB can better influence cultural change when the division is positioned and recognized as field experts who can guide the policy development that undergirds effective equity efforts. The creation of an equity search advocate process, for example, without the ability to enforce its implementation as policy, can create the illusion of equitable practices without having significant impact. Susquehanna University has created space for this essential DEI work, and spaces that are intentional, resourced, and centered can be a precursor to a community of belonging.

“Building affinity spaces, increasing coalition across different minoritized populations, and implementing best-practices such as peer mentorship in programming have proven effective for our campus.”

The present priorities of collegiate diversity, equity, and inclusion work have shifted alongside social, cultural, and political landscapes. While increasing access is still an essential commitment of diversity and inclusion, the question of how to foster belonging, specifically for minoritized populations, rises to the top as a central concern and focus. Even with increasing numbers in representation,

minoritized groups continue to report inequitable experiences, and gaps in retention and achievement at the national level remain.

At Susquehanna University, the question of belonging has most recently informed programming strategies and efforts to institute inclusive procedures and policy. Building affinity spaces, increasing coalition across different minoritized populations, and implementing best-practices such as peer mentorship in programming have proven effective for our campus. When we consider our context as a small, rural, liberal-arts institution in central Pennsylvania with little representation of historically excluded groups in the community at large, space becomes a key component of the conversations around crafting a sense of belonging. For over a decade, the campus hosted only one space aimed at providing a space of belonging for minoritized groups. Nevertheless, as students of color and LGBTQ+ populations have grown significantly, the space could no longer adequately serve this purpose. At the height of the pandemic, the Center for Diversity and Inclusion transformed a conference room into the Diversity Empowerment Nest (DEN), which is now used as a meeting space for nearly every diversity student organization and is open to all students for use. In addition, in 2020, Indigenous students successfully proposed a tribute circle to honor the Susquehannock people as original inhabitants of our campus. And in 2023, we established an LGBTQ+ Resource Center out of an existing space thereby retrofitting our campus to meet the evolving needs of our student body. Mentioned above, the Hillel House has a successful Shabbat dinner on Friday evenings which are attended by all members of the SU community, regardless of religious or ethnic identity.

While the creation of these spaces responded to newly emerging needs or previously underserved communities, we have also developed representational projects in response to bias and discrimination. After an act of vandalism in March 2023, our campus commissioned a local muralist to develop a representational piece of art to be placed on our campus center building. The leadership for this project stemmed from a newly formed group of student diversity organization presidents. Once disaggregated, the individual communities represented in this

coalition comprise a smaller fraction of the student body population; together, their constituencies form a formidable solidarity bloc. Leading students in understanding their shared experiences, values, and goals as minoritized communities has allowed for a burgeoning strength in voice and action.

“In addition to showing up at one another’s events, releasing shared messages, and planning collaborative programming, these groups also do the challenging work of negotiating calendars and resources in an equitable and progressive manner.”

In addition to showing up at one another’s events, releasing shared messages, and planning collaborative programming, these groups also do the challenging work of negotiating calendars and resources in an equitable and progressive manner. Besides increased collaboration, there is improved advocacy around issues of safety and security. As the DAEB moves from programming to policy considerations and procedural improvements, we are looking to protect diverse organizations through policy and to implement a more rigorous bias process on our campus. We must also continue to examine budget lines as they serve as moral documents and speak to the institution’s commitment to the work of not only providing access but also advancing the underlying tenet of affirmative

action, access, by also further developing and enhancing retention measures to best serve the campus community.

The Division for Access, Equity & Belonging at Susquehanna University has come a long way since its formation in early 2022. We also recognize that there is still much to do. This work represents a legacy of access rooted in our Lutheran origins. To advance in this present moment, we might continue to draw from the lessons of the past. While access was central to the inception of Susquehanna University, those efforts were bifurcated along gender lines and completely excluded Black Americans for many decades. We must deeply examine where separation and exclusion continue as we move toward a new definition and practice of access, equity, and belonging in our current context. Our new centralized division, which boasts new physical spaces and initiatives, must also continue to receive needed resources and address policy revisions to continue this commitment to access.

Endnotes

1. *Standard-Speaker*, Hazleton, Pennsylvania, June 13, 1969.
2. Donald D. Housley, *Susquehanna University, 1858-2000: A Goodly Heritage* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2007), 559.
3. Interview with Jonathan Green by María L. O. Muñoz, January 2024.
4. Shaun Harper, “12 Ways CEOs And Companies Fail Chief Diversity Officers,” *Forbes Magazine*, February 14, 2023. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/shaunharper/2023/02/14/12-ways-ceos-and-companies-fail-chief-diversity-officers/?sh=c4785d1125be>

On Recruiting Diverse Students, Rooted in Mission



Jason Mahn interviewed Eric Rowell earlier this spring to discuss the recruitment of diverse students at Augustana College (Rock Island, IL), the college's response to the Supreme Court decisions on affirmative action this past summer, and how this important work is rooted in Augustana's commitment to its Lutheran identity and to educating for vocation.

Jason: How long have you been working at Augustana?

Eric: I have been at Augustana College now almost 22 years.

Jason: And you were a student here before that, correct?

Eric: Yes—class of 1993.

Jason: And so, you're a black man going to Augustana at a time when Augustana was far less diverse (ethnically, racially,

and otherwise) than we are today. What was your experience in the late 80s and early 90s like?

Eric: One of the most relevant things is how I was recruited to Augustana College. I'm from Chicago. I grew up on the south side in a predominantly African American community. There was an Augustana representative that came to visit my high school during a college fair. I wanted to play basketball, so he told our head coach about me, and the coach came to Chicago to see me play. But I was also senior class president and captain

of the basketball team, and those leadership positions mattered to Augustana.

Augie, at that time, was about 95 percent white. But it was also very interested in bringing kids from a variety of different backgrounds to Augustana. And now we've expanded that by searching beyond the region of the Midwest to the rest of the nation and the world.

Jason: Why is recruiting a diverse set of students so important to schools such as Augustana?

Eric: One of the reasons that we do so is because there's a lot of competition in the Chicagoland area (our traditional "market") and so now we recruit students from all over the country. But beyond the fact that we need *a certain number of students*, we also need *a certain blend of student backgrounds and experiences*. Having a diverse classroom is really important. Not only do the students get to learn the subject matter, they also get to learn from each other. What's so wonderful is the opportunity to learn beside and from students who come from a variety of different backgrounds so that you, as a person, can feel comfortable with those individuals now and in the future. That comfort and ability to work across lines of difference leads to greater

Eric Rowell is Assistant Director of Admissions and Diversity Outreach at Augustana College, Rock Island. He also serves as an assistant basketball coach with the Augustana Women's Basketball team and is a member of several local boards. ericrowell@augustana.edu

Jason Mahn is the Bergendoff Chair in the Humanities and director of the Presidential Center for Faith and Learning at Augustana College, Rock Island, IL. jasonmahn@augustana.edu

opportunities, both personally and professionally. That comfort, in turn, allows students to contribute more to society as well because they have formed new skill sets.

Jason: As I remember it, one way that advocates of affirmative action during last summer's (2023) Supreme Court cases argued their point was to say that colleges and universities depend on a diverse student body in order to deliver the kind of deep, holistic education they promise. Is that true in Augustana's case?

Eric: Absolutely.

Jason: What was the conversation like around the Admissions Office at Augustana when these Supreme Court cases restricting affirmation action were coming down the pipeline?

Eric: I think we realized that not much was going to change with us here at Augustana. We really focus on the academic attributes of the students that we admit to Augustana. We just believe that academically talented and promising students come from all parts of the nation and world—from rural Illinois to inner city Chicago, from Pakistan and California—and so we need to go far and wide to find them. So we didn't and don't have to change anything in terms of any sort of "race-conscious" admittance. We focus on offering admissions to all promising and deserving applicants. We are certainly not going to bring in fewer students or a more monolithic student body because of those court decisions. We continue to go out to a variety of communities—as Augustana did when I was recruited 35 years ago.

Jason: Is affirmative action a word that you use in admissions?

Eric: Not very often. And not when I was a student here. I think what's important is, again, just being an institution that really works hard to create a classroom where kids get to learn from one another. This means you have to go out and find kids from a variety of backgrounds. We are now competing on a national level for our students, but our practices are still the same in terms of finding kids that are eager to have a great education and will value what they experience at Augustana.

Jason: Does having more students of color help us increase our diversity even more?

Eric: Absolutely. Oftentimes students of color want to go someplace where there's representation of themselves. But again, we live in an era where the world is smaller. All students and people are much more comfortable with people that are different through their experiences with social media, arts and entertainment, and athletics. So there is a snowball effect when it comes to recruiting and admitting diverse students, when you already possess a variety of different cultures. Having diversity definitely makes enhancing diversity easier, but you still have to reach out.

Jason: Is there a link between the Lutheran values of Augustana and the fact that we're a Lutheran liberal arts school, on the one hand, and the goals that you've articulated in terms of recruiting a diverse student body, on the other hand?

Eric: Definitely there's a connection. As a Lutheran College, we talk about vocation. We talk about being able to find meaningful work and your purpose in life. We talk about being proud of the reflection you want to have staring back at you in the mirror. We help our students find something that allows them to feel whole, and to be able to contribute to the good of society. I saw this Lutheran emphasis on vocation already in the early 90s, when I was a student. I also saw it when I worked in the Advancement Office and got to meet alumni who graduated 50 years before I did. So much has changed, but that Lutheran ethos—this calling to do good work in the world—has remained the spirit of this place for the whole history of our school. We don't have nearly as many Lutherans now, and that also has something to do with becoming much more ethnically and racially and religiously diverse. But the conditions that were set forth in 1860 still remain at Augustana. This is a place that I'm extremely proud of. I enjoy working here and trying to find those kids I believe will be great fits, and then help shape their minds, bodies, and spirits so that they can go out there and make the world a better place.

Jason: Thank you, Eric.

Eric: My pleasure.

MARK ELLINGSEN

What Our Lutheran Heritage Entails for Lutheran Colleges and Affirmative Action



The debate over the character of Lutheran colleges is nothing new, but with new marketing realities in the competition for students the positioning of our church colleges may make the matter even more crucial. Of course we know the trends: Since the 1950s, the general consensus (especially

for schools north of the Mason-Dixon Line located on the Coasts) has been that we need to make ourselves more attractive to non-Lutheran constituencies. This is not just about student recruitment. It's about making our schools more inclusive. Thus let's go a little lighter on our church-relatedness. Besides a quality liberal arts institution cannot be confused with Bible schools. The freedom of academic pursuits and commitments must never be curtailed by Biblical teachings. This sort of thinking has even led some ELCA-related colleges (I am referring even to my undergraduate alma mater) to abolish the requirement that students must take at least one Religion course during their matriculation, to eliminate all theologians and/or historians of the

Church from the faculty. But what then makes such schools church-related?

I confess a bias on this matter. I believe that these arguments favoring looser church-relatedness are based on fallacious assumptions, on pre-1960s evaluations of cultural dynamics, and on ignorance about what the Lutheran Confessional heritage entails for church-related institutions and their curriculum. When we work through these matters, some fresh approaches to making our educational institutions more inclusive will emerge.

Faulty Assumptions?

What is the purpose of a liberal arts education? Duke University says that its purpose is for the student to gain skill and ways of thinking that can take them anywhere they want to go. In the same spirit, other commentators speak of the goal of such an education as creating well-rounded, informed, independent thinkers who are capable of continuing their learning in a wide variety of fields. College is a venue, then, not just for providing students with critical-thinking skills, but also with exposure to disciplines and knowledge which they have not heretofore

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engaged. True, through the 1950s and event into the 60s, we could assume that students (esp. Lutheran college students) had been well exposed to religious training and Christian assumptions. Indeed Christian Protestant assumptions and images were all over pop-culture. Lightening up the requirements on Religion courses in favor of finding place for requiring student engagement in other fields made sense. But is that the reality today in 21st-century America?

“College is a venue, then, not just for providing students with critical-thinking skills, but also with exposure to disciplines and knowledge which they have not heretofore engaged.”

All the poll data suggest the growing influence of secular dynamics in America and increased ignorance of things religious and spiritual among Americans.¹ In 2023 for the first time it was revealed by the Gallup Poll that those who identify themselves as religious in America are no longer a majority in the nation.² This is the definition of a secular culture. It is precisely at this point, I contend, that the church-related college has a vital role to play in America. In a society biased away from religion, with a culture no longer propagating Christian images (Christmas, Easter, and perhaps Thanksgiving are the exceptions, and most of us would agree that these American holidays do not really propagate truly Christian understandings), educated people need exposure to religious themes in college in order truly to be exposed to disciplines and knowledge which they have not heretofore engaged. Graduates of institutions with no Religion requirements have not truly been educated because they have not been exposed to the full range of human culture and history. I submit that making this case need not undermine the academic credibility of our schools and might even open promising doors.

But how can Lutheran colleges assume this task without becoming mere “Bible Colleges,” taking a step back to the

early 20th-century and undermining the positive images Lutheran colleges have carved out in the academy? One answer might be simply to establish Religion requirements (as in the case of most Lutheran colleges). But if you take that track, without making exposure to Christianity and the heritage in Martin Luther at least an attractive option, are you really still a church-related college? After all, most Christians, including those of the ELCA, are not inclined to regard what transpires in their ecclesiastical communities as mere expressions of religiosity/spirituality. And besides, the study of Religion and Christianity interpreted as just one manifestation of Religion, is an Enlightenment invention of the West which too often distorts distinct religious institutions and is readily put to use by the secular trends of Western society we have been discussing.

There is in the historical Lutheran heritage another option for raising religious issues in an academic curriculum while still fully respecting the integrity and independence of intellectual pursuits other than Theology and Biblical Studies. We call it the Two-Kingdom Ethic (*Zwei Reich Lehre*). Though there has been controversy about the utility of the Two-Kingdom Ethic, and it has been alleged that it is biased towards reactionary political positions, contributing to Hitler’s policies (the concluding section of the article will put that concern to rest), it seems to be a position deeply rooted in the catholic heritage, dating back to Augustine from whom Luther self-consciously appropriated it.³ The Reformer could not abide any view that would suggest that the Gospel be legislated by the state and made law of the land.⁴ Were that to transpire, the Gospel would be transformed into the Law, thus forfeiting justification by grace. It is evident, state church legislation in Europe notwithstanding, that any effort to impose Christian principles on human activities like politics is to be critiqued from a Lutheran perspective.

The Reformer unfolds the concept of the Two-Kingdom Ethic by dividing human beings into two classes, those belonging to the Kingdom of God and those belonging to the kingdom of the world.⁵ Thus the Church and government must remain distinct—distinct, but not separate for Luther.⁶ Earthly government in his view is not purely secular (and neither are the classical academic disciplines); they belong to God. And the Christian lives in

both realms. Secular government and the civil righteousness it demands (and is required in most human pursuits and academic disciplines) is good.⁷

In one of his sermons, Luther made clear that the goodness of earthly disciplines (not just government, but other human pursuits) do not require Biblical enlightenment. He proclaimed:

... it is necessary to make a distinction between God and men, between spiritual and temporal things. In earthly, human affairs man's judgment suffices. For these things he needs no light but that of reason. Hence God does not in Scriptures teach us how to build houses, to make clothing, to marry, to wage war, to sail the seas, and so on. For these, our natural light is sufficient.⁸

Reason's legitimate role is not just confined to government and the undertakings just noted. For Luther it is the innovator of art, medicine, and power.⁹ The Lutheran heritage is not advocating for the imposition of Biblical principles on academic disciplines. Indeed, a college of the Church in line with Lutheran teachings is committed to academic freedom, to the use of reason without Biblical and ecclesiastical imposition.

"In one of his sermons, Luther made clear that the goodness of earthly disciplines (not just government, but other human pursuits) do not require Biblical enlightenment."

Of course this is not to say that anything goes politically or academically with regard to the Two-Kingdom Ethic. Luther was a realist about politics and most human endeavors, and the academy can use some lessons in realism and humility, can it not? These institutions and undertakings are subject to sin, since we sin in all we do.¹⁰ For this reason the Reformer added qualifications about loyalty and non-interference with these human institutions. Concerning that matter, on two occasions he wrote:

We should be subject to power and do what they order so long as do not bind our conscience...¹¹

Men must adapt themselves to laws and regulations wherever possible and where the laws are beneficial. But where laws prove detrimental to men's interests, the former must yield.¹²

The Church's role, the role of Christian faith, in the academy is that of whistle blower, to ensure that the academic institution and its various departments are truly being governed by reason, they do not violate principles of the natural law and do not function in ways that are not in the best interests of human beings.

It should be evident now that a college truly committed to the Two-Kingdom Ethic heritage has nothing to fear from church-relatedness and a strong religious voice on campus, unless of course that college is convinced that idolatry and pride are never a threat in the academy. Church-relatedness is no threat to academic freedom, just to idolatry. The religious perspective is not a rival to the various academic disciplines, just complements them.

It's obvious, is it not? Including the study of Religion, even featuring it on campus and in recruiting, is most compatible with academic excellence and freedom in all other fields (as long as Religion and other academic disciplines are presented in accord with the norms of the Two-Kingdom Ethic). What better way for Liberal Arts colleges to "stick to [take seriously] the science" than to ensure dialogue among Religion and their other departments of the institution is vibrantly active?

The Lutheran Heritage and Its Implications for Affirmative Action in our Colleges

Let's turn now to the implications of the Lutheran theological heritage for our colleges to maintain the fight for Affirmative Action. We have already made the case that getting more interdisciplinary Religious reflection in the curriculum need not diminish our prospective student pool, need not undermine the involvement of minorities. But the Lutheran approach to social justice is

a most valid ethical option for keeping the struggle for Affirmative Action alive.

First let's address the charges that Luther's Two-Kingdom Ethic leads to reactionary politics and Anti-Semitism. True enough to a point. Luther did critique a rebellion of the impoverished in 16th-century Germany and his condemnation of the Jewish community is well-known. But neither of these actions is directly related to the Two-Kingdom Ethic.

Regarding his harsh and infamous condemnation of Jews in 1543, it is rarely noted that previous to this confrontation he had called for their human treatment and called on Christians to love Jews.¹³ It seems (according to the Reformer) that his attitudinal change was related to the fact that Jews who had profited from the relaxed strictures against them had been reportedly proselytizing lapsed Catholics.¹⁴ This is no excuse for Luther's blind anger, and world Lutheranism has properly apologized for his writings. But it seems clear that it was a sense of betrayal, not the Two-Kingdom Ethic which was the cause of this anti-Semitism, as the same social ethical model in the background of his critique of Judaism supported his earlier defense of Jewish rites.

We find similar dynamics involved in the Reformer's infamous condemnation of the Peasants Revolt and his defense of royal interests. But this position was not related to their economic agenda, but their efforts to overthrow government in order to realize the Kingdom of God on earth (a position which rejects his commitment to salvation by grace alone) and to impose Biblical values on society.¹⁵ It looks like a politically reactionary position, until you see what the Reformer wrote and did for the poor when theological disputes were not at stake.

Indeed in most other contexts Luther's view of government displayed a clear bias for caring for the poor, evidenced by his critique of the economics of his day which worked to the advantage of the rich at the expense of the poor.¹⁶ He insisted that Christ's Kingdom is also for the poor.¹⁷ In *The Large Catechism* he claimed that government is "to establish and maintain order in all areas of trade and commerce in order that the poor not be burdened and oppressed."¹⁸ In his interpretation of the Commandment against killing he contends that it mandates that we are to "help and support them [neighbors] in all of life's needs."¹⁹

Not surprisingly given these commitments, the first Reformer was critical of the free market, contending there the poor are daily defrauded.²⁰ He contended that government's job included the regulation of the economy on behalf of interests of the poor.²¹ Certainly sounds like an early modern version of Socialism, Affirmative Action on behalf of the poor. The Reformer played a significant role in establishing generous safety nets for the poor in various German cities.²² Indeed, it should come as little surprise that the Lutheran nations of Europe operate with democratic socialist economies.

"Luther's view of government displayed a clear bias for caring for the poor."

We might even refer to Luther's Affirmative Action policies on behalf of women and the enslaved. To be sure, though clearly still ensconced in Medieval patriarchy, the Reformer did advocate for the education of women and late in his career advocated for the escape of slaves and government's responsibility to care for the freedmen.²³ The Lutheran Two-Kingdom Ethic is certainly friendly to Affirmative Action. Would it be too much of an imposition on Lutheran colleges for the Church to expect that History, Political Science, Philosophy, and Religion Departments in these schools attend to these facts, to help students appreciate the progressive heritage of aspects of the Lutheran tradition, especially in view of how they challenge many social stereotypes of Luther and his heritage? A school that is not doing so seems not to be church related.

Let's turn in closing to issues of Affirmative Action today on our campuses and in the ELCA in light of the Supreme Court's Decision on Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College. What can we do about it, and has the Two-Kingdom Ethic provided guidance? I am told that some voices in ELCA headquarters think we have no policy on Affirmative Action in the ELCA, truly striking in view of the data just provided about Luther's thought. But should the feeling that we in the ELCA

have no policy on Affirmative Action be a comment made about ELCA-specific statements, I have two examples to the contrary. First see below the quote from the “User Guide for Faith, Sexism and Justice: A Lutheran Call To Action.”²⁴

Equity means treatment and access to resources and influence according to a person’s needs. The principle of equity takes into account that **people live within uneven playing fields** due to economic inequalities, sexism, racism, etc. **Because of different contexts, individuals or groups may require different resources and support to ensure that they have fundamental rights** and the ability to make choices as others do (such as having a choice of quality doctors, careers, neighborhoods, etc.). The goal of equity is to ensure that each person receives what they need to flourish and is not disadvantaged.

This certainly looks like action in the affirmative to me. And if one contends that this statement is not official policy since it was not approved by the Assembly, how about the following remarks from the approved Social Statement itself?

28) **Develop and support more extensive policies and practices** within the ELCA **that promote equitable authority and leadership** within this church in all its expressions. In many instances this requires **promoting the leadership of women**, with special concern for women of color. In other cases, this means promoting the participation of men in more varied roles, including those traditionally seen as “women’s work.” 29) **Promote changes that are economically just, including equitable pay and benefits, for women** in all ELCA institutions and organizations, with special attention to the situations of people affected by intersecting forms of discrimination.

We seem on record as promoting Affirmative Action for women (and especially women of color). The church is then inconsistent if this is not applied to those without a level playing field due to race. Put this data together with

the Affirmative Action propensities of the Two-Kingdom Ethic, and it seems impossible to explain why the ELCA and its church colleges are not vigorously denouncing the apparent American retreat from Affirmative Action.

Ah, but The Supreme Court has opened doors for Lutheranism and colleges in Lutheran tradition to keep Affirmative Action alive. The media has convinced us all that Affirmative Action is dead as a result of the Supreme Court’s recent judgment. But a pregnant observation by Chief Justice Roberts can keep Affirmative Action healthy and alive (and implementing it is right in line with the Lutheran Two-Kingdom Ethic commitment to a reliance on reason and the natural law in making our points on behalf of justice). I raise these issues here in closing in case your college lawyers have not noted this loophole we have for continuing to practice Affirmative Action. The media certainly has not done much with it, and this loophole opens the door for the ELCA and its associates to do some “good trouble.”

On p.8 (f) of the Syllabus of the Court’s decision on *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College*, while critiquing Harvard’s and the University of North Carolina’s admissions programs for lack of specificity and measurable objectives for using race in admissions that Court agrees that

At the same time, nothing prohibits universities from considering an applicant’s discussion of how race affected the applicant’s life, so long as that discussion is concretely tied to a quality of character or unique ability that the particular applicant can contribute to the university.

The Court’s opinion proceeds to critique universities for too often concluding that the touchstone of an individual’s identity is race and “not challenges bested.” Let’s explore and exploit this observation. Together it opens doors for a partnership between the Black community and universities or businesses committed to diversity to keep Affirmative Action alive.

There is much to be gained in breaking down this comment of the Chief Justice. He contends that the Court has not forbidden questions about one’s race to

be part of the application process, and so by implication such questions could be appropriate for job applicants in business. On these grounds, being Black or a member of some other minority does not get you any extra points. But it would be appropriate, Roberts and the Court majority concede, to have applicants write on how race had affected her/his life. (Many of my friends in the Black community and I don't like how the Court's comments could imply that being Black could be a problem since it seems regarded by the Chief Justice as a "challenge." But for now let's work with what opening the Court gives.) A well-written reflection on being Black (its joys and challenges) could help you get in that school or get that good job.

How can these concessions help the cause of freedom? Colleges and businesses committed to Affirmative Action and diversity in their communities could do a lot to help the cause by putting extra weight on this question, justifying this by contending that applicants who demonstrate in answering the question ability to relate to other ethnicities are just right for these institution's communities. Whether universities institute the use of this question for all applicants, the use of this question of coping with race for all applicants or just for minorities would be up to each institution and perhaps best practices in implementation of this commitment would begin to emerge. Yet I cannot understand why a Lutheran college would not want to proceed in this manner.

"The Court has opened a door to keep Affirmative Action alive. Let's get our church and its colleges organized in order to make it happen!"

Assuming we can get our higher-education system and the business community to buy in on this, there is work to be done by our public schools. In order to keep Affirmative Action going in the new reality it will take some good, thoughtful writing by applicants.

Of course in helping Black kids and job seekers write thoughtfully about how race impacts their lives it will take

empathetic facilitators and conversation partners. We will need more Black teachers in our classrooms. Could this become a mission for Lutheran colleges through recruitment of Black students and also in gearing educational programs to develop through dialogue with the broader African-American community and Black Lutherans in particular curricula for training students to write well on the subject of race and how it impacts them? Could ELCA congregations, especially those with Black membership volunteer to assist in such recruiting and resourcing?

The Court has opened a door to keep Affirmative Action alive. Let's get our church and its colleges organized in order to make it happen! It's the rational, Two-Kingdom Ethic way to proceed. And as we have observed, plunging into this sort of activity on the part of the oppressed is right in line with our Two-Kingdom Ethic. Church-related colleges that are serious about their church relatedness, can do no other, making it clear to all constituents the historical theological rationale for such ethical, community-action commitments. Church-relatedness on our terms contributes to making college communities better citizens.

Endnotes

1. As reported by "US Religious Knowledge Survey," *Pew Forum* 28 (20210), at pewforum.org/Other-Believes-and-Practical/U-S-Religious-Knowledge-Survey-asps.
2. Gallup Poll, "In U.S., 47% Identify as Religious" (2023).
3. Martin Luther, *Auslegung des 101 Psalms* (1534-1535), in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtgasugabe, Vol. 51 (Weimarer Ausgabe) (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolgers, 1883ff.), p.242, l.1 [hereafter the collection is cited as WA] / English translation: *Luther's Works*, Vol.13 (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing – Fortress Press, 1955ff.), p.198 [hereafter collection is cited as LW]; Martin Luther, *Von Weltlicher Oberkeit, wie weit man ihr Gehorsam schuldig sei* (1523), WA11:245-280 (esp, p 249)/ LW45:81-129 (esp. p.88); Martin Luther, *Ob Kerigesleute auch in seligem Stande sein können* (1526), WA19:629,14/ LW46:99-100; Martin Luther, *Epistel S. Petri gepredig und ausgelegt* (1522), WA12:330f,30ff./ LW30:76ff. Those of the world are under the Law Luther claims in *Von Weltlicher Ob erkeit, wie weit man ihr Gehorsam schuldig sei*, WA11:251,1/ LW45:90; *Ibid.*, WA11:262,3/ LW45:105. On the need for secular government to be under the Law, see *Ob Kerigesleute auch in seligem Stande sein können*, WA19:629,17/ LW46:99. Cf. Augustine, *Dei civitate dei* (413-425), XI.1ff; IV.33; XLV54; XIX17,26.

4. Luther, *Von Weltlicher Oberkeit, wie weit man ihr Gehorsam schuldig sei*, WA11:251,22/ LW45:91; Luther, *Auslegung des 101 Pslamos*, WA51:239,22/ LW45:105; Luther, *Ob Kerigesleute auch in seligem Stande sein können*, WA19:629,17/ LW46:99.
5. Luther, *Von Weltlicher Oberkeit, wie weit man ihr Gehorsam schuldig sei*, WA11:249,24/ LW 45:88.
6. Martin Luther, *Briefwechsel* (1540), in *Dr. Martin Luthers Briefe, Senuschreiben und Bedenken*, Vol.5 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1825-1856), p.492, ll.10ff./ LW49:383.
7. Luther, *Ob Kerigesleute auch in seligem Stande sein können*, WA19:629,21/ LW46:99-100.
8. Martin Luther, *Weinachpostille* (1522), WA101/1:531,5/ *Collected Sermons*, Vol.3/2, eds. John N. Lenker and Eugene Klug (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), p.319: "... du must hie scheyden got and und den menschen, oder ewig and zeitlich Ding. In zeitlichen dingen un die den menschen angehen, da ist der mensch vornunfftig genug, da darf er seyness andern liechts den der vornunfft. Darumb leret auch gott ynn der schrift nit, wie man hewsser bawen, kleyder machen heyratten, kriegten, schrifftten, oder berglichen thus soll, dass sie geschehen; den da is das natürliche Licht genugsam zu."
9. Martin Luther, *Die Thesen für Promotionsdisputation von Hieronymus Weller and Nikolau Medler* (1535), WA391:175,9-10/ LW34:127.
10. Martin Luther, *Grund und Ursach aller Artikel* (1521), WA7:436f.,23ff./LW32:86; Martin Luther, *Von Abendmahl Christi Bekenntnis* (1528), WA26:345,32/ LW37:233; Martin Luther, *Sermon von den guten Werken* (1520), WA6:244,10/ LW44:72-73.
11. Luther, *Epistel S. Petri gepredig und ausgelgt*, WA12:334,29/ LW30:80: "Der gewallt sollen wyr untethan seyn, and thun was sie heyssen, weyl sie unser gewissen nicht binden und nur von eusserlichen dingen gepieten wenn sie uns gleych mit faren also tyrannen."
12. Martin Luther, *Kirchen-Postille-Epistel-Predigten* (1522/1524), in *Dr. Martin Luthers Sammtlich schridften*, Vol.12, ed. George Walch (St. Louis, 1880-1910), p.370, l.19: "Also muss es ja sein, dass die Leute sich nach dem Gesetz and Werk schicken, wo sie können und ihnen gut ist; schädlich aber wiederum, wo es ihnen schädlich ist, soll wahrlich das Gesetz sich beugen und weichen..."
13. Martin Luther, *Dass Jesus Christus ein gobroner Jude sei* (1523), WA11:314-336/ LW45:199-229 (esp. p.200); cf. Martin Luther, *Von den Juden und iren Lugen* (1543), WA53:417ff.,1ff./ LW45:174-176.
14. Martin Luther, *Briefwechsel* (1537, in *Dr. Martin Luthers Briefe, Senuschreiben und Bedenken*, Vol.8 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1825-1856) p.899/ LW38:62,67. It should be noted, though, that even prior to his defense of Jewish rites, Luther did call the Jews wretched in his *Dictata super Psalterium* (1513-1516), WA4:367,19. LW11:500.
15. Martin Luther, *Wider die rauberischen und modrederischen Rotten der Bauern* (1525), WA18:361,24 / LW46:54-55.
16. Martin Luther, *Von Kaufshandlung und Wucher* (1524), WA6:58ff.,26ff./ LW45:305-306
17. Martin Luther, *Deuteronomion Mosi cum annotationibus* (1525), WA14:776,657,30/ LW9:148.
18. Martin Luther, *Deutscher Katechismus* (1529), WA301:168,15.
19. Martin Luther, *Kleiner Katechismus* (1529), l.14, WA301:244,23: "Wier solle Gott fürchten und lieben das wier insern nechste an seinem leyb seynen schadē noch laud thun, sondern ynn helfen und fördern in allen Leibesnoten."
20. Luther, *Deutscher Katechismus*, l.7/WA301:166f.,30ff.
21. See n.18, above.
22. Martin Luther, *Ordnung eyns gemeynen Kastens* (1523), WA12:11-130/ LW45:169-194.
23. *Ibid.*, WA12:25,16/ LW45:188-180; Luther, *Deuteronomion Mosi cum annotationibus*, WA14:709,23/ LW9:232-233.
24. "Faith, Sexism and Justice: A Lutheran Call To Action," (2019) https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Faith_Sexism_Justice_Social_Statement_Adopted.pdf

KEN FLORES

On the Power of Transformation and Becoming Human

I consider myself bad at change, yet I believe in the power of transformation.

I have undergone many transformations in my life. I moved from a Japanese-speaking preschool to an English kindergarten at age 5. My parents divorced when I was 11. I moved from Japan to the US, alone, at 18. I came out as non-binary and gay at 19. Each time, there was a period of intense discomfort before a dramatic transformation in how I understood myself and more importantly, in how I saw others.

There is a natural human instinct to live in the moment. I often forget that I have had a storied past, and will likely have a storied future. We tend to see ourselves as monolithic, as though the current version of ourselves was always who we were and who we will always be.

“We tend to see ourselves as monolithic, as though the current version of ourselves was always who we were and who we will always be. This is false.”

This is false. All of us have undergone dramatic (and not-so-dramatic) changes throughout our lives. Literature

abounds with stories of transformation: the story of Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus, personal accounts of Born-again Christians; the archetypal hero’s journey ends with the hero transformed.

Of course, transformation doesn’t mean throwing *everything* out; it just means removing what is unnecessary, much like smelting metal from ore. Many of us have been hurt, and we have built trauma responses as armor against that pain. When we become free from the hurt, that armor can begin to get in the way of our lives and our relationships. It can be difficult and scary, but shedding that armor is an important part of the healing process.

Cultural and institutional reform is much the same. In any institution, there is something about it that holds good, or it would not survive. The work of reformation is discarding what has become no longer useful, while keeping that which still holds value.

Change is uncomfortable. Biologically, a change in our environment requires us to expend resources to adapt, and so we have evolved to shy away from anything that might cause change. That armor of personal inertia is the



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first obstacle to transformation. Here is where I am drawn to an idea I have encountered at Cal Lutheran about living with—and engaging—that discomfort; many people simply turn away from that discomfort, suppressing it in order to remain in the comfort of familiarity. But without engaging that discomfort, it becomes much harder to change for the better.

“The work of reformation is discarding what has become no longer useful, while keeping that which still holds value.”

And here I must add: not all change is a life-changing, revelatory experience. Most change is slow and unnoticed. It can be for the better, or for the worse. But that is also the most important kind of change, as it is the kind that shapes us the most. The question then becomes how we can shape that change to become closer to the people we want to be.

For me, forgiveness also begins with this belief. I have been hurt by many of the people in my life. But as long as I can see them working to improve themselves, then I can believe that the person they are becoming will be better than the person they were when they hurt me.

My thoughts have been shaped by a class I am taking on the criminal justice system; in society we see incarcerated people as criminals, and much of the system is built on the precept that they will *always* be criminals. We do not try to transform them for the better, or to reintegrate them back into society. In the class, we try to press into the question of what it means to be human, and whether the systems of society seek to *dehumanize* people. I think that our institutions should allow us to become *more* human—more empathetic and connected to each other, more knowledgeable and with agency to live our lives the way we want to.

If we all endeavor to become the most human that we can be, then the work of transformation that begins in each of us will be reflected in our institutions as well.

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The theme for *Intersections* in Fall 2024 is “Vocation: Educational Access—Lutheran Roots, Contemporary Practices,” related to our summer conference. We invite written or artistic pieces from any perspective within the university that amplifies the theme of the summer conference. Contributions are due September 15, 2024. If you would like to be in conversation about an idea that is brewing, please be in touch with the editor, Colleen Windham-Hughes: windhamh@callutheran.edu



The Critical Role of Lutheran Higher Education in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence is a highly contested topic. Many conversations in social, political, and academic contexts eventually turn to the implications of AI on job prospects, college success, etc.

While discussing this topic can often feel overwhelming, the role of synthetic thinking produced by AI requires us to analyze the broader implications felt throughout higher education. Lutheran higher education champions critical thinking as a fundamental tool in our development as cognitive and spiritual selves. It “lays the foundation for a kind of critical thinking that can still register awe. It exhibits a freedom of inquiry that challenges every assumption.” (NECU 2018, 4). It is hard to observe the advances in artificial intelligence in the last year and not depart from it with a sense of awe and wonder.

Put in simplistic terms, the vast majority of AI models are highly complex deep learning algorithms trained on millions of data points. Text-based AI like ChatGPT, is part of a family of large language models (LLMs) trained on billions of words (and other grammatical elements) from all

corners of the internet (social media, web pages, comment threads, etc.) The magic of AI emerges from the “tokenization” (e.g. converting into numerical data) of these billions of words and their context. This numerical data is placed into a massive mathematical array and analyzed through deep learning algorithms that uncover patterns in the structure of language. With generative AI models, these inexplicably complex multi-layered hidden operations can approximate human speech with astonishing results.

Even more astonishing is the recent insight among AI researchers that anything can be “tokenized” and placed in an array and analyzed using transformer-based encoder/



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decoder models (a method too complex to describe here). This means that the content medium is irrelevant: text can be mapped to images, audio can be mapped to speech, etc. Even though the study of artificial intelligence dates back to the 1950s, the rate at which artificial intelligence has advanced in the last seven years has been breathtaking. Yet these advances did not enter the cultural zeitgeist until the release of ChatGPT in early 2023.

“Lutheran higher education has a crucial role to play because it can stake out a middle position between a sense of awe and wonder about scientific discovery/reason while holding a healthy skepticism about overestimating human capability.”

It’s difficult to know what impact this explosion of AI will have on society, but it will likely be seismic. A 2020 report by the World Economic Forum predicted that 85 million jobs would be replaced by AI by 2025 (Brown et. al. 2020). While this is just a prediction, it is likely that as people and companies get more adept at using AI, the need for humans to do many rote tasks will most likely decline leading to an overall reduction in white-collar positions. These are the very positions that have traditionally supported many middle-class and upper-middle-class individuals and families. Additionally, these are the jobs that many of our graduates hoped to acquire after graduation. Currently, companies like OpenAI are developing “agents” that allow users, without coding knowledge, to apply AI models to specific tasks. For example, the model itself that was trained on billions of pieces of data can then in turn be trained on a state’s legal code or a state’s tax code to produce an “AI lawyer” or an “AI accountant.”

Currently, our discussions about artificial intelligence, like the rest of society, are polarized. On one side are people who call for caution in overhyping AI. AI scholars like Emily Bender and Timnit Gerbu call generative AI applications “stochastic parrots” that are good at

mimicking human expression but are incapable of human understanding (Bender et. al. 2021). On the other side are people like a16z venture capitalist Marc Andreessen (whose company is investing in many AI startups), who claim Artificial Intelligence will “save the world.”

This is where Lutheran higher education has a crucial role to play because it can stake out a middle position between a sense of awe and wonder about scientific discovery/reason while holding a healthy skepticism about overestimating human capability. Lutheran higher education believes that reason and inquiry are intended to foster a “healthy sense of human limit” (NECU 2018, 5). The expansion of human knowledge only deepens the awareness of human limitations, leading to a dual attitude toward learning that reaches for excellence yet registers suspicion about claims to complete understanding (NECU 2018, 5). It is incumbent upon us to engage in a serious conversation about how we turn the wonders of AI into something fruitful and productive while recognizing the limits of human understanding.

Reckoning with the limits of human understanding is intuitive to any scholar who spends enough time engaged in scientific inquiry. Each scientific discovery unpacks more questions than it answers. The Enlightenment is rooted in this balance between human limitation and human capability. The purpose of the Enlightenment project of which Lutheranism was a key driver was that learning and understanding bring us closer to the divine, but does not get us all the way there. Inherent in the scientific method is this sense of limit. The entire concept of theory as applied to the sciences is rooted in the premise that we cannot collect data on the entire world. As a result, we use “samples” to test hypotheses derived from theory. Because we can’t collect data on the entire world, theories are a necessary abstraction from reality. We all know that theories do not explain every possible case. To do so is to fall into the trap of tautology: theories that explain everything, but paradoxically, explain nothing. This understanding of limits has served to keep “science in its place” regarding deeper questions reserved for theology.

We talk about theories that explain a good deal with a simple causal mechanism as “parsimonious.” But to presume any theory can “explain everything” contradicts

the “healthy sense of limit” of Lutheran higher education. The actual world is far too disordered and complex to explain with simple theories. But AI introduces for some the dangerous notion that science can “explain everything.” We have the processor speed, the storage capacity and the data availability to answer previously unanswerable questions.

And here’s where the challenge of a limit-to-human understanding approach comes in. The more we use AI to dive into the world’s complexity, the more turbulent and confounding the world becomes. In this environment, people are prone to seek out simple answers. This is the challenge for Lutheran higher education. Our mission is more important than ever. We need to produce young people who are “called and empowered to transform the world, who go into that world with wisdom, humility, and hope” (NECU 2018, 5). To not take up this task is to not address the confusion, frustration, and instability of our modern era. Paradoxically, as AI makes more scientific discovery, the sense of the world for many becomes increasingly incomprehensible. The philosopher David Weinberger observed the increased use of big data “with the new database-based science, [and found] there is often no moment when the complex becomes simple enough for us to understand it” (2012, online).

This leaves us vulnerable to demagogues who promise to make the complex simple. We are in the late stage “great tech man” theory where formerly lionized figures like Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg’s platforms are accused of fueling ethnic conflict, spreading conspiracy/misinformation, and moving slowly to take down harmful content. But, as writer Anna Della Subin’s recent wonderful book *Accidental Gods* highlights, the frequency with which we’ve turned our fellow humans into deities is an unfortunate persistent feature of human society (2021). Modernity/rationality was supposed to be a “resistance to gods,” a rejection of irrational impulses. But when society (and AI) become too complex for humans to comprehend, we become anxious and are more susceptible to the vicissitudes of demagogues. A great danger of our time is the ability of bad-faith actors to use AI tools to spread misinformation and otherwise disrupt democratic societies. We must be clear-eyed about the challenges we face. Simple

answers are appealing especially when they have the force of religious authority and dogma behind them.

In this effort to remain vigilant with false claims of clarity in an otherwise unclear age, Lutheran higher education calls us to be reminded that “The divine is present in ordinary life. Every person and every creature [are] potential vessels of grace, and the whole of life displays sacramental significance” (NECU 2018, 7). By adopting a position of gratitude, we can find inherent, unchanging beauty and knowledge such as the natural world, as a foundation for mental grounding. Rather than turning to authoritative figures, manipulative messages, or avoidance entirely, devoting time to discovering beauty in the pure simplicity of creation is a critical pathway toward freedom of being. Lutheran theology prioritizes “radical freedom,” described “as a freedom from false ideas about earning one’s worthiness and a freedom for a life of service to and with the neighbor” (NECU 2018, 4).

Seeing others as “neighbor also resists all that brands them as ‘enemies’ or ‘threats’ or ‘strangers.’” To be a neighbor means to seek to understand and serve people and communities (p. 6). As the world becomes more complex, people become attracted to simpler answers regarding who is to blame for their alienation or isolation. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Hannah Arendt identifies social isolation as creating a vulnerability to authoritarianism. As people become detached from their society, they become vulnerable to alternative “unrealities” that appear to explain their condition.

AI only adds to these challenges. If many people already feel isolated from the broader political community. How much more isolated will they feel when they are increasingly engaging with synthetic talk discourse on social media? One of Lutheran Higher Education’s goals is to impart upon students “the essential relationality of Lutheran theology” which is that “individuals flourish only as they are embedded in larger communities” (NECU 2018, 8). This is intimately connected to the ability to resist seeing the neighbor as enemy or threat. How does the inevitable widespread adoption of synthetic communication impact this ability? Increasingly we forego being in community with one another for the comforts of the phone, the screen, and the algorithm feeding endless curated content. Increasingly, we opt for convenience of Amazon

next day delivery rather than opt for an awkward conversation with a stranger at the checkout line. AI gives us the possibility of forming more manageable less contingent synthetic relationships. AI dating apps that provide virtual girlfriends are no longer the stuff of science fiction.

Without regulation and guidelines tech companies may use AI to create even more addicting technology that may exacerbate current issues with youth and adult suicide and mental health. The use of AI created and curated push notifications in gambling and daily fantasy apps designed to boost interaction and addictive gambling behaviors is a prime example of the potential harms of AI. Those prone to gambling addiction can be manipulated through AI advertising designed to attract and take advantage of individuals betting history to curate types of bets, times, etc. that will maximize money spent and money lost.

In a world that is becoming increasingly dissociative, fragmented and materially oriented, Lutheran higher education institutions must be prepared to fight a lonely battle against the hardening of the human soul. Artificial Intelligence, as a piece of the technological age, continues to place barriers between face-to-face interactions, causing distortions of the truth, not just physically (ex: deep fakes) but psychologically (how do I know what I am seeing or hearing is real?) We are called to “seek to draw on the resources of both [faith and learning] to address human problems.” Their hope is that in doing so, students will feel called to reduce suffering and improve well-being of themselves and those they are in comity with (NECU 2018, 8). It is critical that Lutheran higher educational institutions engage with how artificial intelligence can address human problems and can avoid causing human suffering.

Although AI discovery can produce hope, it can also move us away from the natural world. AI can aid discovery at breathtaking speed, but it can also disrupt and destroy. The ability to tokenize millions of “data points” and instantiate models on high-speed Graphical Processing Units (GPUs) means that science gets detached from understanding and knowing. In January of 2024, a team of researchers at Microsoft announced that they were able to “analyze 32.6 million potential battery materials in 80 hours, a process that would have taken 20 years manually” to discover the desperately needed battery

alternatives to Lithium (Calma 2024). These powerful tools can also be used for malevolent purposes. A 2022 study in Nature reports on a Swiss research team that used a machine learning model created to identify pharmaceutical drugs and were able to use it to produce 40,000 potential biological weapons similar to nerve agents. How are we called to address the awesome power for both good and evil they tools can harness (Calma 2022).

Lutheran higher education calls on institutions to train students to see the other as “the neighbor” and to “resist all that brands them as ‘enemies’ or ‘threats’ or ‘strangers’ (NECU 2018, 5). In 2024, more than half of the nations in the world, representing ~60 percent of global GDP will hold elections. This year, more than any other, democracy is on the ballot. An IMF report found that 60 percent of jobs in Western societies will be immediately impacted by AI. A recent report from the World Economic Forum in its 2024 Global Risks Report found that misinformation in the form of deep fakes was one of humanity’s greatest threats (WEF 2024). How do we ensure that these threats aren’t used to foster ethnic conflict or genocide?

Luther’s Theology of the Cross compels us to identify with the marginalized. AI accelerates the rate at which realistic seeming material can be disseminated. Social media remains a relevant and powerful mechanism for disseminating false narratives that inflame passions. Less understood is the ways in which AI’s trained on primarily Western data can be used to marginalize the culture and languages of those in the global south. This phenomenon known as data colonialism often manifests in the disproportionate reliance on “Western”-centric datasets and knowledge collected from predominantly English speaking and “developed nations” reflecting historical power dynamics and biases inherent in the data collection process. Much of AI training data is sourced from Western English language content, forming a skewed representation of other cultures, languages, and perspectives. This overrepresentation of “western” influence in technology reinforces a form of digital colonialism, where the voices and experiences of “non-Western” communities are excluded or ignored.

Addressing the issue of data colonialism in AI is no small task requiring widespread diversification of training datasets and languages, prioritizing inclusive data

collection practices. To foster collaboration across diverse communities ensuring that AI technologies are more representative, equitable, and respectful of nuance and a depth of understanding that comes with other belief systems' ways of understanding and explaining the world. Ignoring the need for diversification of training data will cause more issues as AI is implemented further entrenching and digitally redlining society.

"Lutheran Higher Education calls us to examine, monitor, and advocate for the environmental consequences of Artificial Intelligence."

Finally, Lutheran higher education is relevant in encouraging young people to "weigh the impact of their actions on other creatures, both human and non-human." We are losing species at a rate of "8,700 species a year, or 24 a day" (Pearce 2015, online). It is comforting to think that we can "nerd" our way out of our behavior through scientific advancement. While there are promising advances in the use of AI to address global climate change and its effects, without people who have an ethic of care, AI will prove futile. We must resist the impulse to blindly adhere to technocratic answers.

Lutheran Higher Education calls us to examine, monitor, and advocate for the environmental consequences of Artificial Intelligence. In an article discussing the book review session for *Atlas of AI* by Kate Crawford, the author notes that "undeniably, the AI industry is responsible for significant greenhouse gas emissions and the release of toxic chemicals, contributing to climate change and global warming, the harmful environmental impacts caused by it" (Ling Chan 2023, online). With this insight, there is a call to develop more sustainable and responsible AI systems. "This involves designing algorithms to be more energy-efficient, reducing the use of single-use hardware, and prioritizing the utilization of renewable energy sources."

Lutheran Higher Education has a call to advocate for these measures, ensuring AI development is ethical, and to "pursue justice for creation through active participation, solidarity, sufficiency, and sustainability."

The mission of training students for this purpose drives professionals in Lutheran higher education. In a world that is increasingly fragmented and materially oriented, these institutions fight a lonely battle against the hardening of the human soul. We are called to "seek to draw on the resources of both [faith and learning] to address human problems." In doing so, students will feel called to reduce suffering and improve well-being (p. 8). Lutheran higher educational institutions must engage in discovering ways that artificial intelligence can address human problems and avoid suffering.

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Team Culture is Key to Success: Learning from Student-Athletes

“Everybody takes an interest in students here—whatever that student does.” With this one statement, Athletic Director Curtis Campbell (Roanoke College) has captured one of the values that makes liberal arts education work: staff, faculty, and administrators see students and support what they do. The tradition of Lutheran higher education develops students as whole persons, supporting their exploration of vocation or callings in many aspects of their lives and undergraduate careers.

During one spectacular December weekend, the successes of student-athletes at Lutheran colleges were plain for all to see. In consecutive days California Lutheran University’s Women’s Soccer Team won the national championship and St. Olaf College’s Men’s Soccer Team won the national championship. One particularly spectacular weekend featured the success of three campuses in our Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities. Both of these historic wins took place at Kerr Field, on the campus of Roanoke College. The athletic accomplishments of three schools in the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU) were in the spotlight simultaneously, thanks to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division III championship games.

Salem, VA, home of Roanoke College, is commonly called “Championship City” by those involved in NCAA Division III (D3) sports. It is, by all reports, a beautiful place to be. Conference planners must think so, too, given that the Championship games held in December 2023 raised the number of championship games played there to 100 over the last thirty years.



Curtis Campbell says D3 sports exemplify the love of the game, the true amateur version of sports. Even as laws evolve to protect and compensate players—especially those competing at quasi-professional levels—in D3 players compete out of love for the game. D3 supporters cheer on their teams in true community spirit. At this level (the level of most athletic teams at NECU schools), players do not

receive scholarships for athletics. Players are recruited as “student-athletes,” with much to gain as well as contribute to wider campus life. Coaches at D3 schools recruit for love of the game and community spirit as much as for competence in any given position. Coaches always want students who are excited about learning and thrive in the classroom as much as they thrive in competitive sports. This combination of academics and sports makes great scholar-athletes.

Excellence On and Off the Field

Frank Marino and Justin Oliver, the coaches of Cal Lutheran’s Women’s Soccer Team and St. Olaf College’s Men’s Soccer Team, respectively, both spoke with pride about the successes of their players in academics as well as sports. Asked about what characterizes his players, Coach Oliver responded, “we have high achievers on and off the field. We only recruit people that can succeed academically, athletically and socially. We had a 3.52 GPA; 27/31 students had above a 3.0.” Cal Lutheran’s Women’s Soccer Team has a cumulative 3.6 GPA and a 90% persistence rate to 4-year graduation. This kind of success takes a village, which is why many teams have a faculty or staff advocate. Dr. Molly George serves in that capacity for the women’s team at Cal Lutheran. During the long weekends of championship play out of state (where several players saw snow for the first time!), players had to negotiate due dates and exam conditions with professors. Dr. George enjoyed her role in facilitating alternative arrangements for players during their stay in Salem, VA. “As a faculty mentor, I found great satisfaction in developing and facilitating strategies to enable our students to thrive academically while excelling at the highest level in Division III sports. The impressive GPA of the women’s soccer team and their historic National Championship victory underscore Coach Marino and the coaching staff’s emphasis on academics. Additionally, our faculty’s commitment to supporting students both on and off the field is evident once they are educated about how to best support these incredible student athletes’ ability to multitask.”

Student-athletes have to learn effective time management, and it differs in peak season and off-season. Perhaps counter-intuitively, their time management is most effective

“The road to success is never an easy path. Winning this championship took work, talent, some luck, but most importantly, a team of girls that became a family. Our small D3 team went from unranked to #1 in the Nation by taking the tournament game by game and being grateful for everything we earned. Our humility and determination allowed us to achieve so many goals we never could have imagined. However, the biggest asset to our team was believing in each other and translating off the field relationships onto the pitch. I have never been a part of a group so special and filled with love in all of my years playing soccer. Our love within our team also spread to our community at Cal Lu. The amount of support we received from other Cal Lu teams, faculty, and most importantly our parents gave us the strength to continuously push through this tournament. When I joined the Cal Lu Women’s soccer team I wasn’t joining just a winning program, but a team with an incredible sense of culture. This culture is what allowed us to become a Championship team. I will always dedicate our journey to the unbreakable bonds we created, and I will be eternally grateful to not only have a trophy but sisters for life.”

Adri

during peak season, when they need to be mentally sharp in all situations and play time is contingent on satisfactory progress. Time management can be more challenging in the off season, when they have more time available. Without the press of daily practices and competitive play, it can be hard to prioritize tasks. Encouraging teammates to keep succeeding after winning a title is part of the team culture that has been built by Oles and Regals alike. According to Coach Oliver, “Winning is contagious and

winning in the classroom translates to winning on the field and to winning in your relationships along the way.”

Building Team Culture

Coach Marino studied the connection between community and teamwork for his Master’s thesis. Marino says that relationships and team culture are key to success. “Everything builds on previous years. Getting off-the-field community right—serving others, building authentic relationships, leading by example—all of that translates onto the field.” At Cal

Lutheran, Coach Marino has led book groups for each year related to team culture and building relationships since 2017. Shawn Howie '78 has led a few of the community-building activities for Regals Soccer. From “speed-dating” to small group conversation, Howie created opportunities for the players to know each other as people, to learn about each other’s dreams and goals, and to develop respect for one another as a baseline for team culture. Through both carefully constructed practices on the field and team-building activities off the field, players learn to prioritize collective success over individual achievement. This approach is true for all



players, regardless of ability or play-time. Marino explains, "They do what's best for the team, whether or not they're contributing the way they want to be; they want what's best for the team, not necessarily themselves."

Healthy team relationships make room for difficult conversations. The team-building process, which is extended, developed, and personalized through team captains, creates an environment where players can speak their mind and work together to solve problems, whether relational or individual. Howie explains, "There are mistakes in soccer all the time. And they can get in your mind." Team culture can support players through physical injuries and mental distress. The Regals' culture played a big role

"**W**inning the NCAA Division III National Championship wasn't even a consideration last year when our season came to an abrupt end after a loss in our conference tournament. Yet, we went on to play a record-breaking season this year and end as #1 in the nation for Division III women's soccer. When people ask me how we did it I always describe our team culture. We're more than a team and I fully believe that it's what made us champions. Our team was built on a foundation of trust, understanding, and friendship, which wasn't developed overnight. Many hours were poured into team bonding in hopes of building authentic relationships amongst each other. Understanding and empathizing with each other's diverse stories is what got us through the struggles of a long and overwhelming journey to success. Our appreciation and respect for one another is what got us through score deficits and feelings of lost hope. In the end, making a family out of a team is what allowed us to celebrate each tiny victory until we got to our final destination.

Vale

"**L**ast soccer season was a dream come true. Transferring from the University of San Diego to Cal Lutheran for my final year, I anticipated a fun season to cap off my soccer career. However, it became much more. Pre-season involved setting standards, sharing goals, and bonding as a team. A casual mention of winning a National Championship sparked a shift in our mindset. Each practice and game became about striving for a collective goal. Early morning workouts and late practices tested our limits and prepared us for challenges. Our resilience defined us; even when trailing, we rallied to tie or win games. Our success stemmed from our unity and belief in each other. Despite a setback in the SCIAC tournament, we remained steadfast, guided by faith. And it paid off. We shattered records and clinched the national title, a testament to our coaches, teammates, supporters, and faith in God's plan.

Eden

in helping the players persist through injuries and challenging games when they came from behind to tie or win in dramatic circumstances, such as overtime play and penalty kicks. Howard Davis, Athletic Director at Cal Lutheran says, "This group of amazing women are so connected and committed to one another. They were a joy to watch all season. So many times, throughout their playoff run this team's connection and grit stood out and were what made them successful."

Team culture is a big part of the Oles' success as well. Coach Oliver says, "Our success this year I think is the culmination of a lot of things. We had twelve seniors that had given everything to this program and are a huge reason we won. They are amazing soccer players and even better people. We had a team that had been through a lot of highs and lows together and that helped us this season especially.

We also had a fantastic process that allowed us to go day by day and focus on being present together while working towards a national championship.” And every step of the way they shared their successes with their campus, and their campus community was there to support them.

Student-Athletes in Liberal Arts and Sciences

Lutheran Higher Education centers the dignity of all persons and seeks to develop students as whole human beings. That said, the time demands of sports are sometimes seen to compete with studies and the financial expenses are sometimes called into question during difficult budget years. Asked about the connections between athletics and liberal arts and sciences education, Coach Marino and Coach Oliver had this to say. “So much of what they learn is relatable to life. Working together as a team gets them ready to work with others in the world. They have to manage time

to be successful in sport and class. And there are life lessons of leadership, relationships, and working really hard for success.” Coach Marino went on to say that, “Enterprise and other companies hire student-athletes because they know those employees arrive with a team mindset.” Coach Oliver agrees: “Our culture is why we had the success we did, we are a product of our culture. We have a team of genuinely good guys, that are high achievers on and off the field that love to be held to and hold others to very high standards. When things get difficult instead of getting more individualistic they lean on each other for help and support. They are great at picking each other up when they see someone is down, if someone is injured the next person steps up.”

Both St. Olaf and Cal Lutheran were awarded National Coaching Staff of the Year by the United Soccer Coaches.

Tired and burned out from a tough season, the Regals gathered around a white board to reconnect with their WHY—to align their motivations and goals together. They have generously agreed to share their list with *Intersections*. We think it may help you and your team, too.

Relationships are key to success Positive self talk and group conversation Have fun—enjoy each moment Appreciate sunsets Love each other, love the game, be truly grateful to God Remember our why Take care of your body Protect your peace Protect your mentality Love, respect and care for each other Love our seniors Focus on the controllables—energy, effort	Appreciate the little things Focus on one good thing Treat each practice like you are warming up for a game Watch films and prepare well Take action—not just words Be united Team needs vs individual needs Appreciate our tiny victories Be a coach and be coachable Let the negative go Not complaining and not making excuses High level of communications Listen and be open minded	Structured game plan Collectivity Consistency within games Full 90 minutes Creativity Be relentless Focus together Keep the passion—enjoy every moment Be positive Be close knit family Listen and be open minded Be creative Be relentless No energy vampires
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JEREMY MYERS

Low-Hanging Fruit, Moonshots, and Coffee: Dreaming Big Within and Beyond Our Limitations

Vocation must be perpetually discerned. In today's culture of constant change and pivoting, this discernment work is often bypassed as a quaint but pointless roadside attraction alongside the freeway towards progress/sustainability/innovation/retention (you pick!). Our team at Augsburg University's Christensen Center for Vocation takes that roadside attraction very seriously. We design and lead transformative learning experiences for leaders intended to help them not only discern their organization's calls but also take action that affirm these calls. Those learning experiences are only transformative if we create and facilitate the space for these leaders and teams to reflect on how the experience has impacted them. To do this, we have implemented an efficient and effective process. This article is a summary of that process and is shared here as a tool you can use with your teams when you find yourselves at a crossroads, when you have completed a workshop or continuing education experience, when a busy season or large event has come to an end. It is a process designed to help you listen to and trust your collective wisdom as you wonder what your next steps might be. It begins with the contemplative practice of the awareness examen, move into naming the low-hanging

fruit that can be accomplished quickly and easily, invites you to dream big about the moonshots your team might take, and then lands with you naming the next few people you need to invite into the conversation.



Awareness Examen

The first step in this process is the Awareness Examen. The Examen was originally a part of the spiritual practices of Ignatius of Loyola. It was intended to be practiced at the end of the day as a way of reflecting back over the day, looking for moments of both desolation and consolation. Moments of desolation are moments when you experienced or encountered anxiety, fear, brokenness, etc. A moment of consolation is a moment in which you experienced peace, hope, healing, etc. Allowing your team to share their experiences of desolation and consolation during an event is a form of program evaluation, a way of relationally processing the experience together, an opportunity to develop trust with one another, and an important

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step towards allowing the collective wisdom of the group propel you work forward. Here is how you practice the Awareness Examen.

“Allowing your team to share their experiences of desolation and consolation during an event is a form of program evaluation, a way of relationally processing the experience together, an opportunity to develop trust with one another, and an important step towards allowing the collective wisdom of the group propel you work forward.”

Sit in a chair with your spine straight and your feet flat on the floor. Or find any position that is comfortable and possible for you and your body. Place your hands on your legs with your palms either up or down. Do a brief scan of your body from your scalp down to your feet. Notice where there is tension or discomfort. Do what you need to do to relieve that tension or discomfort—stretch, wiggle, crack, twist, etc. Then take three deep slow breaths in and begin to center yourself. Allow yourself to become aware of your breath and your body. Close your eyes and then reflect over the experience you want to process. Allow yourself to become aware of moments of desolation in this experience or over the particular time you are reflecting on. Once you’ve identified a moment, examine it. What was happening? Who was present? What were you feeling? Why would you categorize this as a moment of desolation? After sitting with it for a while, take a few more deep slow breaths and release the memory of that experience. When you are ready, allow yourself to reflect once again over the same period of time or experience. But this time, become aware of moments of consolation. Once you’ve identified a moment, examine it. What was happening? Who was present? What were you feeling? Why would you categorize this as a moment of consolation. After sitting with it for a while, take a few more deep slow breaths and release

the memory of that experience. After completing this reflection, take some time to allow each person on your team to share both their moments of desolation and consolation with the team. Allow them to simply share what came to them without any judgment or commentary. Just let their words about those moments stand on their own.

Low-Hanging Fruit

After you have processed and shared your own experiences with an event you are then ready to begin looking forward. We always start this by asking teams to brainstorm what they think the low-hanging fruit might be for them. Low-hanging fruit are practices you and your team can implement almost immediately through minor changes and with the resources already at hand that could result in important and beneficial gains for the work you do. For example, at the end of a day long event focused on sustainability one team identified a quick and easy low-hanging fruit. They could add a “Support Our Work” button to their website where interested parties could simply make a financial donation. It would take one person about ten minutes to implement this low-hanging fruit. I tend to like to phrase the question this way, “Given the desolations and consolations we have heard from one another, what might be some of the low-hanging fruit our team can implement easily that would have a positive impact on our work?”

Moonshots

When we begin with low-hanging fruit we allow our team to honor its very real limitations as well as the assets they already possess. This next step, moonshots, invites your team to move beyond their current limitations and assets. A moonshot is exactly what it sounds like. The phrase originated from NASA’s Project Apollo from the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. It literally meant an attempt to land on the moon. It figuratively means a radical proposal or solution for a very challenging problem. For example, at the end of a DEI training a member of one leadership team said, “Rather than reading a land acknowledgment statement at the beginning of every large event on campus, what if we started a

conversation with the local indigenous leaders in our area about what actual reparations might look like.” This is a moonshot. Again, I will often phrase the question this way, “Given all that we have seen and heard and shared here, what are some moonshots we might just dare to take?”

Coffee

After orbiting around our moonshots for a while, we invite teams back to terra firma. We know how busy we all become upon arriving home after an inspiring but exhausting team experience. We also know how lonely it can start to feel when working to implement some of the changes we dream of making. So the last step we ask teams to take is the naming of a few people with whom they each need to have a cup of coffee and a conversation regarding the low-hanging fruit and moonshots.

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These might be with high-level administrators who can make or break an idea, or they might be with the movers and shakers on campus who really know how to make things happen, or they might be with those naysayers who you know will be suspicious of whatever you propose. Naming these people together helps the team identify key people who need to be part of the movement. It also creates some immediate accountability. Now you each have someone you must reach out to and everyone on the team knows you have agreed to do this. Having these conversations helps to keep the momentum your team developed at the event and it helps build a coalition of people who will help lease the work.

Even though we talked about moonshots, we know this is not rocket science. What we are proposing is nothing amazing. Yet we have seen it be both an efficient and effective way for a team to wrap up their time at a shared experience together that helps them reflect upon the experience and identify some immediate and lofty goals. We often lose the insights we gain from a team experience when we transition away from them without pausing to reflect. This process has proven to be an effective way to honestly celebrate, lament, and move forward from an event with a community of collaborators and a sense of call to action. We hope it helps you do good work and love the work you do.

Intersections

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