

# Intersections

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FALL 2024

# Intersections

Faith, Learning, and the Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education



IN THIS ISSUE

Vocation: Educational Access—  
Lutheran Roots, Contemporary Practices

**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:



Tia Christensen is a senior at Pacific Lutheran University pursuing a bachelor's in fine arts with a concentration in graphic design. Her passions are illustration, design, branding, and packaging.

She is a regular contributor

to Impact, a student-led graphic design agency at PLU that fields and fulfills requests for advertisements and promotional materials. In September, she began her second year as an intern with the Wild Hope Center for Vocation where she manages the website, social media sites, and other day-to-day operations and projects at Wild Hope's office. In her free time she likes to draw, play video games and watch horror movies.

**CALL FOR  
ARTISTS**

Submit your artwork for the cover of Spring 2025 *Intersections* "Vocation as Balancing Act: Mission-driven and Tuition-driven" to the editor, Colleen Windham-Hughes: [windhamh@callutheran.edu](mailto:windhamh@callutheran.edu). We can accept high resolution files of photographs, digital art, paintings, drawings, sculpture, fiber or mixed media pieces.

# Intersections

Number 60 Fall 2024

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## FROM THE EDITOR



Every summer it happens: someone (and often more than one) says, “I finally get what Lutheran higher education is all about!” Some universities send newbies to the summer conference, as a way of accomplishing Lutheran Higher Education 101. Others send seasoned

employees who serve in all different kinds of positions and are well-versed in the commitments and practices specific to Lutheran higher ed. Both newcomers and returners enjoy connecting to the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities, meeting people from other campuses to share in stories of familiar struggles and inspiring initiatives.

Whether you have been to a summer conference or not, you are likely to resonate with the encouragement offered in Dr. Mary Elise Lowe’s keynote address (pp. 11-17):

“**You are co-creating people.** Your work with students reflects God’s ongoing creation. **You are justice-seeking people.** You see the injustices in our educational system, and in big and small ways, you pursue neighbor justice with and for the students on your campuses. **And you are *communio* people.** You value students as individuals and treasure the deep fellowship that exists in your campus community. I hope that these three Lutheran whys will sustain and empower you as you live out your vocations at your own ELCA institution.” [*emphasis added*]

Committed to vocation at the center of our educational enterprise means holding space for the ongoing unfolding of vocation within the lives of staff, faculty, and administrators, as well as students. The whole idea of vocation is that every person is gifted and skilled AND that each person needs the gifts and skills of others. When you open the widest possible access for all persons to hone and develop their gifts and skills, the community has what it needs for all to flourish.

Our work is by definition aspirational. Opening access never ends, which means there is no finish line and we cannot do it on our own. We must, as Emma Jones, Executive Vice President of Credo, pointed out in her keynote address (pp. 6-10), become ever more trustworthy in our shared work and leadership and build structures that are focused on transparency, capability, reliability, and humanity.

In order to sustain our vocations in higher education, it is important to have opportunities for what Rev. Jen Rude, University Pastor at Pacific Lutheran University, calls “Sacred Pause.” Jen led us in three such sacred pauses, which began with these provocative prompts:

- Share about a memorable or meaningful body of water, maybe connected to where you live
- Describe how you are feeling this morning using weather as a metaphor—as in bright and sunny, eye of a hurricane, sticky humid, etc.
- Share a memorable or meaningful gathering around a table

Try prompting yourself with one of these in a quiet moment of reflection. Better yet, incorporate one of these prompts into a meeting with colleagues or students. Sacred pauses humanize us to ourselves and each other, which makes opening access both easier and more joyful.

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

# Reflections on the 2024 Vocational Leaders in Higher Education Conference

The 2024 Vocational Leaders in Higher Education (VLHE) Conference has concluded, marking yet another successful gathering of educators, administrators, and advocates committed to the cause of Lutheran higher education. This year's theme, "Educational Access: Lutheran Roots, Contemporary Practices," reminded us of the deep historical commitment of Lutheran education to inclusivity and accessibility. It also prompted us to reflect on how these foundational values can continue to shape our contemporary approaches to education in a rapidly evolving world.

Educational access has always been a central tenet of Lutheran higher education, stemming from Martin Luther's revolutionary idea that both boys and girls should be educated—a radical notion in the 16th century. Today, this legacy continues as we strive to address systemic barriers and foster environments where all students, regardless of background, can thrive. The discussions and workshops at this year's conference brought this vision into clear focus, offering both inspiration and actionable strategies to ensure that Lutheran higher education remains a beacon of opportunity for all.

As the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU) looks toward the future, we are committed to expanding our focus by actively engaging student leaders as key partners in this work. This Fall we convened over 40 students from our network institutions who shared thoughts, concerns and ideas that will also continue to amplify NECU's mission so that all may flourish. By continuing to convene students across the network alongside faculty and

administrators, we create a more inclusive and dynamic dialogue around educational access and institutional leadership. These types of partnership will not only enrich the work of our institutions but also help foster a new generation of leaders who are equipped to continue the legacy of inclusivity and justice in (Lutheran) higher education.

The collaborative mission of NECU has always been rooted in the idea that education should serve as a force for societal good. This year's conference affirmed that mission and provided a solid foundation for the important work that lies ahead. We are thankful for the profound messages/ keynotes from every presenter at the summer conference, many who are sharing more insights with you in this volume of *Intersections*. We are grateful for the continued dedication of our network and look forward to the new partnerships and innovations that will emerge as we continue to grow together.

Thank you to all who participated in this transformative conference and those who will read this volume and continue to glean from the rich well of academic exploration and a faith-based connection. Your contributions help ensure that Lutheran higher education remains a source of hope, opportunity, and justice for generations to come.



**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. [Lamont.Wells@ELCA.org](mailto:Lamont.Wells@ELCA.org)

# Access, Accessibility, & Change: A Call for Trustworthy Leadership in Higher Education



Change, it often seems, is the only constant in higher education. In more than 20 years of working with leaders, universities, and organizations in this field, I've witnessed both the pace and the complexity of that change intensify. The boundaries

between sector-specific issues and macro-level cultural, societal, and economic influences have become ever more permeable.

These influences and issues are so expansive that it can feel daunting for leaders serving on campuses across the country to find meaningful, tangible ways of making a difference. The reality is that no one leader or institution can pull the sector through the challenges of today, but leaders *can* impact the experience of all those in their care, from faculty to staff to students, and in the Lutheran tradition, do so with a refrain of “so that all may flourish.”

The question is, how do we arrive at a state of flourishing for ourselves and the communities we serve? To navigate the shifting landscape of higher education, it is

essential to understand how interconnected issues such as rising costs, the impending enrollment cliff, changing student demographics, and the declining perceived value of degrees collectively shape the strategic challenges institutions face today.

## **Cost & affordability continues to be a central narrative.**

Even though average net prices for students have dropped in recent years,<sup>1</sup> the cost of college is still unarguably out of reach for the lowest-income families. While the decrease in net price is ostensibly good news for students, challenges remain for institutions; the drop has been driven largely by rising discount rates (total unfunded institutional aid divided by total gross tuition) across the country. In 2023, the average discount rate for first-time students hit an all-time high of 56.2%,<sup>2</sup> which means that for every tuition dollar a college or university collects, it only keeps 43.8 cents. With discount rates this high, institutions are struggling to cover the cost of delivering on their educational mission, and we are seeing more and more colleges' annual revenues slip into the red—often by millions. Financial struggles strain institutional resources and exacerbate uncertainty, undermining confidence in an institution's strategic future.

**Emma Jones** serves as the Executive Vice President and one of the owners of Credo, a national higher education consulting firm. A higher education professional since 2002, Emma is a storyteller, strategist, speaker, writer, and editor. Her passion for supporting and equipping leaders is lived out through the delivery of Credo's leadership development partnerships and programs around the country. | [ejones@credohighered.com](mailto:ejones@credohighered.com) | [linkedin.com/emmlaureljones](https://www.linkedin.com/emmlaureljones)

**The enrollment cliff is here (and, surprise, there might be two).**

We've known for nearly two decades that the so-called "Enrollment Cliff" was coming. Starting in 2025, the number of graduating high school seniors in the U.S. will shrink by 15% over the next four years due to a decline in the birthrate that began during the Great Recession of 2008.<sup>3</sup> This declining body of traditional-aged undergraduate students will significantly impact colleges and universities across the country whose core student base is made up of 18–22-year-olds. Moreover, recent forecasts by the U.S. Census also point to a second enrollment cliff beginning in 2033,<sup>4</sup> in which another downturn in the number of graduating seniors would occur. Many institutions will face compounding financial issues in the years ahead if programs and opportunities are not adapted more robustly to meet the needs of non-traditional-aged college students.

"In higher education, these changes should guide us to vulnerably explore what it means to create belonging for the new wave of wonderfully diverse students in educational environments that were not, for the most part, built for them."

**And the demographics of our learners are changing.**

The good news here, and the extraordinary opportunity for higher education, is that the diversity of students who can benefit from the educational experience of our institutions is expanding dramatically. The shifting racial and ethnic identity demographics across the U.S., as seen in the 2020 U.S. Census,<sup>5</sup> demand that we engage in meaningful learning across differences, and some would argue, consider a redefinition of the "American Dream."<sup>6</sup> In higher education, these changes should guide us to vulnerably explore what it means to create belonging for the new wave of wonderfully diverse students in educational environments that were not, for the most part, built for them. The makeup of tomorrow's student body amplifies the

need for transparent and adaptive leadership to maintain trust and effectively address the diverse needs of a changing student body.

**Meanwhile, the value of a college degree is in question.**

Public confidence in higher education is on the decline as rapidly evolving skill sets and better consumer access to outcomes drive skepticism about the sector's ability to adapt and stay relevant.<sup>7</sup> A recent *U.S. News & World Report* found that "only 36% of Americans have confidence in higher education," with significant concerns about cost and the student debt crisis driving the narrative behind the decline in trust.<sup>8</sup> The declining value of a college degree is influenced by rising costs, shrinking enrollment, and shifting demographics. This trend exacerbates the erosion of trust in higher education as stakeholders question the sector's ability to provide a relevant and affordable educational experience in the face of these mounting challenges.

**So, what can we do?**

Amid all the above, we face a declining level of trust in higher education as an American institution. In fact, I wonder if we've lost a bit of our own belief in the value and sustainability of our sector in a rapidly changing world. On campuses, the global pandemic undeniably impacted the energy and commitment of faculty, staff, and administrators alike, leaving exhaustion and disillusionment in its wake. To counter the popular narrative of higher education's decline, we must begin with the people on our campuses who believe in the transformative nature of education.

Pursuing complex change successfully in any industry requires a variety of operational and strategic components. In higher education, we know change requires trust because, in this sector, our work is about people. Leadership and change happen through people, and people need to trust one another and their leadership to engage meaningfully in the hard work of change. Through an intentional focus on building trustworthy leadership, we can rebuild a foundation of strength within our colleges and universities to, in turn, drive a revitalization of higher education in the eyes of the nation.

## How do you build trust, exactly?

The concept of trust often feels nebulous and complex—what do we really mean when we say, “I trust you?” Or when someone says, “I don’t trust the administration at my university?” It turns out, according to authors Reichheld and Dunlap, trust can be deconstructed into four factors that together build trusted relationships: Transparency, Capability, Reliability, and Humanity.<sup>9</sup> Let’s unpack these four factors in the context of our campus communities.

### **TRANSPARENCY: Continual sharing of information that impacts people.**

How can you improve transparency on your campus or within your team or department?

*Share as much as you can, as often as you can.* The more everyone in the community is connected to the big picture, the more powerful, effective, and willing they will be as partners in driving meaningful change. Your community can spot inauthenticity from a mile away, so these efforts cannot be perfunctory or surface-level.

*Build education and context into information sharing.* People need the “so what.” For example: sharing an update about your institution’s financial picture without couching it in an understanding of how institutional finance works will not maximize the trust-building capacity of your communications. Some of the most eye-opening workshops my colleagues and I have led have been helping faculty and staff understand higher education cash flow patterns, the difference between a budget and revenue, and how an endowment can be used. Let me tell you—the majority of people across your campus do not understand these concepts—they are not exposed to this context with any regularity. As a leader, this financial context may be your language, but it is not the language of individuals across campus. Make sure that you are providing an appropriate contextual underpinning for your updates.

*Build an internal communication rubric (or set of questions) to guide how you share information.* For example: why is this important? Can we connect this topic to mission, vision, or strategic pillars? Who will this information impact? What is already decided, and what has yet to be determined? What are we NOT sharing, and why?

### **CAPABILITY: The observable skills required to deliver on promises**

How can you demonstrate the ability of the organization and its leaders to keep their word?

*Evaluate skill gaps and invest in internal development efforts to close them.* When people have confidence in their own ability to do what is asked of them and can see that others are equipped to execute against their roles, confidence in the organization will grow. And, if you have people in your environment who are capping your ability to make the kind of change and progress that’s needed, think long and hard about whether it’s more difficult to let them go or let them stay and perpetuate poor performance.

*Empower the middle and put them at the table.* The “middle” of an institution are those who bear responsibility for translating strategy into operations, and daily interactions with students, and are critical to organizational success. They know so much about what a campus experience feels like on the ground. During the pandemic, when so many voices were needed and decisions moved at lightning speed, we saw such extraordinary talent rise from the middle. Now, those who were given that kind of access and voice during a crisis are being asked to go back to their seats and receive directions. The impact of this disempowerment is felt across campus. Don’t degrade the leadership that you gained with these critical players—make sure they see that you still trust them to make meaningful contributions.

*Streamline systems and processes to clear the way for impactful work.* Many of us are familiar with James Clear’s *Atomic Habits*, a book about navigating change and goal-settling within ourselves. James asserted, “You do not rise to the level of your goals; you fall to the level of your systems.”<sup>10</sup> If no one has confidence in the systems and processes that are primed to underpin your change initiatives, trust will suffer. The refrain will be, “How can leadership ask this of us when [insert your issue here: our data is so disconnected, our platforms don’t talk to each other, I can never get the information I need when I need it, etc.]?” The same is certainly true of our campuses. Systems efficiency is hard work, but building trust demands that you take every step possible to remove obstacles that will keep your institution from achieving its greatest potential.

**RELIABILITY: Continual delivery on promises made**

How can you demonstrate the commitment of the organization and its leaders to keep their word?

*Show how far you've come.* One of the easiest things for a group of people to do is to forget where they started. One of my favorite things to do in a strategic update in my own organization is to name all of the things we were not doing or did not have when we started and then connect the dots to all the growth and evolution we've experienced since. A simple act like stating progress to date encourages appropriate perspective and creates a sense of accomplishment for people who contribute to and/or benefit from the work. Don't lose sight of what's behind you on the path as you focus on what's ahead.

*"Celebrate every win and visibly course-correct failures. In this environment, every win is a big win. People need hope to maintain momentum and keep them moving forward, so lift up moments of achievement and triumph, either at the institutional or the individual level."*

*Celebrate every win and visibly course-correct failures.* In this environment, every win is a big win. People need hope to maintain momentum and keep them moving forward, so lift up moments of achievement and triumph, either at the institutional or the individual level. Acknowledge great work where it's happening and connect the dots to institutional progress where it makes sense. Regarding their work on change, the Heath brothers encourage us to "find the bright spots," the notion that we hold a predisposition to focus on the problems, but not on what's going well. They wrote, "The question is not 'How can my organization be like my best peer?' The question is, 'How can my organization be like itself at its best moments?'"<sup>11</sup>

*Make the right commitments to your people and your students—then keep them.* Meeting the needs of everyone

on your campus is no easy task: the workplace writ large is more age-diverse now than ever before, with as many as five generations interacting in any given organization.<sup>12</sup> Mental health challenges are on the rise for faculty, staff, and students alike,<sup>13</sup> and the expectation of an organization to invest in wellness for its employees continues to increase.<sup>14</sup> The most important thing to consider when we think about building trust through reliability is to commit to what you can deliver. Overcommitting and underdelivering when it comes to caring for your faculty, staff, and students is a quick road to a lack of trust, discouragement, and retention issues, all of which will slow institutional momentum.

**HUMANITY: Recognition of the uniqueness of each person**

How can you always bring it back to people?

*Constantly ask the question: who does this impact, and how will we address that impact directly?* Groups or individuals whose professional responsibilities, structures, or environment are altered in some way by organizational changes deserve at least explicit acknowledgment of that change from leadership and active support if the change is significant. This demonstration of care will reinforce your trustworthiness because people will feel, and be, seen.

*Tap into your empathies for insight.* You all have them on your team or across campus: those individuals with strengths in individualization, empathy, relatedness, and connection. Make sure they are at the table to bring humanity to strategy and action. Faculty and staff, as much as your students, need to experience belonging in your environment. Careless communication, microaggressions in language or

*"So many of our systems, policies, and procedures are still built on rubrics of equality (providing the same thing for or requiring the same thing of everyone) rather than on an adaptive approach to equity (providing solutions and support based on each person's needs)."*

personal interactions, and overt omissions of impact for different populations are quick ways to derail trust-building.

*Center equity, not equality.* So many of our systems, policies, and procedures are still built on rubrics of equality (providing the same thing for or requiring the same thing of everyone) rather than on an adaptive approach to equity (providing solutions and support based on each person's needs). How can our policies and procedures be structured to create space for meaningful conversations that produce equitable solutions versus structured around rules that prevent or discourage human connection?

## Our Charge

Trust is particularly critical in higher education because it underpins the relationships between institutions and key stakeholders—students, faculty, staff, and the broader community. The past few years of global upheaval and change have challenged our trust in the colleges and universities we serve and degraded the trust of the public in higher education. It may be a long road to restoring trust in our sector as a public good, but we must first look inside our organizations to generate passion for and momentum toward that future.

From wherever you sit on your campus, consider the opportunities you have to build trustworthy leadership through transparency, capability, reliability, and humanity; and remember that trust is built between people, not between entities or organizations. Campuses across the country hold incredible talent. If we can tap into the power of our people and rekindle our collective belief in the vitality of our educational mission, we can surely navigate the landscape around us with purpose and authenticity.

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MARY ELISE LOWE

# Creation, Justice, and *Communio*: Lutheran Insights Empowering Educational Access

Keynote address given July 8, 2024 at the Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education Conference

## Introduction

Today I hope we can think together about the following question: What commitments in the Lutheran tradition empower and advance our work to improve access for *all* the students at our institutions? Or, to put this another way, I want us to think together about the *why* that drives the what. The *what* is improving access? The *why* refers to the reasons that inspire our work. Why do Lutheran colleges and universities care about access? Why do we want students to persist and graduate?

I invite you to explore three deep commitments in Lutheranism that form the why. Why do we want our students to succeed? Why do we struggle to improve equity? Why do we work so hard in our offices and departments? And why do we advocate for institutional changes to make our campuses more equitable? I suggest that these three Lutheran commitments can empower us as we pursue educational access: a Lutheran view of creation, of neighbor justice, and a Lutheran understanding of *communio*.

**Continuing Creation:** Lutherans celebrate that creation is ongoing, that God (in and through Jesus Christ) works through humans in creation, and that creation involves

sustainability. As created co-creators, we humans co-create alongside God in our vocations at our institutions. When we pursue access for students, we do our small part co-creating alongside God.

**Neighbor Justice:** The Lutheran tradition teaches that a central purpose of every individual's life is to serve the neighbor. More recently, the ELCA teaches that serving neighbors includes pursuing neighbor justice alongside, with, and for neighbors. We pursue neighbor justice when we advocate for equitable access.

**Communio** (or Fellowship): When Lutherans share the bread and wine during the communion meal, they share more than food. They share a deep communion with one another and with God. They share each other's burdens and joys. Knowing that we are one in fellowship deepens the connection between us and students. Their struggles become ours, and their success connects to our own vocations in higher education.



**Mary Elise Lowe, PhD**, is Professor of Religion and Philosophy at Augsburg University. Her work focuses on Martin Luther's theology, LGBTQIA+ theologies, and religion and trauma. Prof. Lowe also serves as Augsburg's Batalden Faculty Scholar in Applied Ethics. | [lowe@augsb.org](mailto:lowe@augsb.org)

These three Lutheran commitments—continuing creation, neighbor justice, and *communio*—significantly inform and undergird the why of our work and as we strive for educational access for all<sup>1</sup>

“These three Lutheran commitments—continuing creation, neighbor justice, and *communio*—significantly inform and undergird the why of our work and as we strive for educational access for all.”

## Access and Persistence

As we talk about access as it relates to equity and inclusion in higher education, it will help if we have a shared understanding of some of the pertinent data. A great deal of data is available that captures and tracks admission rates, persistence, and graduation rates for college and university students.<sup>2</sup> The following data shows how long it takes students from different racial groups and cultural traditions to complete an undergraduate degree. These numbers reveal that much work needs to be done to better align the gap between access and persistence. A 2021/22 study shows the following.<sup>3</sup>

- 77% of Asian students graduate within six years.
- 67% of White students graduate within six years.
- 45% of Black students graduate within six years.
- 41% of Native American students graduate within six years.<sup>4</sup>

Obviously, these data demonstrate that many students are not getting the support (academic, student life, economic, advising, housing, etc.) that they need to graduate. Additionally, research shows that females graduate within six years at a higher rate than males in all racial groups. Increasing student support services, mentoring, and tutoring cannot close the gaps between the persistence of one racial group and another. The lived experiences of students and their access to college

preparation in K-12 education are also important variables that institutions must consider as they pursue equity in higher learning outcomes.

It is very important that those of us who work alongside and with students confess and recognize that many students who enter our institutions face a variety of barriers and challenges that we create and we perpetuate. In a recent poll, twenty one percent of black students reported “feeling discriminated against frequently or occasionally at the college they are attending.”<sup>5</sup> Another report shows that nearly “one-third of LGBTQ people (32.6%) experienced bullying, harassment, or assault at college, compared to 18.9% of non-LGBTQ people.”<sup>6</sup>

This graduation data focus primarily on racial identity, sex, and gender. As we all know, our student’s identities are much more nuanced and intersectional. We work with students from a wide range of economic, linguistic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. Many of our students work 15-30 hours a week, and some are caregivers or parents. These dynamic students have demanding lives. Even after they are admitted, a significant number of them will never graduate. Improving access and persistence must be central to our vocations in Lutheran education.

Most institutions of higher learning are talking about access, especially as student enrollment fluctuates, and as the public perception of the economic value of a four-year degree comes under increasing scrutiny. Many colleges and universities need tuition dollars to continue operations. In my opinion, the economic reasons (another why) for improving access are the weakest reasons to advocate for equitable access.<sup>7</sup>

Lutheran colleges and universities have a unique call to empower students and advocate for equitable access. Our tradition takes call and vocation seriously.<sup>8</sup> As it says on the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities’ web page, “At ELCA colleges and universities, students will discover through education in body, mind, and spirit that they are called and empowered to serve the neighbor so that all may flourish.”<sup>9</sup> We strive for equitable educational access for students because we are Lutheran! And because some of the richest commitments in our theological heritage call us to empower students so that they succeed, graduate, and flourish. Let’s turn again to the three Lutheran

commitments that drive our work to improve student access. Again, these include a Lutheran understanding of continuing creation, our concept of neighbor justice, and our understanding of the fellowship or *communio* that we experience in Holy Communion.

## Ongoing Creation

Let's begin at the beginning, with creation. Many people learn best by comparing one idea to another. We can explore a Lutheran view of continuing creation by clarifying how Lutherans do not and do understand creation and God's continuing creation. Lutherans do not teach that creation was a one-time event. Rather, creation is ongoing, and God is still creating new things. Lutherans do not view creation as an idealized place or time in the past. Rather, creation is unfolding, and as Christians, we are called into the near-but-not-yet-realized kingdom of God.

Lutherans do not believe that creation is only for human creatures. Rather, God's intention is that all creation and creatures experience flourishing. All creatures that swarm, swim, fly, jump, and crawl are included, along with the vast diversity of plant life. Creation surely involves the predator/prey relationship, but the biblical texts describe a rich abundance of plants and animals and even hint that God delights in this diversity and flourishing.

Lutherans do not teach that humans are passive beings in God's ongoing creation. Rather, creation is accomplished by God, and God creates in and through us. This claim that we are created co-creators alongside God is very important for our vocations at our academic institutions. God's creation and our creative work take place in our everyday lives and in the spaces where we teach, coach, administer, play, and mentor.

"Lutherans do not teach that humans are passive beings in God's ongoing creation. Rather, creation is accomplished by God, and God creates in and through us."

This commitment that God works in and through humans in creation was central to the teachings of Martin Luther. In the 16th century, he taught people that they could serve God and their neighbor on the farm, in the home, in the print shop, and even in the church. Luther rejected the common claim that only nuns, monks, priests, or bishops who devoted their lives to the Catholic church and who worked in sacred spaces were doing God's work. Listen to Luther describe how humans co-create alongside God.

- "God no longer wants to act in accordance with God's...absolute power but wants to act through God's creatures, whom God does not want to be idle. Thus God gives food...through labor when we diligently perform the work of our calling."<sup>10</sup>
- "What else is all our work to God—whether in the fields...or in government...by which God wants to give God's gifts?...These are the masks of God, behind which God wants to remain concealed and do all things."<sup>11</sup>

Lutherans often ask, what does this teaching or text mean for me? So, let's ask, what does the Lutheran commitment that God's creation is ongoing and that we co-create alongside God mean for us as we work with young adults at ELCA colleges and universities? Allow me to suggest a two-part answer. First, this Lutheran view of ongoing creation means that we continue God's creative activity through our vocations on our campuses. The work you do with students *is* a part of God's ongoing creative activity. God is working alongside you as you engage students. We wear the masks of God when we advance flourishing and equity.

Your creative work might take the form of patient listening and thoughtful mentoring. Your co-creating activities might take the form of ensuring that your institution follows best practices for financial management. Your creative work might take the form of designing courses that engage students. Your co-creating vocation might take the form of helping students from historically marginalized communities name and resist the racism, ableism, and heterosexism that they experience.

All of these activities exemplify how your ongoing work co-creates alongside God. And these activities reflect your deep value that students should have equitable access

to education and should be supported and challenged as they progress toward graduation.

Now to the second part of my answer. God's intention for creation is that it flourish and be sustainable. What does this mean for us? Sustainability connects to educational access. Sustainability is about balance and wellness over time for the individual, for communities, and for the planet. One government report shows that earning a bachelor's degree not only improves a person's lifetime income. It also enhances sustainability and reduces a person's risk of heart disease, diabetes, alcohol abuse, and depression.<sup>12</sup> Educational access and sustainability encompass the whole life of an individual. As we know, higher education is about much more than grades, jobs, and salaries. Your work with students—especially your efforts to help them form their own identities and flourish—is co-creating. It is important. And what you do resonates with the Lutheran commitment that God works in and through all of us—wearing various masks—in God's ongoing creation.

## Neighbor Justice

I now turn to the second Lutheran theme that empowers educational access: neighbor justice. Many of you may have heard of the parable of the Good Samaritan found in the Gospel of Luke in the Christian Scriptures (Luke 10:25-37). Jesus told this story: A man who was traveling was beaten and robbed and left by the side of the road. Several supposedly-virtuous individuals walked by and ignored the wounded man. But a passerby from Samaria—who was viewed as an outsider—did stop to help the wounded man. The Samaritan put the injured man on his donkey and took him to an inn. Among Christians, this story is often lifted up as an example of what it means to care for neighbor.

Caring for the neighbor is a central idea in Judaism and Christianity, and it was very important to Martin Luther. In fact, some Lutherans (like me) think this focus on care for neighbors is one of the most important teachings in our tradition. And it should be one of the main commitments of ELCA colleges and universities. The idea of serving neighbor is so important to Lutheranism that the most recent ELCA social statement, *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action* (2019) pairs the words neighbor and

justice together and employs the phrase neighbor justice. For many of us in this room, our work with students at ELCA institutions is an expression of neighbor justice. To understand this commitment, we must first ask, who is neighbor?

In the Lutheran tradition, the neighbor is not the person who is like you, or even the person who likes you. The neighbor may not share your political affiliation, neighborhood, playgroup, language, or background. The neighbor is *anyone* who needs your help. So, what do we mean by justice? For Lutherans, justice is not retributive. It is not an eye for an eye. Luther and Lutherans have historically taught that people should follow the laws of their ruler and country. This middle-of-the-road view of political justice has been a mixed bag for Lutherans. We have not been known for being on the forefront of fighting for social justice. But this has changed in recent decades. The ELCA and its leaders frequently cry out for justice for women and girls, historically marginalized communities, the poor, immigrants, and those unfairly incarcerated, and we even call for justice for the planet.<sup>13</sup>

This idea of neighbor justice is heard loudly in Luther's teachings. He wrote the following.

- "Christian individuals do not live in themselves but in Christ and their neighbor....They live in Christ through faith and in the neighbor through love....through love they fall down beneath themselves into the neighbor."<sup>14</sup>
- "I will give myself as a kind of Christ to my neighbor.... I will do nothing in this life except what I see will be necessary, advantageous, and salutary for my neighbor."<sup>15</sup>

The ELCA defines neighbor justice this way in its most recent social statement. Neighbor justice "expresses the idea that faith is active in love and love necessarily calls for justice in relationships and in the structures of society. Neighbor justice is meeting neighbors' needs across the globe and in our local communities."<sup>16</sup> Neighbor justice is a powerful commitment of the ELCA, especially as we think about the why that fuels the what that we perform as staff, mentors, administrators, coaches, and faculty. We perform neighbor justice and improve access and persistence

when we support students in the classroom when we help them succeed in athletics or arts, and when they find their first post-college, full-time job.

Think again about the problem of injustice in educational access and persistence. Reflect on the many systemic legal, economic, and academic hurdles that many of our students face. Neighbor justice is needed. Even when students enroll in our institutions, many obstacles, people, and policies prevent them from succeeding. Students need us to pursue neighbor justice alongside them both on campus and off campus.

“There are many actions—some big and some small—that you can take to advance neighbor justice on your campus.”

I know many of you are already pursuing neighbor justice. Think of all the times you helped a student resist and navigate an unjust institutional policy or structure. Remember when you went the extra mile to help a student complete a course or a program? Reflect on the time you connected a student with a staff person or administrator who helped them through a difficult situation. There are many actions—some big and some small—that you can take to advance neighbor justice on your campus.

## Our Current Context

Before exploring the third Lutheran commitment of *communio*, let's review where we've been. Educational access is not just nor sustainable. If we look at graduation rates, the situation is far from equitable for students who identify as students with disabilities, LGBTQIA+, and students from historically-minoritized communities. Our work to improve educational access and persistence is critical.

The co-creating engagement and neighbor justice work being done at ELCA colleges and universities is even more important now that many publicly-funded institutions have cut or reduced programs that support students. In Texas, Florida, and Utah, anti-diversity, equity, and inclusion laws have caused many publicly-funded institutions to drastically

reduce, shut down, or mask their programs and scholarships for students from under-represented communities.<sup>17</sup>

Fortunately, as we've seen, ELCA schools have several deep and longstanding commitments that empower us as we work to advance access. When we celebrate our ongoing creative work with students, we advance equity. When we fight for neighbor justice alongside our students, we advance equity. And when we see one another as God's creatures with whom we share deep *communio*, we advance equity.

## Communio (Fellowship)

Some of you may know of the Christian sacrament that is sometimes called Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist. Christians believe that before Jesus was executed by the Romans, Jesus ate his last Passover meal with his close followers. And he instructed his followers to gather together after he left them to eat the meal and to anticipate the coming of God's reign. Many Christians consider this meal a sacrament. For Lutherans, a sacrament is something that Jesus called his followers to do. It involves a physical element (bread and wine or water), and in the sacrament, God promises to show up in a special way.

During Martin Luther's lifetime, Catholic Christians celebrated seven sacraments. In reforming the church Luther said, let's just practice the sacraments that Jesus participated in. Jesus was baptized, and Jesus celebrated the Passover meal. So, most Lutherans practice baptism and communion. The Latin term *communio* is usually translated into English as fellowship or communion. But when Martin Luther used this term, he meant so much more than just a community of people who worship and eat together. Luther used the promise of *communio* to describe the deep and profound interconnection of Christians with one another and with God.

Today I suggest that the deep *communio* shared in the sacrament of Holy Communion can empower us as we think about the why of our vocations in higher education. *Communio* is part of the why that explains *why* we fight for equitable access. Deep *communio*, interdependence, and mutuality offers us a way to envision our connection to students and colleagues. Let's listen to Luther again. Pay attention to the profound interconnection offered in and through the sacrament. Luther says that Christians are like

grapes crushed together into wine. There is no distinction between individuals. He also says that this community is one loaf, that Christians eat and drink one another, and that they take on one another's burdens.

- “We too are to give ourselves with might and main for our neighbor....just as a loaf is constituted by many kernels out of which one makes a single lump of dough....We who are many... are nevertheless all one loaf and one body.”<sup>18</sup>
- “Through this same love, we are to be transformed and to allow the infirmities of all other Christians to be our own....That is the real fellowship and the true significance of this sacrament.”<sup>19</sup>
- “And just as one member serves another in such an integrated body, so each one also eats and drinks the other; that is...we are simply food and drink to one another.”<sup>20</sup>

In *communio*, Christians are so united that they not only become one—they eat and drink one another! The meal calls participants to give their might and main for neighbor and to regard the struggles and challenges of others as their own. Holy Communion also calls Christians to confess and recognize their own shortcomings and struggles. I realize that borrowing this Lutheran view of *communio* to talk about educational access may feel like a bit of a stretch. But this idea of deep co-constituting mutuality can help us as we work with students, staff, faculty, community members, and administrators at our colleges and universities.

So many students have experienced and do experience systemic racism, homophobia, ableism, anti-immigrant sentiment, Islamophobia, or anti-Semitism. For some, school has been a place of bullying, low expectations, and being stereotyped. Many of our students have been viewed as others—as members of “that group” or “those people”. A Lutheran view of *communio* and of interconnecting fellowship challenges us to reimagine the way we see one another, the way we see ourselves, and the way we understand our campus community. So many students struggle with loneliness and isolation. *Communio* helps us understand the connection that God promises and creates among and between us.

If we truly enter into *communio* with our students, they are not others. Together we are *one* body. We are *one* campus community. The differences in our identities, backgrounds, and roles are real and important, but they should not divide us. As members of *communio*, we also share one another's burdens. If inequity in higher education is oppressing our students, then this inequity is our burden

“If we truly enter into *communio* with our students, they are not others. Together we are *one* body. We are *one* campus community.”

as well. If students are suffering from the effects of institutionalized racism, ableism, sexism, or homophobia, we are called to resist these forms of marginalization. Each one of us has a vocation to help our campuses be *communios* of diversity and sustainability. We can and must use all of our co-creating main and might to pursue neighbor justice alongside our students so that each student can experience intellectual challenge, educational equity, and personal flourishing.

## Concluding Thoughts

As we bring our conversation to a close, I ask you to think again about *your* why. Why do you work so hard to support the students at your ELCA institution? I know that many of you can think of more than just one reason *why*. I hope that our time together has given you three more whys that empower us as we pour our time, hearts, hands, and minds into helping our students succeed as whole people and as we encourage students to achieve their academic and personal goals. You are *co-creating* people. Your work with students reflects God's ongoing creation. You are *justice-seeking* people. You see the injustices in our educational system, and in big and small ways, you pursue *neighbor justice* with and for the students on your campuses. And you are *communio* people. You value students as individuals and treasure the deep fellowship that exists in your campus community. I hope that these

three Lutheran *whys* will sustain and empower you as you live out your vocations at your own ELCA institution.

## Endnotes

1. Here I refer to the work of Martin Luther. I must acknowledge the negative effects of his teachings. Although many ideas in Luther's theology have been life-giving for some, too often his words dehumanized others. Luther espoused many perspectives that today are justly regarded as anti-Semitic, anti-Islamic, homophobic, and sexist. For too long the Lutheran community has failed to reject the hateful rhetoric in Luther's legacy. I commit that my own work with Lutheran theology will repudiate dehumanization, foster interfaith mutuality, and advocate grace and inclusion for all.

2. This data does not include the fall 2024 admissions data that may have been significantly influenced by the US Supreme Court's ruling in *Student's for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College*, (Harvard) and *SFFA v. University of North Carolina (UNC)*, 2023.

3. Nicholas Zill, "The College Completion Gap and How to Close It," Institute for Family Studies, August 2, 2023, accessed June 18, 2024, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-college-completion-gap-and-how-to-close-it>. Please note that the racial categories used here are those frequently employed when analyzing college enrollment and graduation data.

4. "Native American Students in Higher Education," Postsecondary National Policy Institute, accessed September 4, 2024, [https://pnpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2019\\_NativeAmericanFactsheet\\_Updated\\_FINAL.pdf](https://pnpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2019_NativeAmericanFactsheet_Updated_FINAL.pdf).

5. Camille Lloyd and Courtney Brown, "One in Five Black Students Report Discrimination Experiences," February 9, 2023, Gallup, accessed June 15, 2024, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/469292/one-five-black-students-report-discrimination-experiences.aspx>.

6. "Experiences of LGBTQ People in Four-Year Colleges and Graduate Programs (May 2022)," UCLA School of Law, Williams Institute, accessed September 1, 2024, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbtq-colleges-grad-school>.

7. My thanks to my colleague, Robert Gould who serves as Augsburg University's Vice President for Strategic Enrollment Management for his input on the graduation data and the issue of student support.

8. Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities, "Rooted and Open: The Common Calling of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities," accessed September 1, 2024, [https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Rooted\\_and\\_Open.pdf](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Rooted_and_Open.pdf).

9. Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities, accessed April 22, 2024, <https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Leadership/Colleges-and-Universities>.

10. Martin Luther, "Lectures on Genesis Chapters 15-29," trans. George V. Schick, in *Luther's Works* American Edition, vol. 3, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Concordia, Saint Louis: 1961), 274.

11. Martin Luther, "Psalm 147," trans. Edward Sittler, in *Luther's Works* American Edition, vol. 14, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Concordia, Saint Louis: 1958), 114.

12. Enrollment in Higher Education—Healthy People 2030," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, accessed June 1, 2024, <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/enrollment-higher-education>.

13. There are numerous ELCA social messages and social statements that advocate for justice for neighbors and creation, <https://elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society>.

14. Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian 1520: The Annotated Study Edition," translated by Timothy J. Wengert, (Fortress, 2016), 32, [https://www.elca500.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Freedom-of-a-Christian\\_final-proof\\_3.17.20201.pdf](https://www.elca500.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Freedom-of-a-Christian_final-proof_3.17.20201.pdf).

15. *Ibid.*, 29.

16. *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action* (2019), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 78, accessed May 28, 2024, [https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Faith\\_Sexism\\_Justice\\_Social\\_Statement\\_Adopted.pdf](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Faith_Sexism_Justice_Social_Statement_Adopted.pdf).

17. Erin Gretzinger, Maggie Hicks, Christa Dutton, and Jasper Smith, "Tracking Higher Ed's Dismantling of DEI," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 6, 2024, accessed September 7, 2024, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/tracking-higher-eds-dismantling-of-dei>.

18. Martin Luther, "The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ—Against the Fanatics, 1526," trans. Frederick C. Ahrens, in *Luther's Works*, American Edition, vol. 36, ed. Abdel Ross Wentz (Fortress, Philadelphia: 1959), 352-353.

19. Martin Luther, "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods, 1519," trans. Dirk G. Lange, in *The Annotated Luther vol. 1 The Roots of Reform*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Fortress, Minneapolis: 2015), 241.

20. Martin Luther, "The Adoration of the Sacrament 1523," trans. Abdel Ross Wentz, in *Luther's Works*, American Edition, vol. 36, ed. Abdel Ross Wentz (Fortress, Philadelphia, 1959), 287.

# Committed to Paradox



My friend and colleague Mary Elise Lowe dove into the ways that creation, justice, and *communio*/community are concepts and practices rooted in our institutions' shared Lutheran identities. When considering the many issues that require our focus on campus, our undocu-

mented students, our neurodiverse neighbors, disability services, gender diversity, food access, and queer justice ... we see that one more thing becomes clear: This work is complicated. Committing to access and accessibility around these and other things necessarily means that institutional habits and patterns are disrupted. It can feel messy, uncertain, and challenging. That is, of course, the point.

There is one more distinctive root to Lutheran higher education that meshes with an honest assessment of this complex reality: paradox. Things that seem self-contradictory or run contradictory to expectation, multiple true things that would seem to be in opposition to each other. There are a lot of things about working at a Lutheran college or university that fit this description, including all of these issues around access and accessibility. I invite you to think about how this root of embracing and valuing paradox informs our work in two ways:

It helps us understand who we are ... both our individual human nature, as well as the nature of institutions.

It helps us talk about what we do ... our actions, transformations, and why change is challenging.

Embracing and living out of the value of paradox can also be one way of practicing humility for anyone who needs to remember to be open to learning, able to navigate transformation, and be okay with a bit of messiness along the way. Living in the muddled middle means the extremes of one position or another, one practice or another, have less value. Life is lived, and education and transformation happen somewhere in the middle.

## Who We Are: Human Nature, Human Institutions

First, I want to point out that insights around how things are complicated and paradoxical help us understand who we are: human nature and by extension, human institutions. The Lutheran theological, intellectual, and educational tradition exists in a world where paradox is a fact ... it is the nature of reality. Things that seem like they can't both be true at the same time are. Things whose existence is not at all what conventional wisdom would suggest are real. These are the Both/Ands, the Muddled Middles.

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Why we embrace this value has at least something to do with Martin Luther's work, where we see a tendency to resist the binary, the "either/or". When it comes to talking about human beings, he centered a claim that each person is both saint and sinner, and he embraced the paradox of freedom wherein a person is both lord of all and servant of all at the same time.

On the paradox of human nature, you already know that no one person is completely good or completely evil ... we're all more complicated than that. Consider how this applies to your work and your institution, and your habits and practices. Any one policy or practice is likely complicated, and not all good and probably not all terrible. For example, think of attendance policies in the classroom, billing deadlines in the business office, and marketing and branding strategies. Valuing paradox means that we can recognize complicated realities in things like these, and then discern together how to amplify what is good and figure out how to mitigate harm.

"Valuing paradox means that we can recognize complicated realities in things like these, and then discern together how to amplify what is good and figure out how to mitigate harm."

On the paradox of human freedom, Luther argues that because Christians are freed by grace from having to do and say and be the perfect things in order to be saved and to "get right" with God, they are liberated to attend to the needs of their neighbors. For him, this is a theological discussion and he draws on the New Testament writings of Paul, suggesting "that when each person has forgotten himself and emptied himself of God's gifts, he should conduct himself as if his neighbor's weakness, sin, and foolishness were his very own."<sup>1</sup> Because of that, he also notes that a Christian should "be guided in all his works by this thought and contemplate this one thing alone, that he may serve and benefit others in all that he does, considering nothing except the need and advantage of his neighbor."<sup>2</sup>

These statements capture an essential reorientation of human attention toward the needs of the neighbor. Some like to shorthand this and say, "We are freed to serve." Though he is clearly focused on what it means to be Christian, I think this re-orientation is helpful for institutions living out of those roots. In fact, I suspect that service and leadership are some sort of central pillars on your campus. Perhaps they're in your mission statement or define a signature program. Remember, service and leadership are paradoxical insofar as they can be thought of in opposition to one another, and some will view them as contradictory. But on our campuses, something like servant leadership, holding that tension together, is good.

The fact that this paradox is woven into the Lutheran tradition helps us think about human beings as complicated, and human institutions as sometimes or even often contradictory. We can champion things that seem contradictory to some, like service and leadership, faith and learning. We may also recognize the most obvious paradox of being educational institutions that are Rooted AND Open ... and Reaching and Gathering and Serving and so many other things.

When it comes to considering the needs and benefits of our students, it also gets complicated. Because it doesn't mean just giving them what they want, treating them as consumers who need to be satisfied. It requires that we do the work of discerning what sort of education is good for them and for the world, what challenges will benefit them when they are in the world, when their worldview needs a little deconstructing, and when reconstruction needs to happen. And I know that each person working on a college campus will have more than one story of how students are complicated ... they are walking paradoxes. They want to craft and sometimes brand their own bespoke lives and they want desperately to be in community. They have so many questions and crave certainty while resisting given answers. They have access to the world of information and connection in their pockets and are by many accounts the most socially isolated generation yet. They know the world itself is a mess and they have no shortage of blame for the ones in power. They feel they have no power while others perceive them as key drivers of culture.

Students are complicated, and our campus communities are complicated. Think about it: our institutions are Lutheran without a critical mass of Lutheran students, or faculty, or staff. A generation past would have bemoaned that paradox. Even beyond religious identity, most of the students in my classroom, and probably most of the people working on each NECU campus, are not the people for whom the modern university was established. Especially Lutheran colleges and universities. Unless you are a straight white cisgendered neurotypical able-bodied Lutheran man, your presence in this work today is a paradox.

I conclude this discussion about the paradox and complications of who we are as people and as institutions with the words from one of our student speakers at commencement this spring:

“Attending an Evangelical Lutheran College as a Muslim, I was apprehensive. Would my faith waver? Spoiler: it didn’t. Thanks to courses like RE 102 and the college’s support for my spiritual journey, my commitment to Islam only grew stronger. ... Enrolling in RE 102, Bible in a Diverse World, I encountered peers who embraced their faiths with passion and sincerity while remaining genuinely open to understanding others. This experience illuminated the profound role faith plays in shaping our lives and principles. It inspired me to explore the mosaic of religious beliefs, a journey that, rather unexpectedly, deepened my own commitment to Islam.”<sup>3</sup>

## What We Do: Human Action, Struggle, Change, Transformation

If who we are is complicated, let’s shift to focus on what we are called to do in our work as colleges and universities committed to access and accessibility, and see how this Lutheran root of valuing paradox and tension informs that. Because we didn’t get to this point where a Muslim student leader claims the value of a Lutheran college education easily, quickly, or without dissent. The vision of what it means to be a college or university of the ELCA changed over time, and as a result of discernment, needs, action, pressures, and intentions.

By being grounded in a resistance to binaries and false choices, opening our institutional doors wider, and reaching for each other, Rahima’s and so many other students’ stories are possible. In the end, the series of choices that moved from rootedness to openness and accessibility has empowered more flourishing. This commitment to complicated work, holding things in tension, sheds light on more dimensions of the human experience and makes deeper connections possible. If someone were to insist that Lutheran higher education is still only for that mythically normed young white Lutheran man, look at what would be lost. Look at who would not be here. Think of the conversations that wouldn’t be had.

“They can and should lead to hard conversations, to information that can complicate things and even change your mind, to relationships that contradict what you might have been taught were possible, and to the particular kind of discomfort and challenge that is essential for growth and transformation”

These paradoxical communities are not simple, not always fun, and often challenge us deeply. They can and should lead to hard conversations, to information that can complicate things and even change your mind, to relationships that contradict what you might have been taught were possible, and to the particular kind of discomfort and challenge that is essential for growth and transformation.

Here too we have grounding notes from the Lutheran theological and intellectual tradition: Martin Luther focused a lot of his attention on the cross when talking about how to “do theology.” In the Christian gospels, Mark especially, Jesus’ followers routinely have no idea what he is talking about throughout his public ministry, and they are uncomfortable to the point of desertion. They aren’t there at the end of his life, at the cross. The

women are there ... but the men? Gone. A surprising fact in a complicated narrative. Luther pointed out that the Christian belief in a God of power and grace who would be most fully present in death and desertion also defies logic and conventional wisdom. That Jesus' own devoted friends and followers would be absent? This is not what one would expect. That new life comes from brutal death? This is not what one would expect.

For Luther, the moment of Jesus's tortured and painful death at the hands of the state on the cross is both not how one would expect "the son of God" to live and die, and it is exactly there that God is most fully experienced: in a shocking place of suffering and injustice. It is also that God is there in the suffering precisely for the purpose of overcoming it. He argues that understanding this is a prerequisite for being a theologian because it accepts that the default human situation is pain, not comfort. It assumes struggle and claims God's presence in the midst. With a deep hope that all of this mess is headed somewhere else. This is Luther's description of what it means to be a "theologian of the cross."

Theologians of glory, on the other hand, are the ones who assume they know everything already and are able to get it right—even perfect. On the contrary, with this cross experience, Luther puts it bluntly: "God destroys the wisdom of the wise."<sup>4</sup> Knowing that we don't really know, seeing that we have not truly seen, listening to voices that we have not heard: these today are expressions of this Lutheran root.

"When we commit to access and accessibility, we live out of a complicated and ever-reforming Lutheran tradition that is rooted in understanding the truth of paradox and struggle, the value of accompaniment and discernment, and the hope of new life."

It is important that we lean into the hope and ultimately the freedom that this foundation affords us all. When we commit to access and accessibility, we live out of a complicated and ever-reforming Lutheran tradition that is rooted in understanding the truth of paradox and struggle, the value of accompaniment and discernment, and the hope of new life. The work is complicated, and it's ultimately worth doing, so that we can witness more stories from transformed lives and renewed communities.

## Endnotes

1. Martin Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness (1519)," in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), 31:302.
2. Martin Luther, "Freedom of a Christian," 365.
3. Rahima Waheed, "Wartburg is our village." Online: <https://www.wartburg.edu/rahima-wartburg-is-our-village/>
4. Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," 53.

# 2024 VHLE Conference: “Rooting Access” Panel Talking Points

“What Can We Learn From an Evolving & Complicated Biblical Depiction of Access?”



- The Bible is considered authoritative within Christianity in general and Lutheranism in particular. The Reformation doctrine of sola Scriptura affirms that Scripture should be understood as the sole source of divine revelation, the only inspired, infallible, final, and authoritative norm of faith and practice. While this doctrine has been used to promote the idea that there is a singular, consistent biblical perspective, the Bible reveals that human understanding is flawed and must always be open to change and evolution.

- The Bible is a mess. It is a collection of writings by dozens of authors and redactors spanning over

1000 years. You can find texts in the Bible that support virtually any perspective or position you can think of. Critics of the Bible often say it is useless because it is full of contradictions, and defenders of the Bible frequently deny its contradictions. Both critics and defenders are motivated by a belief that the Bible can *only* be meaningful if it presents a clear and consistent perspective that represents the unchanging will of God.

- However, both Bible critics and Bible defenders fail to understand what the Bible actually represents. The Bible is meaningful not because it presents a singular perspective but instead because it presents an **ongoing evolution of thinking**, which is always messy and complicated. Many books in the Bible are conversing with each other, and there is much we can learn from that conversation. When we learn to read the Bible as an ongoing conversation, we witness an evolution of thinking regarding various topics and issues. For our brief time together today, I want to look at the continuing conversation and evolution of thought regarding the issue of “accessibility.”

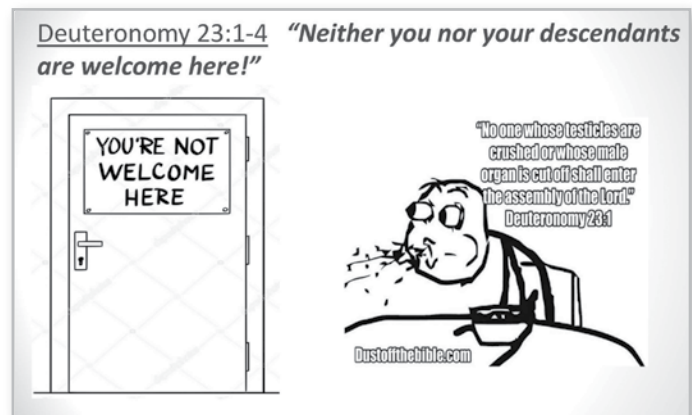
While the Bible’s depiction of “access” is complicated and messy, we can learn much from the *evolving* biblical message.



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## Deuteronomy 23:1-3

- Dating biblical texts is a challenging and, at times, contentious practice. There is rarely scholarly unanimity regarding the assigning of dates to biblical texts. The internal evidence of Deuteronomy indicates several stages of composition and editing. While the book of Deuteronomy refers to a much earlier time, most scholars date the stages of composition between the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Samaria (721 BCE) and the beginning of the Judean restoration (535 BCE). The text, therefore, spans an almost 200-year window. Let's take a look at Deut 23:1-3.
- The explicit exclusionary perspective of this text is undeniable. Christians and people who embrace this text as part of their sacred collection of writings cannot ignore or deny the hatred and bigotry contained in the text. Trying to do so or making excuses for the text is "inexcusable."
- The text comprises one of the many biblical texts that feminist biblical scholar Phyllis Trible calls "Texts of Terror." The text proclaims a divine mandate to exclude people based on genital impairment, based on what was considered at that time to be improper [i.e., "illicit"] sexual unions, and based on ethnic identity. Descendants of such people were also excluded. While contemporary readers rightfully condemn this text, later biblical writers also condemned the text.
- While it is uncertain if the book of Ruth was written as a direct challenge to the prohibition against Moabites found in the book of Deuteronomy (as well as the prohibitions against foreign wives presented in the book of Ezra), it is clear that Ruth presents a competing and conflicting depiction. The story of Ruth is about a Moabite woman who was the great-grandmother of David, one of Israel's most famous kings. As the great-grandson of a Moabite woman, David falls within the "tenth generation" of descendants excluded from the Lord's assembly by Deuteronomy. Ruth clearly presents an evolving understanding of "accessibility."



***"No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall come into the assembly of the LORD. Those born of an illicit union shall not come into the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall come into the assembly of the LORD. No Ammonite or Moabite shall come into the assembly of the LORD, even to the tenth generation. None of their descendants shall come into the assembly of the LORD forever..."***

Wait a minute.... What about **King David**?

**Ruth 1:1, 4, 16**

*"In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of **Moab**, he and his wife and two sons.... These [two sons] took **Moabite** wives; the name of one was Orpah, and the name of the other **Ruth**.... But Ruth said, 'Do not press me to leave you, to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; **your people shall be my people and your God my God.**'"*

**Ruth 4:13, 17**

*So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. When they came together, the LORD made her conceive, and she bore a son.... The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, 'A son has been born to Naomi.' They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.*

## Isaiah 56:1-8

- Like Deuteronomy, the book of Isaiah also spans more than 200 years. Scholars often divide the book into three periods, referring to the first 39 chapters of Isaiah as “First Isaiah,” chapters 40-55 as “Second Isaiah,” and chapters 56-66 as “Third Isaiah.”
- Third Isaiah presupposes an audience that has returned to the land of Judah *after* the exile. The people have intermarried with so-called “foreigners” and have raised families of mixed ethnicities while in captivity. In returning to their homeland of Judah, they also find new ethnic groups living in the land. The author of Third Isaiah challenges the xenophobia and ethnic purity exhibited in the book of Deuteronomy.
- Most biblical scholars understand Isaiah 56:1-8 as a direct challenge to the teaching and instructions found in Deuteronomy 23. As with the book of Ruth, this passage presents an evolving understanding of “accessibility.”



**“Thus says the LORD: ‘Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed.... Do not let the foreigner joined to the LORD say, “The LORD will surely separate me from his people,” and do not let the eunuch say, “I am just a dry tree.” ...the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,... these I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”**

## Acts 10

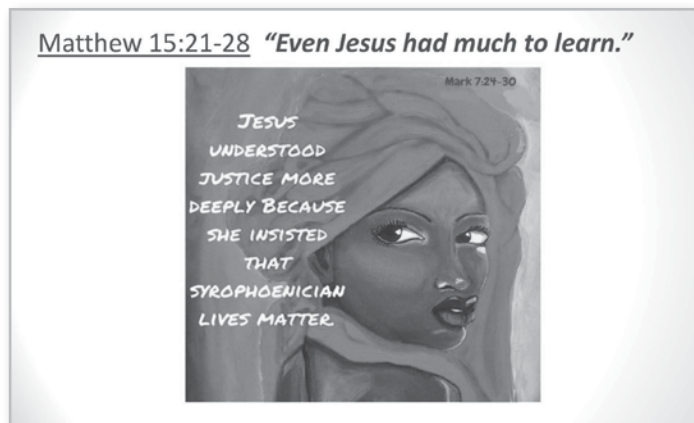
- The book of Acts presents a so-called “history” of the birth and development of the community of Jesus-followers, which will eventually become known as “the Church.” A vital component of that development is the expansion and evolution of the Jesus community from an exclusively Jewish community to a community of Jews and Gentiles (i.e., non-Jews). Within the traditional Jewish worldview at that time, there were essentially two types of people in the world: there were “the people of God” (i.e., “Jews”), and there was everyone else (i.e., “Gentiles”). Acts 10 is one of the many stories challenging this dichotomy. Once again, this passage presents an evolving understanding of “accessibility.”



**“About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the heaven open and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures, reptiles, and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’ But Peter said, ‘By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.’ The voice said to him again, a second time, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane.’ This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.... Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared.... As he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled, and he said to them, “You yourselves know that it is improper for a Jew to associate with or to visit an outsider, but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean....Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every people, anyone who fears God and practices righteousness is acceptable to God.... While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles....”**

## Matthew 15:21-28

- The last passage is from the gospel of Matthew. While the slide references the version of the story found in Mark's Gospel, which most scholars believe to be older than Matthew's version, I will be referencing Matthew's version because I think the change the author of Matthew makes is significant.
- As we consider this passage, I want to introduce the notion of "privilege" and how it hinders "access." The author's decision to identify the woman in this story as a "Canaanite" is significant. There is a long history in the Bible of divinely sanctioned violence by Israelites against Canaanites. In the biblical story of Israel's god giving the "Promised Land" to the Israelites, God is depicted as giving instructions to the Israelites to enter into the homeland of other people, to take their land, and to destroy and kill every living being in the land. Canaanites are among the people to be killed (Deut 20:10-18). The "Promised Land" story reveals the way "Israelites thought of ethnic" others. It also illustrates how, throughout human history, people have used "God" to legitimate hatred and violence against other people by claiming such violence to be God's will.
- Fast-forward approximately 1200 years to the time of Jesus. By identifying this woman as a "Canaanite," the author of Matthew invokes the memory of this violent historical past between Jews and Canaanites. In Mark's version of the story, the woman is identified as "Syrophoenician." Matthew's change of the woman's identity appears to be deliberate.
- By the time of Jesus, people in this region were no longer called "Canaanites." It would be like Americans today calling someone from New York a "New Amsterdamian." While New York used to be New Amsterdam, it ceased being New Amsterdam hundreds of years ago. The author's decision to identify the woman as a "Canaanite" not only emphasized her ethnic *otherness* but also challenged the author's audience to reflect on a long history of ethnic hatred.
- After Jesus initially ignores the woman, and the disciples urge him to "send her away" (even though she is a resident of the region and they are the ones who are visiting), Jesus tells the woman, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Jesus informs her that he was not sent to help her, her daughter, or her people. Jesus is not only denying the woman "access," he is also denying "access" to an entire population of people.



*"Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then, a **Canaanite** woman from that region came out and started shouting, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.' But he did not answer her at all. And **his disciples** came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.' He answered, 'I was sent **only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**' But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and **throw it to the dogs.**' She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed from that moment."*

- After the woman continues to beg for his help, Jesus replies with a vulgar response that reveals his understanding of his ethnic “privilege.” He tells the woman, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” I don’t know how any reader—especially an African American or female reader—can read this story without being troubled. As an African-American man who has and continues to experience the pain and humiliation of racism, this particular passage of scripture has always been problematic for me. I am uncomfortable, therefore, with anyone who tries to defend or make theological excuses or legitimations for Jesus’ behavior.
- While I find Jesus’ comparison of this woman, her daughter, and their people to dogs quite disturbing, I believe part of the message of this text is found amid this disturbance. Most biblical scholars believe that Matthew was written for a predominantly Jewish audience during a time when Gentiles were beginning to join the community of “Jesus-followers.” A story about the tenacity and faithfulness of a “Canaanite” woman would have not only highlighted the non-Jewish identity of these new members of the Jesus-following community, but it would have also caused the original audience of Matthew to reflect upon long and deep-seated prejudices harbored against ethnic (and religious) others.
- Matthew’s story highlights the realities of ethnic and biological “privilege” in order to challenge such privilege. The story reveals how easily people can be influenced by the prevailing sexist, racist, and ethnocentric views of their time and their culture. Even Jesus was influenced by such views. Jesus initially used his privilege to preserve an advantage for himself and his people while denying access to this woman and her people.
- In considering access, it’s essential for us as ELCA institutions to recognize how we might unwittingly privilege Christianity above other religious traditions, thereby creating a unique advantage for Christians, resulting in various denials of access to people of different religious traditions.

“The story reveals how easily people can be influenced by the prevailing sexist, racist, and ethnocentric views of their time and their culture. Even Jesus was influenced by such views.”

“In considering access, it’s essential for us as ELCA institutions to recognize how we might unwittingly privilege Christianity above other religious traditions, thereby creating a unique advantage for Christians, resulting in various denials of access to people of different religious traditions.”

- In Matthew’s version of this story, the author uses a Canaanite woman—a marginalized ethnic “other”—to challenge the ethnic privileging of the author’s time. The woman advocated for herself, her daughter, and her people, even though it meant confronting and challenging more than a thousand years of prejudice.
- While there is much more that needs to be said about the specifics of her challenge as well as Jesus’ response, I will conclude here simply by asserting that while Jesus still has a long way to go in this text, the challenge posed to Jesus by this “Canaanite” woman forced him to reflect upon his own cultural privilege and consider how he used that privilege to deny “access” to others.

### What can we learn from these biblical passages?

The *evolving* biblical message regarding “access” offers a hopeful perspective on improving “educational access” on our campuses. The passages reveal how **WE** and our institutions have to be open to change. When talking about “access” we often have a tendency to talk about “*student readiness*” rather than “*institutional readiness*.” While we often complain about students not being “ready” for college and focus on how to help **THEM** become better prepared for college so they can succeed, we rarely focus on how to better prepare our institutions to be “ready” for a diversity of students so that all students can succeed. The issue isn’t just about improving “*student readiness*” but also bolstering “*institutional readiness*.” This shift in thinking and focus presents opportunities for positive *evolution* in our thinking about “educational access.”

### Two Questions ~ ten-minute conversation



Tell a story about a time when a student challenged or changed one of your habits or practices in your work on campus (classroom, office, department, etc.). What was that experience like for you?



Discuss what it would mean for YOUR institution to shift the focus from “*student readiness*” to “*institutional readiness*.” What would that look and/or sound like on your campus?

### What can we learn from these biblical passages?

- The evolving biblical message regarding “access” offers a hopeful perspective on improving “educational access” on our campuses. The passages reveal how we and our institutions must be open to change. When talking about “access,” we often tend to talk about “student readiness” rather than “institutional readiness.” While we frequently complain about students not being “ready” for college and focus on how to help them become better prepared for college so they can succeed, we rarely focus on how we can better prepare our institutions to be “ready” for a diversity of students so that all students can succeed. The issue isn’t just about improving “student readiness.” We also have to improve “institutional readiness.” This shift in thinking and focus presents opportunities for positive evolution in our thinking about “educational access.”

**SAVE THE  
DATE**

## Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education Conference

Augsburg University, Minneapolis, Minnesota  
July 14-16, 2025 | TOPIC: TBA

# Affirming, Entrusting, and Acting: A Baptismal Grounding of Affirmative Action in Lutheran Higher Education



“How do you define affirmative action in the context of Lutheran (NECU) higher education, and what are its main objectives?”

This provocative question was asked to those of us who attended this past summer’s Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education Conference at

Augsburg University after a panel discussion on our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion at institutions of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU).

We were asked to respond to this question while gathered in small groups with colleagues who occupy similar positions at other NECU institutions.

When this question came up on the screen, it immediately stimulated my imagination.

I thought perhaps, as the whitest Christian denomination in North America, institutions of the ELCA had little to say about the practice of affirmative action in our society.

As institutions grounded by the vision presented in “Rooted and Open: The Common Calling of the Network of

ELCA Colleges and Universities,” I began to imagine how it was that Lutheran theology and practice might support and affirm the ways our institutions strive to create spaces for all students, particularly for those who come from under-represented populations on our campuses.

To this end, I asked myself, “Where in the shared practice of Lutheran communities do we make affirmations and where do we take action?”

As a Lutheran pastor, I immediately thought of the sacrament of baptism because it is through baptism that individuals are welcomed and incorporated into the community of the church.

Baptism is a sign of radical welcome into a community, where the baptized now unconditionally belong.

To do this, the Lutheran baptism liturgy includes a moment where the pastor presiding over the baptism asks the entire

“Where in the shared practice of Lutheran communities do we make affirmations and where do we take action?”

**Peter Carlson Schattauer** (he/him/his) serves as the Associate Director of the Lutheran Center for Faith, Values, and Community at St. Olaf College. A Minister of Word and Sacrament in the ELCA, Schattauer previously served as Associate Pastor at Advent Lutheran Church, Maple Grove, MN and as Pastoral Intern at Gethsemane Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. A graduate of St. Olaf College and Yale Divinity School, Schattauer’s work focuses on connecting students, staff, and faculty to the work of the Center and promoting partnerships with student organizations and across campus. | schatt2@stolaf.edu

gathered assembly to make a profession of their faith.

In this profession of faith, the pastor asks the assembly a series of six questions. The first three ask the gathered assembly to renounce ways of the world that defy God's desire for humanity and creation, including evil and sin. The second three ask the assembly what they believe, using the words of the Apostles's Creed to affirm faith.

The assembly is ritually asked what they say "no" to and what they say "yes" to. In their responses, they make affirmative statements about the content of their belief.<sup>1</sup>

Earlier in the liturgy, the presiding minister lists the responsibilities that are entrusted to those who are baptized, concluding with the effect these responsibilities have on the baptized, namely "so that [they] may learn to trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace."<sup>2</sup>

In the sacrament, the act of affirming belief entrusts the baptized with responsibilities, through which they are called to action in the world.

"Because similar to the way the gathered assembly affirms what they are for in the baptismal liturgy, our colleges and universities are also called to affirm what it is that we are for."

Action that promotes care, justice, and peace in our world.

As all these thoughts swirled in my head, I shared some of these initial ideas with colleagues at the conference. Speaking together, they helped me articulate a connection between my thinking and our shared work. Because similar to the way the gathered assembly affirms what they are for in the baptismal liturgy, our colleges and universities are also called to affirm what it is that we are for.

In "Rooted and Open," the authors affirm that "In their appreciation and cultivation of diversity in its many forms, Lutheran colleges and universities welcome all and learn from all."<sup>3</sup>

This is an affirmation echoed by many of our schools in mission statements and college or university values. At my own school, St. Olaf College, our mission statement specifically names that we strive for our students to learn in an "inclusive, globally engaged community."<sup>4</sup>

In this mission, we make an affirmative statement about the community of which we are a part.

"As the sacrament of baptism reminds us, our affirmations also entrust us with responsibilities, which move us towards action in our communities and the world."

But, as the sacrament of baptism reminds us, our affirmations also entrust us with responsibilities, which move us towards action in our communities and the world.

The questions for our communities, then, are: What responsibilities do our affirmations to create diverse, inclusive communities create for us? And what actions do our responsibilities call us towards?

A Lutheran perspective on affirmative action argues that we will create truly inclusive and just communities when we clearly affirm our commitments, name the responsibilities that our affirmation entrusts to us, and act in ways that embody our affirmations.

May our work be grounded in such affirmations, responsibilities, and actions that we continue to move our communities to be places of belonging so that all our students may flourish.

## Endnotes

1. "Holy Baptism," in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 229.

2. Ibid, 228

3. "Rooted and Open," May 18, 2018, [https://elcamediaresources.blob.core.windows.net/cdn/wp-content/uploads/Rooted\\_and\\_Open.pdf](https://elcamediaresources.blob.core.windows.net/cdn/wp-content/uploads/Rooted_and_Open.pdf).

4. "Mission," About St. Olaf, June 7, 2023, <https://wp.stolaf.edu/about/mission/>.

MELISSA WOEPPEL

## Reflecting on Belonging



As someone who works at my own alma mater, I've spent much time thinking about what it means to call this place "home." As a young woman from a small, rural community in Nebraska, moving to a small town in Kansas didn't feel like a huge stretch. In fact, I remember telling people that

was something that drew me here. By student population, Bethany College was about the same size as my high school at the time. I was excited to be 3 hours away from home and in a different state, knowing I could feel at home here. Although I'm not Swedish, I look much like some of the first students at this institution as a white, Lutheran, farm kid.

While there was certainly great diversity represented when I was a student, that only accelerated over the 8 years I was away following graduation. In this community, we know the story of our founding well. Founded in 1881 by white, Swedish Lutheran settlers, Bethany College came into being to provide access to education for the Swedes who immigrated to this place. Very early on, the education of women was also a priority. These are stories Bethany College and the wider Lindsborg community tell through festivals, traditions, and our local culture. As I think about

this legacy, I wonder what this means to the students who call this place home today.

One of our own NECU students shared, "I don't want to feel like I'm being welcomed into your home. I want to feel like this is my home, like I belong." As students return to our campus this fall, this articulation of belonging has stuck with me.

It is good and lovely that our NECU institutions have been home to so many of us. And...there is room to do some wrestling with our welcoming and the stories we tell. What do these Swedish, Lutheran, immigrant roots mean for our students who come from 38 states and 21 countries, who represent 35 faith traditions and a wide breadth of ethnic and cultural diversity? At Bethany, we've begun to think about these questions, but these experiences aren't yet part of our institutional story.

Dr. Mindy Makant (Lenoir-Rhyne University) was on campus recently leading some vocational reflection with faculty and staff. While she invited us to think about our vocational stories, she shared, "We don't have a choice about the story of the past, but we do get to decide how we tell that story forward." We get to choose how who we have been shapes and informs who God is calling us to be.

By telling these stories forward, claiming them, and living them, we can decide to make space for our students in their fullness. By doing so, we are celebrating them and making space for their stories, too.

**Melissa Woepfel, MDiv**, is the Campus Pastor at Bethany College, where she oversees spiritual development and is an advocate of the College's mission and identity. Her work is grounded in the belief and practice that there is a place for everyone. | [woepfelm@bethanylb.edu](mailto:woepfelm@bethanylb.edu)



The theme for *Intersections* in Spring 2025 is “Vocation as Balancing Act: Mission-driven and Tuition-driven.” We invite written or artistic pieces from any perspective within the university that emphasize the difficulties of being driven by both mission and tuition, pursuing vocation while also paying bills. More broadly, the Spring issue invites us to engage practical realities of vocation. We invite:

- A brief insight from your research, coursework, teaching, or advocacy
- Your perspective based on your campus/position/location
- Student perspectives on any of the above—art, posters, essays, blogs

Contributions are due February 15, 2025. 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](mailto:windhamh@callutheran.edu)

# CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

# Intersections

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Rock Island, IL 61201-2296

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