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## Our Calling in Education

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## Prologue: Education and Vocation

The calling of Lutherans and of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in education is closely tied to a Lutheran understanding of vocation. While many understand vocation as a job or career or as the call to be a pastor or priest, Lutherans understand vocation as a calling from God that encompasses all of life for all the faithful.

Vocation involves God's saving call to us in baptism and life lived in joyful response to this call. In Jesus Christ we are loved by a gracious God who frees us to love our neighbor and promote the common good; in gratitude for God's love, we live out our vocation in our places of responsibility in daily life—home, congregation, work place, neighborhood, nation, and global society.

Education belongs to our baptismal vocation. Our particular calling in education is two-fold: to educate people in the Christian faith for their vocation and to strive with others to ensure that all have access to high quality education that develops personal gifts and abilities and serves the common good. This calling embraces all people in both Church and society.

We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America express gratitude for homes and congregations that carry out this calling in education. We give thanks to God for other institutions and individuals in all of education's varied settings: for public, Lutheran, and other private early childhood education centers, schools, colleges, and universities; for outdoor ministries and for campus ministries; and for all who live out their vocation as students, parents, pastors, lay professionals, teachers, administrators, staff members, directors, board members, and trustees in these educational settings.

The ELCA's calling in education recognizes special responsibilities and accountability in certain specific areas:

- It affirms the essential role of parents and congregations in the faith formation of young people and urge revitalization of the baptismal commitment to educate in the faith for vocation, a commitment that continues throughout life.
- In light of the essential role of public education in serving the common good of the society and in the face of continuing concern for the effectiveness of some public schools, the lack of equitable access for many students to high quality schools, and the often inadequate provision of financial resources, the ELCA affirms and advocates for the equitable, sufficient, and effective funding of public schools.

- In view of the expanding role of ELCA early childhood education centers and schools in providing outreach and distinctive religious educational opportunities to growing numbers of children, this church affirms these schools and encourage synods, pastors, congregations, and members to claim and support this unique mission opportunity.
- In gratitude for the extraordinary work of ELCA colleges and universities in preparing students for vocation in the Church and world and for ELCA seminaries in their preparation of leaders for our church, this church affirms the role of these institutions and encourages them to sustain and strengthen those elements that distinguish the Lutheran tradition in higher education and theological education.
- In gratitude for public higher education and the vital role of ELCA campus ministries in public and private universities and in recognition of the special cultural, missional, and financial challenges they face, the ELCA affirms these ministries and urges new and creative collaborative efforts in their support.
- In recognition of the growing costs of Lutheran, public, and private higher education, which limit access for many students, the ELCA affirms foundations, corporations, congregations, institutions, and individuals who provide financial assistance to students and urge both state and federal governments to expand grant funding for low- and middle-income students who need it.

## 1. What Does God Have to Do with Education?

Education, as understood in this social statement, refers in a broad sense to learning, teaching, and knowing as a dimension of human life. It is a lifelong activity that permeates all that we do. In a narrower sense, education refers to intentional activity in which we engage one another in learning. People create institutions and situations whose purposes are to encourage, transmit, and advance human learning and to shape and equip new generations. Through education human beings are formed as people, acquiring knowledge, wisdom, attitudes, beliefs, skills, and abilities to think, feel, and act in particular ways.

When the Christian church talks about education, it does so in the light of its faith in God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christians believe that God creates human beings with ability to learn, teach, and know and that God is active in and through education. God's creative activity encompasses all people and their education, and the redeeming gospel of Jesus Christ gives the Church a distinctive mandate in education.

### *The Lutheran Legacy*

From the time of the Reformation, the Lutheran church has been a teaching and learning church. Martin Luther, a university professor, pursued the reform of education on all levels as an integral part of his reform of Church and society. With his teaching on vocation, Luther understood the Christian life to be one of service to God and neighbor in one's everyday places of responsibility; education equipped Christians for this vocation. He taught that education served the common good of Church and society: In a move unusual for his day, he taught that schools for all—both those who were wealthy and those who were poor, both boys and girls—were necessary so that the Church would have learned and faithful pastors and the civil community would have wise and good rulers.<sup>1</sup> He insisted that Christians learn to read, understand, and interpret the Bible and know the content of their faith. He stressed the importance of teaching faith and love in the home by word and example, writing "The Small Catechism" to assist parents in this task.<sup>2</sup>

Lutherans in North America and the Caribbean followed Luther's call to educate in home, Church, and society. They prayed and held devotions in the home, taught the faith in Sunday school and through catechetical instruction, founded schools, colleges, and seminaries of all sorts, and established campus ministries and outdoor ministries. They strongly supported public education, and many Lutherans have carried out their calling as educators in a wide array of educational institutions. This legacy lives on in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as one of its defining characteristics.

### *The God Who Calls Us*

In baptism Christians are called to live in faith and hope in God and in love to neighbor in the ordinary relationships of daily life. God's wondrous and awesome call to us gives joy, confidence, seriousness, and purpose to all of life. It holds together faith and love, God and neighbor, the individual and community, and a person's gifts and the needs of others and of the earth. In our places of responsibility in family, work, society, and Church, God's living call comes to us to serve others, seek justice, promote the common good, and care for creation competently and creatively with our gifts and abilities. This Lutheran understanding of vocation is especially important for our approach to education today.

Faith in the God who calls provides a critical and constructive perspective to guide Christians in their calling in education today.<sup>3</sup>

### *The God Who Calls Us Is "the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth"*

God's good creation, with its amazing variety and diversity, presents the context for vocation. A

- how well the options prepare the student for life with and for service to others in a complex, diverse, global society; and
- the affordability of each option.

Because education is a shared responsibility, the ELCA encourages parents to consult with others who may be of assistance in making their decision.

#### 4. Will Our Church Have Schools and Colleges? Will Our Schools and Colleges Have a Church?

##### *The Commitment to*

##### *Lutheran Educational Institutions*

In a living tradition devoted to educating in the faith for vocation in the Church and world, it is not surprising to find that institutions of learning and teaching have been integral and vital to its life and mission. “When schools flourish,” Luther was recorded as saying, “then things go well and the church is secure. Let us have learned citizens and teachers. The youth furnish recruits for the church; they are the source of its well-being. If there were no schools, who would there be to take our place when we die? In the church we are forced to have schools. God has preserved the church through schools; they are its conservatories.”<sup>28</sup> Since the Reformation Lutherans have taken on the demanding task of establishing and maintaining educational institutions in hope and commitment to equip a new generation to witness to the gospel and carry out their vocation in society.

A steward of this tradition, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has an extensive network of educational institutions to benefit Church and society. In 2006, ELCA congregations owned and operated 267 elementary schools, 18 high schools, and 1722 early childhood centers, involving more than 225,000 students.<sup>29</sup> Twenty-eight colleges and universities are affiliated with this church, which enrolled nearly 58,000 students in 2007.<sup>30</sup> There are eight ELCA seminaries, and dozens of centers and programs for continuing education.<sup>31</sup> Under the auspices of the three seminary clusters, other educational programs and institutions of the ELCA are joining as interdependent lifelong learning partners with the seminaries to expand access to lifelong learning in the faith for all the baptized by building a theological education network. The ELCA’s Study of Theological Education, adopted by the Churchwide Assembly in 1995, guides the building of this new network.<sup>32</sup>

What are the ELCA’s hopes for and commitment to the future of its schools (early childhood education centers through high school), colleges, and universities? All are highly prized by the constituencies that directly support and benefit from them, yet they are too often not well known or appreciated by many ELCA members. For the most part all must find their

own financial support. Yet we face an opportune moment. The number of schools is growing, and many colleges and universities are reclaiming their Lutheran connections. This situation provokes the question: Will our schools and colleges and universities have a church—laity, pastors, bishops, congregations, synods, seminaries, and churchwide organization— that affirms and supports them?

This church’s fervent hope is that it be so. We affirm anew our historic commitment to Lutheran schools and colleges and universities and encourage its deepening and extension. If we follow through on this commitment, then, yes, this church will have vibrant schools and colleges and universities, benefitting both Church and society and valued as indispensable educational arms of this church’s mission.

##### *Lutheran Schools and Centers*

ELCA congregations are becoming increasingly involved in offering preschool, elementary, and secondary education to their surrounding neighborhoods. From 1995 to 2006 the number of schools and centers grew by 15 percent, and many congregations continue to express interest in beginning a school or center.<sup>33</sup> This remarkable development means that today nearly one of every five ELCA congregations operates some type of school.

Through their schools and centers, congregations aim to offer a strong academic education in a caring Christian environment. By word and example, teachers, administrators, and pastors seek to motivate students to learn and nurture their gifts in service to others in response to God’s love for them. Students learn in a setting where they pray, sing, and worship, and where they study the Bible, the Church’s beliefs, and Christian moral teachings. Families who send their children to Lutheran schools and centers take on an extra financial burden. Often families desire that their children be firmly educated in the faith to prepare them for engaging aspects of a culture that they perceive to be indifferent to or in conflict with the Christian faith.

Lutheran schools and centers enroll students of different religious, ethnic, cultural, and economic backgrounds. At least 17 percent of children who attended Lutheran schools in 2005 were people of color other than white, a percentage more than five times higher than ELCA congregations as a whole.<sup>34</sup> Students and teachers are especially diverse in urban settings. Through the care and witness of faculty, staff, pastor, and congregational members, Lutheran schools and centers offer students and their families opportunity to hear the gospel and, if desired, to become part of the congregation. In so doing they have proven to be a significant means of evangelizing unchurched families. They also have been important in educating many

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children who later became leaders in this church and in society.

Lutheran schools and centers face many challenges in offering excellent education in a caring Christian environment. They work, for example, to maintain low tuition while providing fair and adequate salaries for their staffs, to find rightly qualified teachers and administrators, and to develop a wholesome relationship between congregation and school and center. Schools and centers serving the poorest neighborhoods are often the most fragile, under resourced, and in need of the most improvement.

We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America view Lutheran centers and schools as a significant part of this church's mission; commend congregations that sponsor them; and honor the teachers, administrators, staff, and pastors who work in them. Wherever they exist, Lutheran schools and centers should be an integral part of a congregation's witness to the gospel and public service to the community. Congregations should fulfill their responsibility to provide oversight, support, and direction for their educational institutions.

#### ***Expectations of Lutheran Centers and Schools***

The ELCA expects our early childhood education centers and schools to continue serving this church's mission by:

- promoting academic excellence in age-appropriate ways according to accepted standards;
- reaching out to others with the good news of Jesus Christ;
- educating in the faith for vocation; and
- serving their community.

Lutheran schools and centers will offer a secure, welcoming, and caring learning environment for children of all cultural, ethnic, religious, and economic backgrounds, and special needs. As they are able, Lutheran Schools (sometimes in cooperation with public schools) are expected to make provision for students with special learning needs. They will provide scholarships for low-income students and involve families in their children's education. Lutheran schools and centers will offer service education and prepare students to be responsible citizens and productive members of society. They will work in partnership with other schools in their community.

#### ***Expectations of this Church***

In order to provide a more supportive climate for enacting this vision, the ELCA calls for renewed efforts to assist schools and centers in areas that include:

- expecting churchwide and synodical leadership and ELCA publications to promote Lutheran centers and schools;
- encouraging members to consider sending their children to Lutheran centers and schools;
- preparing pastors, associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers for service in congregations with centers and schools;
- encouraging our seminaries, colleges, and universities to prepare teachers, principals, pastors, and other staff for Lutheran centers and schools both in their degree programs and through in-service training;
- encouraging alliances for financial support for struggling centers and schools, such as pairing congregations in affluent areas with congregations in low-income areas;
- providing seed money to ensure that Lutheran centers and schools have a good foundation in areas of defining purpose, education, faith formation, governance, administration, and finance;
- strengthening the network among Lutheran schools to meet common opportunities and needs; and
- disseminating information on and ensuring equity in public funding for all children as laws require and the United States Constitution permits.

#### ***Lutheran Colleges and Universities***

##### ***A Tradition of Academic Excellence and Service***

"A Christian cobbler makes good shoes, not poor shoes with little crosses on them," Luther was reported to have said.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, Lutherans, out of commitment to the common good, have insisted that their colleges and universities have a first duty to be excellent schools. This has been and continues to be the case. Following the example of Luther's and Philip Melancthon's leadership at the time of the Reformation, Lutheran colleges and universities have conceived of education in holistic terms and shaped their academic programs in the liberal arts tradition. Today they appear regularly in lists of the best regional and national colleges.

ELCA colleges and universities perform valuable service to Church and society. At their best, they offer an excellent curriculum that aims at educating the whole person. Their emphasis on broad and integrated learning and critical thinking equips students for a whole life. Within this liberal arts context they prepare

students for professions in education, health care, science, technology, social work, the arts, business, law, and other specific callings, and they provide many future pastors and other future leaders in this church with a well-rounded education.

Furthermore, ELCA colleges and universities find excellent ways to introduce their students to the essential questions of meaning and purpose. Many prominently feature the Lutheran teaching on vocation—that the purpose of life is to serve God and the neighbor in one's callings in everyday life. More specifically, many ELCA colleges and universities also educate students in the faith by offering—and often requiring—courses in Bible, theology, church history, and ethics. They help students engage the intellectual claims of the faith with the claims of other disciplines.<sup>36</sup> They sustain strong programs of service to the neighbor in both local and global settings. They offer opportunities for worship, Bible study, mentoring, and participation in strong music programs that praise God. When they take their heritage seriously, they impart a vision of the world in which Christian faith plays the central integrating role. Graduates testify and a comprehensive national survey confirms that Lutheran colleges and universities have a positive and lasting impact on students in matters related to academic quality, faith, ethics, civic engagement, and church affiliation and leadership.<sup>37</sup>

### ***The Changing Context***

In the history of higher education in the United States, many church-founded institutions of higher learning have disengaged from their sponsoring churches—some totally, some partially. Nearly all church-related colleges have experienced some measure of disengagement from both the institutional church and from the religious heritage that once influenced nearly every facet of the college's life. ELCA colleges and universities represent a broad range on the spectrum of engagement. Most have maintained a significant connection with their Lutheran heritage, and many are giving renewed attention to their Christian identity in a world of many faiths and cultures.

ELCA colleges and universities persist in their mission as church-related colleges in the midst of a sharply changing environment that brings both opportunity and challenge. The major opportunity is that they will continue to be excellent schools that bring the Lutheran voice to bear in an increasingly global, ecumenical, diverse, and competitive educational scene. This church's colleges and universities can continue to embody in a vastly new environment a persuasive vision of Christian higher education that is embedded in the Lutheran tradition. Especially encouraging are the vigorous global outreach programs on many campuses, the affirmation of Lutheran distinctiveness in a changing and sometimes hostile culture, and the growing cultural and ethnic

diversity in many settings. Among the challenges are that our colleges and universities might lose their connection with the Christian heritage completely, that they may lose their academic vitality due to inadequate resources, that their costs might exceed the financial resources of most Lutherans, or that they may not achieve the diversity they seek.

### ***Life in Relationship***

A strong and vibrant relationship between this church and its institutions of higher learning assumes mutual commitments. In shaping the future of that relationship, this church may ask whether or not its colleges and universities are authentically and recognizably Christian in the Lutheran tradition, urging them to manifest that identity. Conversely, colleges and universities that are faithful to their Christian character may ask whether or not this church vigorously supports them: Will congregations encourage students to consider an ELCA college or university? Will pastors and bishops promote them? Will ELCA high school graduates attend our colleges and universities? In these matters the ELCA will need to manifest its commitment to its colleges and universities.

Due to shrinking resources and competing priorities, there has been a forty-year decline in churchwide and synodical financial support for colleges and universities. The ELCA is grateful that Lutheran colleges and universities have developed alternative sources of financial support, and many individual Lutherans are generous and faithful benefactors. It has provided advocacy and support, maintained a strong network among college leaders, provided leadership development opportunities for faculty and staff, nurtured the conversation between faith and learning, and provided valuable research to assist the colleges and universities in their mission. Fortress Press, the academic arm of this church's publishing ministry, continues to publish texts in biblical studies, theology, ethics, and pastoral care that are used widely in ELCA colleges and universities as well as in this church's seminaries.

In the future as in the past, the survival and flourishing of ELCA colleges and universities will depend on a delicate ecology of school, church, and family. Where the colleges and universities live out their calling as significant ventures in Lutheran education, churches and families demonstrate interest and confidence in those institutions. Without the churches and families that give important support to Lutheran ventures in education, the colleges and universities may re-define themselves and their missions for people who will support them. The ecology that once made Lutheran colleges, churches, and families a viable interdependent organism must be shaped in ways that respond to these new realities and opportunities.

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The ELCA, therefore, urges its colleges and universities and this church in all its expressions to maintain their connections where they are strong, strengthen them where they are weak, and rebuild them where they are lacking. It calls for mutually beneficial relationships built on trust, commitment, and collaboration.

#### ***Expectations of ELCA Colleges and Universities***

In such a relationship the ELCA expects that its colleges and universities will:

- reaffirm their commitment to maintain a living connection with the Christian faith;
- offer excellent, broad education in service to Church and society in a setting of academic freedom;
- educate in the faith with courses in Bible, Lutheran theology, church history, and ethics;
- serve as incubators for the discovery of knowledge, preserve it in scholarly collections, and communicate it through scholarly publications;
- nurture an ongoing dialogue between the claims of the Christian faith and the claims of the many academic disciplines as well as explore issues at the crossroads of life;
- feature prominently the Lutheran teaching on vocation;
- embody important elements—worship, music and the arts, service, personal moral standards, international education— as part of the ongoing Lutheran ethos;
- maintain programs that serve as a liaison between the college or university and the various expressions of this church;
- make adequate provision to meet the needs of students with disabilities; and
- continue to attempt to make it financially possible for qualified students—especially Lutheran students—who desire to attend a Lutheran college or university to do so.

#### ***Expectations of this Church***

To make the relationship a mutual one, this church also expects that:

- the presiding bishop and synodical bishops will voice persistently and persuasively their commitment to our colleges and universities;
- the churchwide organization will demonstrate persistently and persuasively its commitment to this church's colleges and universities;
- the churchwide organization will continue its consultative and informative roles with ELCA

colleges and universities and foster contact and collaboration among them;

- synods will support colleges and universities on their territory in intentional and visible ways;
- colleges and universities, seminaries, synods, schools, and other ELCA institutions and ministries will initiate and welcome partnerships with one another;
- congregations will support colleges in helping them recruit students and in aiding students financially who attend ELCA colleges and universities;
- ELCA youth and their parents will give careful consideration to Lutheran colleges and universities; and
- advocacy ministries will call on lawmakers to find means of public support for students to attend private and religious colleges and universities and urge lawmakers in those states that make grants to students going to private colleges to maintain them at the highest level possible.

This church individually and corporately should give its schools, colleges, and universities its full loyalty and support so that they faithfully and competently exercise their calling in education.

#### ***Supporting Lifelong Learning***

Education is a lifelong process and takes a variety of forms, involving non-formal learning experiences as well as each person's own more formal discipline and study. This ongoing learning may occur in museums, art galleries, planetariums, aquariums, theaters, concert halls, zoos, botanical gardens, nature preserves, book clubs, travel programs, and lecture series. We of the ELCA value and support these non-formal institutions and activities. We also affirm the more formal role of public universities, colleges, and other educational institutions in providing a broad range of extension and continuing education programs that serve an increasingly diverse adult population. We welcome the opportunities for learning provided by new forms of electronic communication.

Just as many congregations offer quality educational experiences for people of all ages to continue to grow in their faith, our Lutheran colleges and universities, seminaries, lifelong learning partners, and outdoor ministries also offer opportunities for lifelong learning in knowledge of the faith as well as in knowledge of the world. The ELCA commends Lutheran colleges and universities for expanding their academic programs to serve the needs of non-traditional students for both graduate and undergraduate studies. We also commend our seminaries and other study centers of this church for

responding to the learning needs of both lay and rostered leaders in congregations as well as to the desire of adults of all ages for personal growth in faith and knowledge through lifelong learning.

We urge the churchwide organization to continue to provide leadership and support to the institutions and agencies of the church that provide these essential educational services and to encourage them to deepen their interdependent partnership in a network that educates for vocation. In order that lifelong learning be encouraged and well-resourced, the full range of teaching institutions and programs in this church should continue their progress toward fulfillment of the vision of the ELCA's Study of Theological Education, deepening their emerging partnerships with the three seminary clusters to form an interdependent network of education providers throughout this church. Only such a network for lifelong learning is adequate both to our calling in education and the callings of all learners.

## 5. Will Public Higher Education Serve the Common Good?

### *Expectations for Public Universities and Colleges*

Higher education in the United States embraces a broad range of religious, private, and public colleges and universities. These academic institutions vary in their philosophy of education, history, culture, quality, specialties, cost, size, and status. This variety gives vitality to higher education, making it one of our country's strongest assets.

Public institutions are the most numerous institutions of higher education and serve the most students. Public four-year colleges and universities, public community colleges, and technical colleges provide the primary access point to higher education for millions of people of all economic classes and every racial and ethnic group, including thousands of international students. As public institutions, we as citizens share responsibility for them. Their future is vital to the common good, which we are to serve and promote as part of our vocation.

Institutions providing technical education make important contributions to the common good by preparing skilled professionals for careers in a wide range of trades and professions. Individuals prepared for these occupations are enabled to make their way in society and to serve their neighbors in practical ways.

We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America look to all colleges and universities to transmit knowledge through teaching, advance knowledge through research, preserve knowledge in scholarly collections, and communicate knowledge through publications.<sup>38</sup> They thereby contribute to the common good by connecting their knowledge to the world in which we live. Public universities and colleges do these things across a wide spectrum of disciplines. They teach undergraduate students the humanities, arts,

languages, and sciences; and their post-graduate programs educate professors and other professions such as doctors, lawyers, and scientists. Public universities along with many private universities are centers of basic scientific research and technological development. Their libraries and Internet resources make vast learning available, and publications by their professors profoundly influence our culture. They also sponsor continuing education for adults who have concluded formal degree programs but wish to continue learning throughout their lives.

### *The Commitment to Public Higher Education*

Lutherans have long had a commitment to public higher education. The ELCA is grateful for the role public universities and colleges play in preparing people—including most Lutherans who attend college—to act competently in their callings and responsibilities. Because knowledge of how the world functions and learning how to learn continue to benefit both individuals and society, we encourage vigorous public support for the many institutions of higher learning. As society's expectation increases about how many years of schooling people should have, the importance of public universities and colleges also increases.

The ELCA honors and supports the broad network of community and technical colleges and their students, faculties, and staffs. These institutions of higher education provide strategic opportunities for many students who wish to continue their education and obtain training in sought-for practical skills. In addition to preparing students for their careers, these educational institutions often invigorate the economies of their communities.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America expects all universities and colleges to be places of free inquiry that exhibit intellectual honesty, the disciplined search for knowledge and truth, and civility. We support the academic freedom of public higher education and oppose its restriction for ideological or political reasons. We expect that the diversity of perspectives among professors will enable public universities and colleges to be settings for genuine dialog on the major ideas and values that shape and often create controversy in our society.

Universities and colleges are charged to engage in ongoing discussion about what counts as knowledge in contrast to ignorance and misunderstanding. The boundaries and shape of this discussion change as new discoveries are made. This has led to new areas of inquiry such as the history of religion. It also has led to the study of peoples and cultures that may have been ignored or excluded, in the past. This church challenges and encourages public universities and colleges to take up the full range of religious traditions and their intellectual content as legitimate participants in their search for knowledge and truth.