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SPRING 2019

# Intersections

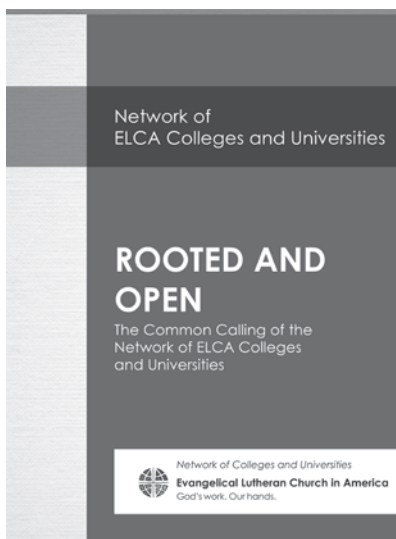
Faith, Learning, and the Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education



IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

## Rooted and Open

**Intersections** is a publication by and largely for the academic communities of the twenty-seven 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. It is published by the NECU, and has its home in the Presidential Center for Faith and Learning at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois, the institutional sponsor of the publication. **Intersections** extends and enhances discussions fostered by the annual Vocation of the Lutheran College 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.



This special issue of *Intersections* includes a copy of *Rooted and Open*, the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities' endorsed expression of the common calling of its member institutions. The unpaginated document can be found between pages 30 and 31; more information about the production and reception of *Rooted and Open* can be found on page 4.

## Intersections

Number 49 Spring 2019

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# About *Rooted and Open: The Common Calling of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities*

*Rooted and Open* is the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities' statement on Lutheran identity (or institutional vocation) in higher education. The full text is between pages 30-31 of this special issue of *Intersections*.

The development of this articulation of the "common calling" of our 27 institutions was a major project of NECU in its first years as our collegiate association in the ELCA. The statement was written to serve as a resource for NECU institutions. Since its adoption in January 2018, many NECU institutions have found *Rooted and Open* to be a helpful tool. We hope this issue of *Intersections* will encourage further use of this foundational document and assist with its interpretation.

Thank you to the faculty working group who donated their knowledge, wisdom, and time in the development and drafting of *Rooted and Open* in an 18-month period during 2016-17. Its members are listed below. Asterisks denote the persons who formed the writing team for *Rooted and Open*:

Marcia Bunge, Gustavus Adolphus College

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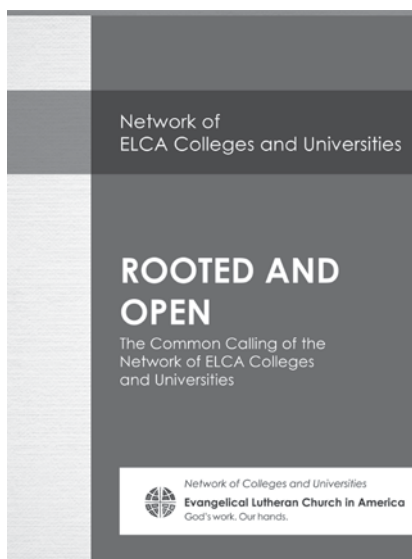
\*Jason Mahn, Augustana College

\*Martha (Marty) Stortz, Augsburg University

Samuel Torvend, Pacific Lutheran University

\*Mark Wilhelm, NECU

Ned Wisnefske, Roanoke College



By providing comments on a draft in the summer of 2017, NECU presidents gave further shape to *Rooted and Open*. A penultimate version was revised by Darrel Colson, President of Wartburg College, in collaboration with Mark Wilhelm, Executive Director of NECU, and members of NECU's Executive Committee. The presidents of NECU institutions unanimously adopted the document as an accurate and aspirational articulation of our shared institutional calling in January 2018.

This issue of *Intersections* begins with an essay by Mark Wilhelm that further elaborates on the background and goals of *Rooted and Open*. The other three members of the writing team offered additional context and analysis when presenting a draft to the NECU presidents in summer of 2017; revised versions of their remarks are included here as well. The remainder of the essays mark a variety of ways that *Rooted and Open* is being discussed and employed on NECU campuses—from a deep dive into its major claims with one university board of regents, to a case for moving from common calling to the particular callings of each institution (and back again), and again to the ways that our unique institutional callings can help us better support the "faithful nones" in our classrooms and to teach self-care to our students so that they might more reflectively and intentionally live out their own callings. May the issue be informative and inspirational as you live out your part of the shared vocation of Lutheran higher education.



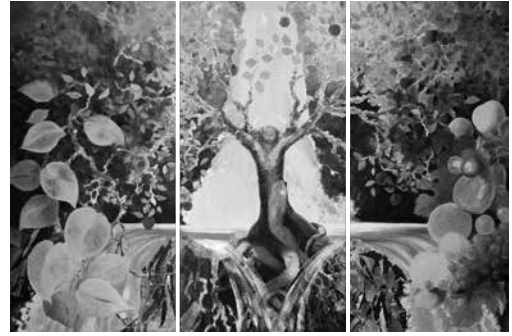
# About the Cover and Artist

Kristen Gilje ([www.kristengilje.com](http://www.kristengilje.com))

*Tree of Life*

Acrylic on Masonite panels, 8' x 12'

Theme painting for Holden Village Summer Program 1999



Kristen Gilje is a full-time artist who works in her Bellingham, Washington studio on art commissions for sacred spaces. She makes large colorful works on silk for seasonal use, which can be seen in churches from coast to coast. Kristen spent nine years as Artist in Residence at Holden Village, a Lutheran retreat center near Chelan, Washington, where she learned the value of making art for and with a worshiping community. A 1978 graduate from St. Olaf College, her senior concentration was entitled "Art as Expression of the Holy." Kristen has been combining ideas about art and theology in her work ever since. She says the following about *Tree of Life*:

I am fortunate to have worked as Artist in Residence for several years at Holden Village. Part of my work there was to create art to support each summer's theme. Revelation 22:1-2 was the theme chosen for Summer 1999:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (NRSV)

It is a vision of God's reign of peace and justice, of abundance and beauty. My task was to illustrate this scripture to help us visually understand what this text might mean for us, and how it might guide our actions and thoughts as children of God.

The most beautiful interpretation of this painting I heard while working on it. My studio was set up on the stage in the gymnasium we used as our Village Center. The painting was about half done. Out of nowhere a voice rang out, "Oh Wow! That's Yggdrasol!!!" It was someone I knew only as Lapidary Fred.

"What?" said I.

"That's Yggdrasol," he said again.

"Who's that?" I queried.

"Yggdrasol is the Norse Tree of Life, the oldest and first tree," he said. "It's also Prometheus, who was tied to a tree so the ravens could pluck out his eyes! And it is the Druid Tree Spirit. And of course it is a crucifix."

With a crazed look in his eyes Fred noted the faint halo over the head of the figure, and continued, "And don't you ever think that a halo is simply a reflection of the glory of God upon the head. The saints used to gather up energy from the ground, given to the earth by God to make abundance for the good of all." He pointed to the waterfall, the "river of the water of life," then the roots of the tree-figure. Then he spread his arms, imitating the figure, pointed to the fruits and the leaves, and continued: "The saints glowed from this God-given life energy moving through them! The person has just said thank you to God for this wonderful system. God has just said, 'You're welcome,' and they are sharing a moment of love."

Fred helped me verbalized the great beauty I found in the biblical text. God's creation is indeed a sacred and loving gift from God, where God is present "even in the tiniest leaf" as Martin Luther put it. How does this perspective of nature change our actions? How can this vision change our societies to be more equitable, providing abundance and flourishing for all? I'll leave that to you to think about.

# *Rooted and Open*: Background, Purpose, and Challenges

The Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU) issued *Rooted and Open* in January 2018 to express—in the words of its subtitle—NECU’s “common calling.” This essay briefly records *Rooted and Open*’s provenance. It also sketches even more briefly the document’s intended purpose and the challenges implied by the document.



## Backstory

The project that became *Rooted and Open* has its origins in discussions among leaders of Lutheran higher education that began in the mid-twentieth century. These occasional discussions focused on the identity and mission of Lutheran colleges and univer-

sities. They were part of a larger conversation that sought to understand the role of Christian higher education in the wake of the scientific method’s replacement of Christian doctrine as the unifying principle of higher education in North Atlantic culture. The transition from Christian doctrine to the scientific method had been underway in higher education in the United States since the mid-nineteenth century. But by mid-twentieth century, the change was largely complete, and Lutheran higher education leaders began to grapple with the implications of the change for the identity and mission of their institutions.<sup>1</sup>

Other social, economic, and cultural changes in the American Lutheran community and American society conspired with the shift in higher education’s unifying

principle to complicate the new, changed reality facing leaders of Lutheran colleges and universities.<sup>2</sup> But the primary issue facing Lutheran leaders was an academic one, namely, the replacement of Christian doctrine with the scientific method as the academic core of higher education. Given the shift, what was the role of religion at a college or university? How was the mission of higher education still a part of the mission of the Lutheran church?

“How was the mission of higher education still a part of the mission of the Lutheran church?”

Conrad Bergendoff, president in mid-twentieth century at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, seems to have been the first to challenge the Lutheran higher education community to address this fundamental question. Speaking at a meeting of a group known as the Association of Lutheran College Faculties in 1948, Bergendoff “issued a call for a Lutheran philosophy of education.” Bergendoff issued his call and asked, “In what ways are we unique?” (Narum 135).<sup>3</sup> This challenge initiated a fifty-year search for a convincing response.

**Mark Wilhelm** is the Executive Director of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities.

Lutheran church leaders framed the search to develop a Lutheran philosophy of education as a search for the proper integration of religion and learning or—to use the more common phrase—faith and reason. The argument was that, even though discovery of knowledge through the scientific method may be the central purpose of learning, the scientific method cannot discover the meaning of knowledge or the wise practices for the application of knowledge. Such understanding and wisdom are to be found by applying values drawn from Lutheran theology to higher education. They argued that a college or university in the Lutheran intellectual tradition will explore and apply such values in its curriculum and co-curriculum.

Continuing informal and occasional discussion among Lutheran higher education leaders slowly began a deeper dive into Lutheran theology to demonstrate how it serves as a source of values for educating students. By the 1970s, the annual meetings of the Lutheran Educational Conference of North America began regularly hearing from leading Lutheran theologians on this theme. The theological sources for values such as freedom of inquiry, creativity, questioning of received practices, giftedness of existence, and living out one's vocational began to be identified. The work of mining the Lutheran theological tradition came to be widely accepted as the principle path toward defining the mission of Lutheran higher education and articulating a Lutheran philosophy of education, although by the late twentieth century the phrase used by Bergendoff to label the project had been forgotten.

By 1989, Martin Marty, the preeminent Lutheran church historian, reflected the now commonplace agenda for Lutheran higher education. At a symposium on the mission of the new Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's colleges and universities, Marty could say that the founding of the ELCA provided an occasion for the "conscious recovery" of the theological tradition that birthed Lutheran higher education and that this conscious recovery was "essential" (Marty 14).

Through the 1990s and 2000s, the progress toward a more complete recovery of the tradition moved ahead through the work of faculty such as Tom Christensen (Capital University), DeAne Lagerquist (St. Olaf College), Ernie Simmons (Concordia College) and Darrell Jodock (Muhlenberg College and Gustavus Adolphus College). In

this period, a three-pronged infrastructure consisting of an annual conference (The Vocation of a Lutheran College), a journal (*Intersections*), and a higher education leadership development program (Thrivent Fellows) was established. Each supported the articulation of the recovered values of Lutheran higher education as derived from Lutheran theology, and each expressed a renewed focus on the implications of the Lutheran concept of vocation as a vital lens for expressing the mission of Lutheran higher education.

*"Rooted and Open* is NECU's statement of a Lutheran philosophy of education, answering Bergendoff's challenge seventy years after it was posed."

*Rooted and Open* expresses the vocation or common calling of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities by drawing upon the outcomes of the explorations described above into Lutheran theology and its implications for Lutheran higher education. It is NECU's statement of a Lutheran philosophy of education, answering Bergendoff's challenge seventy years after it was posed.

## Process and Purpose

As the new Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities was being organized, the presidents of NECU institutions asked for assistance in articulating Lutheran identity in higher education. In response to their request, an effort was initiated that resulted in the publishing of *Rooted and Open*.

A faculty working group was convened in late 2016 to prepare a draft statement for the presidents' consideration. The draft was presented to a conference of NECU presidents and others in Chicago at the Lutheran Center on June 16, 2017. A writing team drawn from the faculty working group revised the document in fall 2017 based on comments and advice received during the June conference. Members of the writing team were Darrell Jodock (Gustavus Adolphus College, emeritus), Jason Mahn (Augustana College), Martha Stortz (Augsburg University), and Mark Wilhelm, (NECU).



The Executive Committee received the writing team's revision at the Committee's meeting on November 17, 2017. At that meeting, it was agreed to further revise the document. Those revisions were made by Darrel Colson (President, Wartburg College), and final editing was done by Mark Wilhelm in light of comments by other members of the Executive Committee to Colson's revision. The text was slightly edited again during NECU's annual meeting on January 4, 2018, prior the Board of Directors' unanimous vote to endorse the document at the same meeting.

The members of the Board of Directors of NECU are the presidents of NECU institutions. The Board of Directors received *Rooted and Open* at its annual meeting on January 4, 2018, with the following resolution:

Be it resolved that the Board of Directors endorses *Rooted and Open* as an expression of the common calling and shared values of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities; and be it further resolved, that *Rooted and Open* is commended to the colleges and universities of the Network for their use.

And so, in addition to assisting presidents with the task of articulating a vision for Lutheran higher education, *Rooted and Open* is intended as a teaching and study document for NECU colleges and universities.

"It is hoped that those who live and work at Lutheran institutions will come to appreciate the sources in Lutheran theology for these widely-held educational values and the distinctive emphases that the Lutheran tradition gives to these values."

It is important to note that *Rooted and Open* is not a juridical document. Member institutions are not required to adopt it as a policy statement. It is also not a statement that employees of NECU institutions must sign. Faculty and administrators in Lutheran need not affirm the theology behind the values for higher education as described in *Rooted and Open*.

Faculty, administrators, and governance board members should, however, be able to articulate the values that guide Lutheran higher education. Faculty, administrators, and board members should also come to understand the theological sources of these values for Lutheran higher education as described in *Rooted and Open*. Other educational traditions, which educate for understanding and not just for the transmission of knowledge, share similar values, but it is hoped that those who live and work at Lutheran institutions will come to appreciate the sources in Lutheran theology for these widely-held educational values and the distinctive emphases that the Lutheran tradition gives to these values.

NECU hopes that *Rooted and Open* will become a valued resource for continuing study of and conversation about what it means to part of Lutheran higher education. Such study and conversation could help reverse an unfortunate, longstanding reality in our community of colleges and universities. This reality has been best expressed by Richard Solberg, the historian of Lutheran higher education, when he commented twenty years ago that Lutheran higher education had failed in America to live out the educational ideals "implicit in its own theology" (Solberg 80).

By engaging in conversations about *Rooted and Open*, faculty, administrators, and governance board members can reverse the reality named by Solberg as they begin to:

- Understand the Lutheran intellectual tradition's commitment to educate the whole person and the roots of this type of education in Lutheran theology.
- Explore *Rooted and Open*'s assertion that the identity of a Lutheran college or university is an institutional calling, independent of the religious identity of individuals who study or work there.
- Appreciate that students at a Lutheran college or university are "called and empowered, to serve the neighbor, so that all may flourish."

## Challenges

Although *Rooted and Open* summarizes well the implications of core theological concepts for the values that should inform Lutheran higher education, it also implies certain challenges facing NECU institutions.

First, there is the challenge of embodying an institutional vocation. It is certainly true that the calling of a Lutheran college or university is an institutional calling, independent of the personal religious affiliation of those at the college or university. But ideas and commitments must be embodied. If few or no persons at a Lutheran institution are comfortable with or interested in the core ideas and practices that should drive the institution's identity and mission, clearly the institutional calling will become nominal, at best. A regular program of in-house faculty and staff development about the institution's calling must be maintained if the identity and mission are to remain alive. ELCA colleges and universities are, however, currently not robustly equipped for universal involvement of faculty and staff in such development programs.

"It is certainly true that the calling of a Lutheran college or university is an institutional calling, independent of the personal religious affiliation of those at the college or university. But ideas and commitments must be embodied."

Second, the larger context of Lutheran higher education complicates its mission. *Rooted and Open* ignores that American society, the American academy, and the Lutheran church itself have frequently shared the assumption that a religious identity for a college or university will tie the institution to parochial religious interests. Tactics are not in place for effectively overcoming the social, academic, and ecclesiastical cultural biases about religion and higher education that all faculty and administrators bring to campus.

Perhaps the presence and use of *Rooted and Open* will provide enough impetus to steer us past these challenges. It is certainly a good start!

## Endnotes

1. On the shift to the scientific method, see Roberts and Turner, *The Sacred and the Secular University*. The Bible college movement arose in this era as a response to and repudiation of the rise of the scientific method. On this movement, see Brereton, *Training God's Army*.

2. Principle among these other changes were the abandonment of ethnic separatist culture in American Lutheranism and the ending of the culturally-expected separation of students in American higher education (and the legal segregation of many African American students) into colleges and universities divided by class, race, gender, ethnicity and other socio-cultural factors. See Wilhelm, "The Vocation Movement."

3. One should note that Bergendoff undoubtedly used the word "unique" in the colloquial sense of "distinctive."

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# In a Diverse Society, Why Should Lutheran Colleges/Universities Claim their Theological Roots?



The individual histories of ELCA colleges and universities vary considerably, but in general we can say that 60 to 70 years ago what it meant to be a Lutheran college was pretty clear. Virtually all students were Lutherans, and the faculty and senior staff were either alumni or

graduates of similar institutions. They were familiar with the Lutheran tradition and had been socialized into understanding what it meant to be a Lutheran college. Today, for the most part, the core faculty who once carried and interpreted the tradition have retired. National searches mean that many faculty and senior staff arrive on campus with no idea what it means to be a Lutheran and little idea what it means to be a Lutheran college.

As it is asked today, the question of what it means to be a Lutheran college is a product of diversification. Diversification is, of course, not a bad thing. On the contrary, it has enriched our schools. However, what this development does is to leave us with a task: to explain to ourselves and others how we can claim to be Lutheran while at the

same time being diverse—that is, while welcoming to campus those who do not share this tradition.

One impediment to this explanation is that so many people think there are only two options. *Either* a private college is sectarian, or it is non-sectarian. Either it is rooted in a particular tradition *or* it values a diversity of constituents, but not both.

Using the broadest possible strokes, *Rooted and Open* suggests that Lutheran colleges follow neither of these default models. Instead they pursue a third path.

*"Rooted and Open suggests that Lutheran colleges follow neither of these default models. Instead they pursue a third path."*

## Rooted and Open

To review briefly, a sectarian college aims at religious uniformity—by requiring faculty and staff to sign a statement of belief, for example, or be members of a particular church or adhere to certain religion-specific standards of behavior. Such a college is closely tied to its

**Darrell Jodock** is Professor Emeritus at Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minnesota. He served on the drafting team that produced *Rooted and Open* and on the drafting team for "A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment." A graduate of St. Olaf College, Luther Seminary, and Yale University, he has taught at Luther Seminary, Muhlenberg College, and St. Olaf College. He is active in adult education, Jewish-Christian dialogue, and helping to define what it means to be a Lutheran College.

sponsoring faith community. There may be some religious diversity in the student body, but it is not acknowledged. Thus the college does not need to struggle with religious diversity. Such a college is good at nurturing religious identity but a bit cut off from the larger society. It is rooted but not inclusive, rooted but not open. It is an enclave.

The second default model is non-sectarian. A non-sectarian college has severed its connection to the faith community that started it. It accommodates religious diversity in the same way as the surrounding society—by regarding religion to be a private matter. Thus it too does not need to struggle with religious diversity. It merely follows an established pattern worked out in society at large. Such a college is inclusive or open, but not rooted. It is a microcosm of the larger society.

A college that is both Lutheran and diverse follows a third path—one that is both rooted and open. It is rooted in the sense that it continues to take seriously its Lutheran heritage. And it is inclusive or open in the sense of welcoming into its midst faculty, staff, and students of various religious backgrounds and inviting them to participate in the kind of inter-religious and intercultural dialogue that benefits everyone. It expects that such dialogue and learning will not only expand a person's understanding of another religion but also deepen that person's understanding and appreciation of his or her own. A number of studies of diversity have shown that mere exposure is not enough. When dealing with religious or racial or social differences, exposure alone can actually heighten misunderstandings. Engagement is needed. So, when a third-path college takes religion seriously and encourages respectful, inter-religious dialogue, it is preparing students for the multi-religious world in which they will live and work. To repeat, one way a third-path college is open or inclusive is that it welcomes diversity. Another way it is open or inclusive is that it seeks to serve the wider society, not just the church that sponsors it. Its goal is to graduate students with a robust sense of vocation, with a mature idea of the common good, and with a readiness to reach across the social, political, and religious barriers that currently prevent our society from advancing the common good. A third-path college is like a well dug deep to nourish the entire community.

As I have said, many people, on and off campus, assume that there are only two models. In their eyes, a college should be one or the other. A Lutheran college or university that values the third path will need to explain it and its advantages—and do so in all sorts of settings.

"A third-path college is like a well dug deep to nourish the entire community."

One small caveat. In my experience, some older alumni are attracted to the sectarian model, because they want their alma mater to be a safe and nurturing place, as they remember it when it was less diverse. But I do not think our Lutheran colleges were ever intentionally sectarian. Some of them were accidentally so, because of the recruitment patterns of that day. For a Lutheran college to be intentionally sectarian today would be an innovation that is, in my opinion, out of tune with basic themes in Lutheran theology.<sup>1</sup> Other alumni want our colleges to be more non-sectarian, because they look back on their college experience as too provincial. This is an understandable reaction, but it does not recognize the potential for change within the third-path model. In my opinion, adopting the non-sectarian option would abandon the distinctiveness of a Lutheran college and diminish what it can offer our society.

## The Threefold Work of a Third Path College

The third path involves three distinguishable components of a college's identity and work. The first element encompasses all the activities that occur on a college campus—everything that happens in a college's classrooms, dormitories, athletic fields, laboratories, library, chapel, etc. I like to imagine that a third-path college is like a large bridge with a deck wide enough and long enough to host all these activities.

The second element consists of shared educational priorities. These are the priorities that influence a college's decision-making and show up in its activities. On my bridge analogy, these are the pillars that hold up the deck. So, for example, one educational priority at

Lutheran colleges is academic excellence. Another is hospitality—creating a safe place in which to be challenged and to learn. I went to a Lutheran college 350 miles away from home, did not know a single person there, and had received no preparation for what to expect. The first week was a complete blur of confusion as I showed up for this or for that. When I sat down with my musical instrument for an audition, the band director must have sensed my confusion, because he said, “Remember, Darrell, here you are among friends.” The fact that 59 years later I still remember what he said is an indication of how important it was to me and of how typical it was of my overall experience at the college. In many settings hospitality is a virtue, yes, but it also can be an educational value. It can create a safe space within which to consider new alternatives. John Haught has observed that a quest for truth can be derailed by a need for acceptance (Haught 99). The experience of hospitality can free students to pursue the truth and to challenge some of their assumptions.

The third element involves the theological values that color, inform, and anchor the educational priorities. These are the footings that support the pillars of the bridge. Taken individually, the educational priorities may not be distinctive, but they become so when shaped and informed by Lutheran values. Thus, in a Lutheran setting, academic excellence is not only a way to ready students for success in their career and not only a way to move the college as a whole to a higher ranking in the college guidebooks; it is primarily a way to serve others. Solid ideas, based on good information, will help us all make better decisions about how to assist our neighbors and the larger community. In addition to good intentions, good deeds require that we understand what is needed and what will work. Bad ideas and misinformation sooner or later bring harm to the community or to other individuals. Just think of what damage has resulted from a bad idea such as racial hierarchies (once thought to have a scientific basis) or from misinformation about people in another religion or another nation or another part of the world.

Likewise, when hospitality is undergirded by a theology of God’s unconditional acceptance (Haught 99-105), which is a core emphasis in Lutheran theology, it then becomes “radical hospitality.” Radical hospitality can break through the limits imposed by society as a whole. This happened in

the 1930s when, at the highest point of anti-Semitism in our nation’s history, some Lutheran colleges welcomed Jews. It happened in the 1940s when some Lutheran colleges welcomed Japanese-Americans from the internment camps. And it continues to happen when undocumented immigrants from Guatemala and refugees from Somalia and Syria and elsewhere are welcomed. An individual faculty or staff member is expected to understand and appreciate the theological values of the college but not necessarily subscribe to them on a personal, religious level.

“This distinction between educational priorities and theological values is crucial if a college is to follow a third path.”

This distinction between educational priorities and theological values is crucial if a college is to follow a third path. A sectarian college moves directly from its religious principles to its decision-making. It does not make this distinction. A non-sectarian college has abandoned its theological footings. It also does not make this distinction.

## Responding to Objections

So, why does it matter whether a Lutheran college continues to take its Lutheran footings seriously?

Let me first consider some possible objections.

Some persons fear that claiming a college’s religious roots will put it under the authority of the church. Though this does occur in some places and can cause many headaches, it is simply not the way things work in the ELCA.

It would be possible to suspect that claiming the Lutheran tradition involves endorsing something ready-made—something that was defined and packaged in the past. But this is not the case, because the Lutheran tradition is dynamic, living, and changing. It is constantly being re-formed at the intersection of its theological principles and the contemporary context. It retrieves neglected elements of Luther’s thought and rejects others. The tradition has been revitalized and reshaped by reaching back behind the movements that shaped our colleges in their early years (such as Lutheran Orthodoxy or Pietism) to Luther himself.



For example, a return to Luther's deep appreciation for ongoing creation—an appreciation largely lost from view a hundred years ago—has nourished discussions of science and faith. Likewise, an examination of Luther's understanding of the "two kingdoms" has replaced the distorted teaching that influenced the passivity of churches in Nazi Germany and, to some extent, churches in the United States. The result has been a renewed, more dynamic understanding of political ethics that supports engagement and resistance rather than quietism. Similarly, a return to some of Luther's principles has opened a way to support inter-religious dialogue (see "ELCA Consultative"). And, currently, a renewed attention to Luther's many proposals for reforming the society of his day has suggested helpful ways to engage today's society (see Lindberg and Wee).

A third possible worry would be that when a college claims its Lutheran roots, it somehow limits freedom of inquiry. This is simply not the case. Nothing is cordoned off. For Luther, every cherished idea needed to be examined to see whether it was true and whether it helped people or harmed them. The decisions made by church authorities were not exempt. Theology was not exempt. And even his most cherished Bible was not exempt. All of this is true because the tradition is all about freedom. Its concern is how human freedom is to be deepened and empowered, not how it is to be curtailed.

A fourth possible objection is to worry about associating with the misdeeds of the Christian church. This is a significant concern, because far too many regretful things have been done in the name of Christianity. We can think of the Crusades, the slave trade, religious wars, and so on. We can think of individuals who have been harmed when religion has been used as a bludgeon—whether by parents or clergy or public officials. But, because these actions are distortions of the religion, Lutheran Christianity has the resources to challenge and change them—as has happened again and again—whether with Luther opposing a crusade or Christians opposing the slave trade or clergy participating in the civil rights movement or Lutherans during the last 50 years revising their view of Judaism. A college needs to teach discernment—the ability to distinguish between the beneficial forms of a movement and its detrimental forms. The theological values that anchor a

Lutheran college equip us to undertake this discernment with regard to the Christian tradition. Once learned there, this skill can be applied to other movements. But learning to discern is not enough, a Lutheran college should also seek to model a generous, humane, and thoughtful version of Christianity in its chapel services, student religious groups, and elsewhere.

A fifth possible objection comes from a discomfort with religious particularity. On some visceral level, this discomfort is evident among many who are involved in higher education. I suspect that it may be a legacy of the Enlightenment. But whatever its source, this discomfort is real and often surfaces in campus conversations. However, one thing we have learned from post-modernism is that in human affairs, anything that claims universality simply masks some form of particularity. So the issue today turns out not to be particularity itself. The challenge is to distinguish between those forms of particularity that are closed and those that are open: open to other insights, interested in finding their place in the whole, and ready to self-critically enrich the broader community. Claiming the Lutheran tradition is not to say that this is the only way to run a college. It is to say that this is one valuable way alongside other valuable ways. Higher education as a whole is enriched by the kind of institutional diversity that includes the distinctive contributions of Lutheran colleges and universities.

"The challenge is to distinguish between those forms of particularity that are closed and those that are open: open to other insights, interested in finding their place in the whole, and ready to self-critically enrich the broader community."

A sixth possible objection arises from a worry that claiming its Lutheran roots will make non-Lutherans feel like outsiders at a Lutheran college. I do not deny that this can happen. Sometimes it happens when too much theological jargon is used, so we need to articulate the Lutheran principles in fresh ways—as *Rooted and Open* attempts to

do. And sometimes it results from a misunderstanding or misapplication of the relation between the footings and the pillars, the theological values and the educational priorities. Once this distinction is understood and the educational priorities and theological values are explained, what I hear back is “I’m a Roman Catholic” or “I’m a Buddhist” or “I’m a Muslim” or “I’m a Jew,” and “if these are the educational priorities supported by the Lutheran tradition, I want to support them, because these priorities are worthwhile and not found at every school.” Because a Lutheran college or university follows a third path, because its educational priorities can be shared by persons in differing religious traditions, and because the Lutheran values that undergird its educational priorities support inclusiveness, non-Lutherans should not feel like outsiders. The more these matters are discussed and the more everyone is equipped to participate in the discussion, the less anyone will feel left out.<sup>2</sup> To cite but one example, I vividly recall a discussion of a possible grant application when a Roman Catholic faculty member at a Lutheran college made a beautiful argument why a Lutheran college should develop a program that fostered civil discourse. He understood the pillars and footings well enough to formulate a sound rationale for undertaking the envisioned project.

Let me note in passing that I do not think there is any way around the reality that in a Lutheran college or university, the Lutheran tradition has a position of *institutional* influence not accorded other religious traditions. I don’t see any way around this, short of becoming a non-sectarian school and losing the benefits of a third path. As will be evident below, I regard this institutional influence to be educationally beneficial. It is neither oppressive nor coercive.

## Why Lutheran Footings Matter

So, let me return to the question: why does it matter whether a Lutheran college takes its Lutheran footings seriously?

One important reason is this: claiming a college’s Lutheran footings deepens the educational enterprise. One purpose of a Lutheran education is cultivating wisdom—that is, an understanding of humans and communities, how they work, and what they need to be whole and healthy. This requires going beyond gaining knowledge (as important as it is) to probe the implications of this

knowledge. How can it be used to benefit the neighbor and the wider community? It also requires a community of discourse. Individuals can attain knowledge on their own, but the give and take of a community is necessary in order to benefit from multiple perspectives and to attain some appreciation for the complexity of the problem and the best way to address it. If one also gives attention to the Lutheran understanding of humans as a complex mixture of a capacity for good and a capacity for evil, the conversation about the implications of something learned will go still deeper. Or, to cite another example, students with a lively sense of vocation are likely to be more engaged with their studies than others who are merely trying to please their parents or receive a credential with a minimum amount of effort. When rightly understood, there is nothing in the Lutheran tradition that gets in the way of freedom and learning. In fact, the opposite is true: the tradition fosters freedom and learning.

Why does it matter? Because claiming a college’s Lutheran footings equips members of its community to serve our larger society. So, for example, for quite different reasons, both a sectarian and a non-sectarian college ignore religious diversity, but to the degree that a Lutheran college or university takes both religion and inter-religious understanding seriously, it will help reduce the fear of other religions and the inter-religious conflict in our world. It will equip graduates to live and work in a pluralistic society. To take another example: the Lutheran tradition puts a priority on the importance of a healthy community. This is an antidote to the excessive individualism in our society (among people of both the right and the left) that tends to erode our social fabric and undermines cooperation for the common good.

Why does claiming a college’s Lutheran footings matter? Because it anchors the college’s educational priorities. To return to my image, the footings anchor the pillars, which in turn determine what happens on the deck of the bridge. In order for a college to serve society, a certain amount of independence from that society is needed. Then it can identify the dangers or weaknesses as well as the strengths and virtues of the larger community and send out graduates ready to tackle its deficiencies and preserve its strengths. One might think that the Enlightenment values that have informed higher education

would be enough to sustain this independence, but the last 150 years have shown that this is not the case. In the face of political pressure, the universities of the world have too easily been co-opted by an ideology—be it Marxist-Stalinist, fascist, or something else. Lutheran footings can provide an anchor that militates against succumbing to a powerful social, political, or economic ideology.

“Taking a college’s Lutheran footings seriously keeps alive a dynamic connection with the past and a lively hope for the future. By contrast, American society, as a product of the Enlightenment, has tended to dismiss the past as ignorant and superstitious.”

Why does it matter? Because taking a college’s Lutheran footings seriously keeps alive a dynamic connection with the past and a lively hope for the future. By contrast, American society, as a product of the Enlightenment, has tended to dismiss the past as ignorant and superstitious. It has instead been, in the words of one commentator, “officially optimistic” (Hall 43-59). But recent developments have challenged this optimism. For many, the future now looks ominous and no longer under their control. They see there a mushroom-shaped cloud, a silent spring, limited resources, economic vulnerability, and seemingly intractable racial and economic injustices. Cut off from the past, frightened by the future, and trapped in the present, Americans exhibit a great deal of ongoing anxiety, which slows down learning, amplifies fears, and seeks a quick fix (Steinke 8-9).

When Luther wrote to the city councils of Germany, urging them to establish schools for all young men and women, he emphasized that these schools would explore societies of the past and determine what went right and what went wrong in order to generate the wisdom needed to lead a community or a household (Luther 368-69). The Lutheran tradition values the past without being constrained by it. And it expects God’s work of fostering shalom<sup>3</sup> in the world to nourish hope, even in the face of the darkest storm clouds. It is hard to overemphasize

how important it is to expand our sense of the world into the past and into the future in order to understand our place in it, to find a shared sense of meaning and purpose, and to overcome the anxiety that otherwise polarizes and paralyzes our society. As Rabbi Greenberg has said, “hope is a dream which is committed to the discipline of becoming a fact” (Greenberg 8). It overcomes paralysis and unleashes human agency.

For all of these reasons, I think it is important that our colleges and universities continue to honor their theological footings, follow the third-path model, explain what it means, and foster an ongoing conversation about its implications.

## Endnotes

1. One of my colleagues, whose field is American church history, once commented that Gustavus “never was a Christian college,” in the way that term is used by sectarian colleges today. As soon as Gustavus moved to its present location, it offered programs designed to attract local students who were not Lutheran, in addition to recruiting the children of Swedish-American immigrants. Its founder, Eric Norelius, also insisted that classes be taught in English in order to prepare its Swedish-American students for participation in American society.

2. In conversations with faculty members who are Christian but not Lutheran and faculty members who practice a religion other than Christianity, I have discovered that talk about the “Lutheran identity” of a college makes them feel like outsiders, whereas the language of “educational priorities and theological values” is more inviting and inclusive. “Identity,” they explain, feels like something one is born into, whereas an adult can choose to endorse “values” and “priorities.”

3. There are many images of shalom in the Bible. They lead me to define shalom as whole healthy relationships among humans, between God and humans, and between humans and the rest of creation.

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# Roots and Shoots: Tending to Lutheran Higher Education

It was a joy to be part of the working group and writing team that helped compose *Rooted and Open* and that helped spark conversation among the Network presidents in June of 2017. At that gathering, I was asked to talk about that word “calling” and its Latin-derived alternate, “vocation.” Why do we talk so much about the *vocation* of a Lutheran college or university? Why is the subtitle of *Rooted and Open*, and the primary description of its contents, about NECU’s “common *calling*”? Why, according to the shortest encapsulation of what characterizes these 27 institutions, are our graduates first and foremost persons who are “*called* and empowered”?<sup>1</sup>

I begin this essay by reviewing how and why education-for-vocation, that is, our common calling to educate students for their own multiple vocations, has become something of a leitmotif, a central organizing principle, for the diverse missions (or institutional vocations) of our 27 schools. Rehearsing and embracing this decades-old development depends on clearly distinguishing the identity of a Lutheran college or university from the religious affiliations of the people who populate it. I then come to terms with a second distinction that structures the whole of *Rooted and Open*—that between the educational priorities (strategic plans, campus-wide initiatives, etc.) of our schools and the Lutheran theological soil out of which such priorities grow. I’ll conclude by raising some friendly

critiques of Darrell Jodock’s central architectural metaphor of a bridge’s pillars and footings, especially in light of *Rooted and Open*’s own suggestive imagery.

## Individual Lutherans and Institutional Vocations

As Mark Wilhelm describes, “education-for-vocation” or what he calls “the vocation movement” was not always front and center of discussions about what it means to be a Lutheran institution (Wilhelm 59-63). In fact, 50 or even 30 years ago, there was very little discussion about what it actually meant to be a Lutheran college or university. A Lutheran college or university was simply assumed to be a place where Lutheran students went to be educated by Lutheran faculty members, who in turn were overseen by a Lutheran provost and president. Now for some (including for some of our alumni) this period entailed a kind of golden age of Lutheran higher education. Certainly there was no debate or doubt about what it meant to be a Lutheran college or university—it was quite simply a campus that had a majority of individual Lutherans on it. But notice that the designation “Lutheran” can mean very



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little here. It marks the church membership or self-identity of *individuals on a campus*, but it tells us next to nothing about what the institution as a whole *is*, and, even less, about what it *does* and is called to *be*.

"A Lutheran college or university was simply assumed to be a place where Lutheran students went to be educated by Lutheran faculty members, who in turn were overseen by a Lutheran provost and president."

All of this changes when, in the latter part of the twentieth century, Lutheran institutions diversified along with most every other mainline church-related college. I follow Peter Berger in saying "diversified" or "pluralized" rather than "secularized" because the latter assumes a *loss* of religious identity, which simply has not happened historically (Matthews 152-53). On our campuses, there certainly was a decrease in the percentage of *individuals* who identify as Lutheran. Our Lutheran students (at Augustana College, the percentage hovers somewhere in the low teens) now have classmates and professors who identify as Jews and Muslims and secular humanists and neo-pagans and as "nones" (that is, none of the above—those who identify with no particular religious tradition—which may in fact be another distinctive posture of faith<sup>2</sup>).

This rapid diversification of *individuals* on our campuses was worrisome for many. The first and understandable reaction of many Lutheran schools was to try to hold onto a certain percentage of Lutheran students or Lutheran faculty or Lutheran board members. As long as we didn't fall below a certain threshold, we could assure ourselves that we were Lutheran. You can see how easily this strategy could backfire. Besides having to revise downward that percentage of select individuals who need to be Lutheran as demographics change, this strategy of marking the "Lutheranness" of an institution by way of the individuals populating it, when taken alone, *threatens to overlook and overshadow* the more meaningful and relevant ways that a college—as a college—can be

decidedly and effectively Lutheran. Couldn't the college be Lutheran, couldn't its mission be Lutheran, regardless of the religious affiliations of the individuals advancing that mission?

Taking all of this as a positive opportunity, some 30-some years ago our institutions began a serious and sustained conversation with one another about what "Lutheran" means when we are talking about the identity and mission of a *college*—what *it* is and *it* does. It is a long and ongoing conversation, but in recent years there has emerged something of a consensus around "education for vocation" as a helpful way to talk about our institutional identities and common calling.

I write here of our institutional Lutheran "missions" and "identities." According to David Cunningham, Director of the Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education (NetVUE), language of institutional *callings* or *vocations* may be more felicitous. He notes that the word *mission* (from the Latin *missio*) connotes a "sending." An institution's mission implies a push from behind—a trajectory

"Couldn't the college be Lutheran, couldn't its mission be Lutheran, regardless of the religious affiliations of the individuals advancing that mission?"

established by those who founded the college or university, originally set its goal, and thus propel the rest of us toward it. Institutional vocation, by contrast, connotes a pull from and into the future. The discernment of an institution's calling entails more than a recognition or recovery of its mission (but, I would add, certainly not less). It also entails listening to voices—Cunningham references the rising level of student protests in academic institutions over the last several years (264)—that can help pull the college or university into what it is yet to become. Discerning institutional vocation is an open-ended, dialectical process that attends to future possibilities in addition to present realities and past objectives (Cunningham 258-66).

## Cultivating a Common Calling

As I have suggested above, “education-for-vocation” has slowly but surely become the primary way that we have come to name our individual institutional vocations, as well as the common calling of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU).

What is meant by “education-for-vocation”? At best, NECU institutions educate not exclusively or primarily to secure employment, to develop a “life of the mind,” or even for citizenship and to cultivate civil discourse and civic virtues, as important as each of these is. Lutheran institutions principally educate students so that they can discern the material and spiritual needs of other human and nonhuman creatures and then respond *with* committed service and *out of* a sense of gratitude. In the Christian tradition, such service is patterned after the life of Jesus, whose solidarity with a broken world brought salvation and healing to it.

Language of vocation is deeply rooted in Lutheran thought and practice. Before Martin Luther, only nuns, monks, and priests had vocations. For Luther, all persons are called to meaningful work—especially work that serves the common good and leads to the flourishing of another, whom Luther called “the neighbor.” Educating students so that they can discern their calling, their *needed* place in a *needful* world, is deeply Lutheran stuff.

At the same time, “calling” and “vocation” are not the exclusive property of Lutherans or even Christians. Rather, out of the depths of their own theological traditions, Lutheran colleges and universities educate Lutherans, other Christians, people from other religious traditions, and the nonaffiliated for lives of responsible, grateful service so that the world God created and redeems might also flourish. Neither do the faculty, staff, and administrators who educate for vocation need to be Lutheran. Indeed, some of the most intentional and effective educators advancing their institution’s callings hail from very different religious and nonreligious traditions. Perhaps not *personally* identifying with Lutheranism makes them more discerning and proactive as they link their own commitments to the calling of the college.

Those teaching and learning on our campuses live out their callings whenever they match their own passions

and capabilities—their sense of being gifted—with the real needs of the world. They teach and learn in order to respond, to be helpful, and to care. Lutheran colleges and universities live out *their* callings when they help form their students and educators for vocation. In short, *our* collective institutional vocation is to educate *for* vocation.

“Perhaps not *personally* identifying with Lutheranism makes them more discerning and proactive as they link their own commitments to the calling of the college.”

## Educational Fruits and Lutheran Roots

A quick examination of *Rooted and Open* reveals a three-part structure reflecting the central markings of Lutheran higher education and those who have become marked by it.<sup>3</sup> Our common calling is to prepare our students to be “called and empowered—to serve the neighbor—so that all may flourish.” Less obvious is an important distinction *within* each of these three sections. Each begins with certain “educational priorities” shared by our institutions. Our schools are called to offer “an excellent education, rooted in the liberal arts, that engenders freedom of inquiry and prepares [our students] for meaningful work.” They all called to support students as they “discern their gifts and hone their skills so that they are able to contribute capably, confidently and courageously to the needs of a world that desperately needs them.” Finally, they are called toward the flourishing of the whole person and attention to the common good (NECU).

After each of these educational priorities is further unpacked, the document turns to the ways each is grounded theologically within the tradition of Lutheran thought and practice. Our calling to educational excellence and intellectual humility is grounded in Lutheran claims about the radical mystery of God and the “freedom of a Christian.” Our commitment to education for vocation, and to service, justice, and advocacy, is grounded theologically in God’s unmerited love and concern for all, which inspires those so graced to respond with gratitude and service

to and beside others. Our calling toward the common good and commitment to the whole person is grounded theologically in the incarnation of God, the holiness of the everyday, and in a bold hope for the salvation (from *salus*—the healing) of all creation.

In the present volume of *Intersections*, both Marty Stortz and Colleen Windham-Hughes unpack these three educational priorities and their theological roots more fully than I am able to do here. The point I want to make is that, just as the distinction between a Lutheran institutional mission (or vocation) and the religious identities of individuals advancing it allows for the inclusion of a diverse group of allies and advocates for that mission, so too this distinction between educational priorities and their theological groundings ensures that the priorities can be advanced by educators who do not personally ascribe to the theology.

Augustana's own articulation of what it means to be Lutheran also makes this distinction between educational priorities (or what we call our "faith commitments") and the particular theology that grounds them. The bulk of Augustana's *Five Faith Commitments* lists and exemplifies our commitments to interfaith engagement, social justice, spiritual exploration, the reasoned examination of faith, and vocational discernment. Christian language is used sparingly throughout these descriptions of our institutional commitments, Lutheran language even less so, and "Jesus" is not mentioned once (to the chagrin of a few who would want Augustana to be more confessionally Christian). And yet, the "Theological Context" that precedes the actual commitments ends with some rather robust theological claims:

Martin Luther believed that God is revealed in unlikely places — including a barn in Bethlehem and on a cross outside Jerusalem. Having learned to be surprised by this, members of Augustana enter into **interfaith engagement** with curiosity, anticipation, and wonder.

Luther understood Christian freedom to be comprised of both freedom *from* having to save oneself, as well as freedom *for* a life of service to neighbors in need. Augustana College is called to **social justice** out of a sense of liberation and gratitude.

Christians put worship of God at the center of their lives. Luther democratized worship, put the Bible in the hands of everyday Christians, and considered beautiful music to go hand in hand with prayer. Augustana commits to **spiritual exploration** out of these sensibilities.

As both pastor and professor, Luther called faith a "living, busy, and active thing." Out of this spirit and the Christian quest for "faith seeking understanding," Augustana commits to ongoing **reasoned examination** of faith.

Finally, the Lutheran reform movement understood God to call not only church leaders, but every person to work according to their giftedness and the world's needs. Out of this understanding, Augustana educates for vocation and supports **vocational discernment**. (Augustana College)

In the terms of Darrell Jodock, the "distinction between educational priorities and theological values is crucial if a college is to follow a third path" ("Diverse Society" 12). By not distinguishing its theological groundings from its educational priorities, more "sectarian" schools fail to incorporate into its mission those who do not ascribe to their particular religious tradition, while for more "secular" (or "non-sectarian") schools the educational priorities are only grounded in themselves, so to speak (12). By contrast, a third-path Lutheran college or university is both rooted and open precisely by distinguishing the particular Lutheran tradition that nourishes its priorities from the priorities themselves, which all are invited to nurture.

## Tending to the Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education

No image has done more for sustaining conversation and commitment to Lutheran institutional vocation than that of Darrell Jodock's "third path" ("Vocation" 5-6). In his essay from this issue of *Intersections*, he couples that path analogy with a second metaphor from civil engineering—that of bridges and bridge-building ("Diverse Society" 11-12). Distinguishing the daily activities of students and educators from the long-term planning and priorities of

the college is like distinguishing the deck of a bridge from the pillars supporting it. And yet those educational pillars/priorities must in turn be distinguished from what secures them—the footings of the bridge, composed of a deeply anchored Lutheran theological tradition.

The analogy works well in imagining important distinctions. Still, I want to offer some appreciative critiques in order that the structural analogies not overshadow what *Rooted and Open* alternatively suggests—namely, that our institutions are more like well-rooted and widely branching plants than the products of human engineering. I have three interconnected reasons for my preference for analogies taken from botany and horticultural.

### ***Growing in Two Directions***

First, while bridges are built quite literally from the ground (or river bottom) up, most plants continue to grow downward while they also grow upward and outward. The deck-pillar-footings analogy suggests a one way column of dependence. The decking depends on the pillars and the pillars on the footing, but the reverse is not true.

By contrast, as a single organism, a healthy plant depends on conditions both above and below the ground. Plant and roots are interconnected; each grows along with the other. It would seem that a healthy Lutheran college or university is like that. Not only do roots sunk deeply

“New directions and developments of the college frequently necessitate a ‘re-rooting’ of the tradition, a conscious re-conception and reemployment of ‘Lutheran,’ a widening and deepening of what that identity means, precisely so the contemporary initiatives can be grounded.”

in Lutheran belief and practice nourish the institution’s educational priorities, which in turn sustain the daily work of students and their educators, but also new directions and developments of the college frequently necessitate a “re-rooting” of the tradition, a conscious re-conception and reemployment of “Lutheran,” a widening and deepening of

what that identity means, precisely so the contemporary initiatives can be grounded.

According to Wilhelm, this is exactly what happened when, 30-some years ago, education-for-vocation began to get “reclaimed” as a central tenet of Lutheran higher education (Wilhelm 63-66). The tradition’s understanding of vocation had to be retrieved and reconceived; our institutions had to grow downward, to deliberately name and nurture our Lutheran institutional identities, precisely in order to sustain schools that were quickly diversifying, growing outward.

The same is true of my college’s *Five Faith Commitments*. It was only in 2004, after the rapid religious pluralization of educators and students within Augustana, that the then new president, Steve Bahls, and the Board of Trustees articulated and affirmed Augustana’s faith commitments. And it wasn’t until 2014, when the *Five Faith Commitments* were updated and revised, that the above robust theological claims were added. While deep roots allow for wide branches and abundant fruit, the reverse is also true. The growing inclusivity of institutions also necessitates a constant re-rooting.

### ***Identity and Inclusion***

The second reason for preferring the plant metaphor is closely related. Recall the value of considering an institution’s vocation in addition to its mission and identity, according to Cunningham. Whereas an identity (from *idem* = to be the same) is by definition self-consistent, and a mission propels one from the past along a certain trajectory, an institution that is *radically open* to new constituents and new callings means that it can and should grow and change into the future. Indeed, to do so is to become what it is called to be.

I worry that Jodock’s engineering metaphor fails to capture this forward looking, open-ended process, especially given that Jodock himself has reservations about the perceived inflexibility of a college’s inherited “identity” (“Diverse Society” 15n2). While much of a bridge is engineered to sway in the wind, the footings are built not to move. Many consider the Lutheran “foundations” of an institution in much the same way. This assumption then suggests that increasing diversity and openness of an institution is in competition with the college’s

foundational identity and mission, which otherwise “anchor” it, preventing it from moving too far from the spot. By contrast, to consider the vocation of a college as naturally both rooted and open helps us take leave of forced tradeoffs between identity and inclusion. Jodock’s third path—as truly a third option and not some middle “balance” between sectarian rootedness and secular openness—is best supported with organic images that take diversity and distinctiveness as mutually constitutive.

### ***Tending the Garden***

Finally, plants better than bridges help imagine the necessary work of all educators as they tend to the institutional calling. To liken Lutheran theology to the footings of a bridge means that one can claim or point to or appreciate its foundational role. And yet, beyond major repair jobs (a major overhaul of mission statements? founding a new institution?), it is unclear how one nurtures the “Lutheranness” on a daily basis. Jodock explains why Lutheran footings matter; he urges us to “claim” them, to “give attention” to them, to “honor” them, and to “take them seriously” (“Diverse Society” 14-15). I agree with Jodock that doing so will connect us to the past and so help alleviate anxieties about the future.

“Our care for the tradition is exactly that—a kind of care, a nurturing and tending rather than technique or procedure, one that often takes longer than we expect before we see the fruits of our labor, one that sometimes surprises us with flourishing beyond all expectations.”

But if Lutheran colleges and universities are more like plants than like structures, the work of each of us gains some nuance and purpose. Domestic plants require tending. It is not enough to learn about and appreciate them; they must be planted, watered, pruned, picked, nurtured, and otherwise cultivated. What is more, our

daily work of nurturing another living organism can never be completely planned in advance and executed with maximal efficiency. (Large scale industrial agriculture has attempted this; the overuse of fossil fuels and the loss of topsoil and biodiversity is part of the result.) Rather, our care for the tradition is exactly that—a kind of care, a nurturing and tending rather than technique or procedure, one that often takes longer than we expect before we see the fruits of our labor, one that sometimes surprises us with flourishing beyond all expectations.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Intersecting Root Systems***

I leave you with a final image that points us again to the common calling of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities. One of my favorite places is a grove of young aspen trees that spans both sides of the foot trail that leads from Holden Village to Hart Lake in the Cascade Mountains. I learned in college that the world’s largest organism (or at least the heaviest) is a grove of quaking aspens found on the Colorado Plateau in south central Utah. Aspens only look like individual trees nestled closely together. The trees are actually shoots off the same root system. The whole grove is one organism.

The 27 NECU institutions are discrete organizations with their own distinctive identities, different ways of tending to their “Lutheranness,” and alternative lists of faith commitments. But I think it is also true that, digging deep below the surface, we would find interconnected roots if not a whole intricate root system sustaining the whole Network. *Rooted and Open* has it that “the world needs our graduates.” In order to faithfully and innovatively educate them to be called and empowered to serve the neighbor so that all may flourish, we certainly need one another as well.

### **Endnotes**

1. See “Network” below. According to *Rooted and Open*, the shortest expression for our common institutional vocation is to equip students to be “called and empowered—to serve the neighbor—so that all may flourish.”

2. See compelling musings by John Eggen about what he calls “the faithful nones” in this issue of *Intersections*.



3. See the reflections of Marty Stortz in this issue of *Intersections* regarding the “re-inscription” of *Rooted and Open*’s characteristics from marking our institutions to primarily marking the students (I would add, also educators) therein.

4. My understanding of vocation as fragile enterprises that require “passive dispositions” such as patient nurture owes much to the philosophical perspective of Martha Nussbaum. See Bill Moyers’s interview with Nussbaum as excerpted by Popova, below, as well my explicit reliance on Nussbaum in Mahn, “The Conflicts in Our Callings.”

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# Marked by Lutheran Higher Education



My task here is to present a kind of operating manual to the document, *Rooted and Open*. To do that, I open and close with a story.

Years ago, I was on a plane from Boston back into the Bay Area. At the time, I traveled in Lutheran circles more familiar with theological education

than higher education. My seatmate had just visited his son, a freshman at a prestigious East Coast university. I asked how his son liked it, and the father said he wished his son had chosen a Jesuit institution for college. I asked why. Without missing a beat, he replied: "Because he would have learned: to always give back, to be a man for others, and to find God in all things." He knew his son would graduate with a ticket into the power elite, but he was dubious about the values that went along with that invitation. In contrast, he believed that a Jesuit institution clearly communicated its values to graduates. More than that, he was convinced that those values—always giving back, being a "man" for others, finding God in all things—were needed both in the workplace and in the world of the twenty-first century.

What are the distinctive values of a Lutheran higher education? How are those distinctive marks needed both in the workplace and the world today more than ever?

## Marks of NECU and Our Students

In consultation with a larger working group of teaching theologians from the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU) institutions, those are the questions the writing team of *Rooted and Open* tried to address. As we thought and talked and argued together, we cultivated a stereoscopic vision: with one eye, looking for the deep roots of a lively theological tradition, with the other, looking at the challenges and opportunities of the present moment.

What are the distinctive values or "marks" of Lutheran higher education? Think of these common markings as being inscribed into the bodies and minds and hearts of our students, as well as the people who teach them, work with them, and administer the institutions that hold the network in place.

Identifying these marks is an effort always in process; it participates in the spirit of reform (*semper reformanda*) that characterizes this particular movement within Christianity. The late Tom Christenson came up with three "marks" of Lutheran higher education: giftedness, vocation, and that vaunted freedom *from* and freedom *for* (Christensen 72-80). I weighed in with five "charisms": *semper reformanda*, a spirit of critical inquiry that grows out of the notion of freedom, regarding the other as "neighbor," vocational discernment, and a concern for justice that draws on Luther's notion of the priesthood of

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all believers (Stortz 102-113). Darrell Jodock identifies six distinguishing “features”: giftedness, an engaged God, wisdom, epistemological humility, the value of community, and service and community leadership (Jodock 86-97). Though crafted for different times and contexts, notice the resonance in these three constellations of charisms/features/marks.

But what might the NECU institutions say together? And how might that common witness speak into the present moment?

*Rooted and Open* addresses a variety of audiences and on a number of different levels. Specifically, there is the “elevator speech” that telegraphs in broadly accessible and succinct language three distinctive gifts or charisms of Lutheran higher education. The longer version then elaborates the educational priorities these gifts nurture, again, in language that does not presume “Lutheran literacy.” Finally, there’s the full version, one that roots the educational priorities in the thick, rich language for which the Lutheran intellectual tradition is known.

An early draft identified three charisms of Lutheran higher education which marked the institutions themselves. These institutions delivered:

An excellent liberal arts education,  
In service to the neighbor,  
So that all may flourish.

Feedback from a wider faculty working group, as well as the NECU presidents, who reviewed the draft in January 2017, prompted the drafting team to inscribe the charisms. The charisms of Lutheran Higher Education marked people, not just institutions. Accordingly, the tone of the document moved from descriptive to aspirational, even promissory. Verbs rather than nouns detailed the change. The final draft promises that graduates, educators, and the institutions themselves would be:

Called and empowered  
To serve the neighbor  
So that all may flourish

The change is subtle but significant, a move from institutional character to personal identity. While it is possible to discern the marks of Lutheran higher education in the programs, initiatives, and other educational priorities of

each institution, these common markings find their proper place in the identities—on the bodies and minds and hearts—of its students, colleagues, and leaders.

## Grounding Priorities Theologically

After articulating the marks in shortest form, the document then builds out each, first suggesting common educational priorities. Each of the institutions in the network inflect these priorities differently, depending on institutional history, student demographics, and contexts. These educational priorities could be affirmed by faculty and staff, students and administrators who may or may not be Lutheran, may or may not be Christian, may or may not even be “religious” at all. Finally, deep theological roots ground each of these priorities, and these are tended intentionally within the institution.

“Deep theological roots ground each of these priorities, and these are tended intentionally within the institution.”

In some institutions, an office of Mission and Identity may be tasked with this responsibility and privilege. In other institutions, the task may fall to campus ministry or a particular department. In still others, the work may be shared among various stake-holders of the university.

### ***Called and Empowered***

For example, the educational priorities that stem from a network marked by “an excellent liberal arts education” (as the former draft had it) can be elaborated in terms of a commitment to excellence, a grounding in the liberal arts, and a spirit of intellectual humility that values questions as much as their answers.

All of these educational priorities of an excellent liberal arts education are grounded theologically, first, in the radical mystery of a God whom the human intellect can never fully grasp, and, second, in a radical human freedom, which Luther described as “the freedom of a Christian,” a freedom from fundamentalisms of left and right and a freedom for critical inquiry.

## ***To Serve the Neighbor***

Service to the neighbor carries two educational priorities, which NECU institutions share. The first is a regard for the other as “neighbor,” which seems unremarkable until you realize how easily the other can be labeled “threat” or “stranger” or “enemy,” designations that divide. A second educational priority here is the commitment to justice and advocacy, which are the natural issue of a call (*vocare*) to speak out and speak up for (*ad + vocare*) the needs of those who cannot speak for themselves.

These educational priorities that help call our students to serve the neighbor are grounded theologically in the wild generosity of God, to which the only appropriate response is gratitude—and great joy.

## ***So that All May Flourish***

The third and final “mark” of Lutheran higher education—the flourishing of our students and their communities—directs educational priorities toward the flourishing of the whole person (body, mind, soul, and spirit) as well as the whole ‘hood or community, through the practices of radical hospitality and a hunger for diversity.

These educational priorities are grounded theologically in a God who became one of us, in order to better understand the human condition and infuse everyday life with divine mystery.

## **Concluding Reflections**

Think of these marks—called and empowered, to serve the neighbor, so that all may flourish—as inscribed onto bodies like indelible tattoos. Our graduates are marked women and men. And people marked by Lutheran higher education are needed even and especially now.

I’ll close with a final story.

For a couple of years I participated as both a leader and a participant in the Ignatian Colleagues Program (ICP), a national program through the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (see “Association”). Its directors—a mixed group of Jesuit priests and laypeople—rightly realized that if the unique “marks” of Jesuit higher education were to survive, they couldn’t depend on leadership from Jesuits alone. The founders of ICP could already

see effective leadership exercised by faculty and administrators who were not Jesuit, maybe not even Catholic, possibly not even Christian, and even not religious at all.

But these potential institutional leaders were drawn to Jesuit education because of its marks, and they needed a way to articulate them to a variety of audiences and on a number of different levels.

“Our graduates are marked women and men. And people marked by Lutheran higher education are needed even and especially now.”

*Rooted and Open* is a way of articulating our own distinctive marks for all members of this Lutheran network. Needed now more than ever are these institutional charisms and the marks they leave on the people who teach and administer and learn on our campuses.

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Network of  
ELCA Colleges and Universities

# ROOTED AND OPEN

The Common Calling of the  
Network of ELCA Colleges  
and Universities



*Network of Colleges and Universities*

**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.



## ROOTED AND OPEN:

### The Common Calling of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities

A Lutheran college or university locates identity in a common institutional calling. Institutions in the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU) share a common calling that is deeply rooted in the Lutheran intellectual tradition and boldly open to insights from other religious and secular traditions.

*Because* they are rooted in a robust theological tradition, these institutions intentionally pursue conversation about big questions from the full array of religious and secular academic traditions. In so doing, they shape character, invite vocational discernment and build religious literacy. These institutions pose big questions, like “Who are you going to be?” alongside the question “What are you going to do?” Wrestling with these questions, students gain fluency in the language of meaning and purpose. Then, these institutions press graduates to push beyond careerism toward meaningful work and active participation in just, loving communities. These institutions also critically engage with religion while understanding that, for practitioners, religion is a way of life. Attention to religion helps Lutheran students and students in other religious traditions grow in faith and commitment to their communities. Students with a secular self-understanding will grow in their commitment to their guiding ethical perspectives.

Now, as never before, *the world needs our graduates*, graduates who are intellectually acute, humbly open to others, vocationally wise, morally astute and religiously sensitive.

Although their mission statements vary, NECU institutions share a common calling. Together, these educational communities equip graduates who are:

Called and empowered  
To serve the neighbor  
So that all may flourish.

Because this calling names our common *institutional* identity and mission, rather than the religious affiliation of *individuals*, we can and should distinguish some shared educational priorities from the distinctive Lutheran theological values that undergird them. In what follows, the document first names educational priorities that mark each dimension of our common calling, then unpacks Lutheran theological values that ground and support them.

## **CALLED AND EMPOWERED**

*Students of NECU institutions receive an excellent education, rooted in the liberal arts, that engenders freedom of inquiry and prepares them for meaningful work.*

A commitment to excellence has distinguished Lutheran education since its inception. Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon, founders of the Lutheran reform movement and university professors themselves, led the charge for academic as well as religious reform, offering education of the highest caliber to women and men regardless of socio-economic class. Curricular reform, new pedagogies and rigorous learning have marked Lutheran education from the beginning. For this tradition, education matters.

This distinctive education centers on the liberal arts, which prepares students for roles they cannot yet envision and a future as yet unknown. Education across the disciplines—from the humanities and fine arts to the natural and social sciences, from business education to health care—lays the foundation for a kind of critical thinking that can still register awe. It exhibits a freedom of inquiry that challenges every assumption. This freedom of inquiry is often more open and inclusive insofar as NECU institutions invite the critical and empathetic

investigation of religion in public academic spaces rather than restricting religion to the private, personal realm.

Because NECU institutions are both rooted in the Lutheran tradition and open to others, they are distinctive in higher education in the United States. Neither sectarian nor secular, NECU colleges and universities take a third path of being rooted in the Lutheran intellectual and educational traditions while being open to others.

In their openness to the new perspectives and fresh insights of others, these institutions practice a spirit of intellectual humility. Because the world is always larger and more mysterious than the lens through which it is known, intellectual humility nurtures genuine curiosity and an interdisciplinary search for truth.

One Lutheran theological root that anchors the educational priority of excellence and unfettered inquiry is radical freedom. Luther described “the freedom of a Christian” dialectically, both as a freedom *from* the need to shore up a right relationship with God and as a freedom *for* good and meaningful work in God’s world. It is both a freedom *from* false ideas about earning one’s own worthiness and a freedom *for* a life of service to and with the neighbor.

Another Lutheran theological root is a healthy appreciation for the limits of human knowing. Humans can never fully grasp the fullness of God or the mystery of the world around them; they are incapable of understanding God completely or seeing the world through God’s eyes. Luther believed God was hidden (*absconditus*) from full human understanding. The expansion of human knowledge only deepens the awareness of its limits, and this awareness leads to a dual attitude toward learning. On the one hand, because broad knowledge and deep wisdom benefit the world, these institutions reach for excellence. On the other hand, they register suspicion about claims to have a complete understanding of complex issues.



The Lutheran tradition cautions that only God has the God's-eye-view, and all other claims to a complete and final perspective stand as idolatrous, dangerous and even potentially coercive.

With its spirited freedom and healthy sense of human limit, Lutheran higher education is a joyful undertaking with serious purpose. Called and empowered to understand the world and to help transform it, students of NECU institutions go into that world with wisdom, humility and a sense of hope.

## TO SERVE THE NEIGHBOR

*Students of NECU institutions discern their gifts and hone their skills so that they are able to contribute capably, confidently and courageously to the needs of a world that desperately needs them.*

Lutheran education is education for vocation. Students are called to do work that is both meaningful to them and helpful to the earth and its creatures. Vocation-centered education equips students to understand how the world, human beings and communities function, as well as what they need to be personally fulfilled and healthy. Vocation-centered education is for the many callings that our students answer whether in the non-profit or for-profit sectors. Vocation-centered education equips students with the wisdom and capacities for good and needed work in the world through all forms of human endeavor.

NECU institutions embrace the challenge to see all creatures as neighbor and to be a neighbor. The concept of neighbor calls students to serve others while eschewing all forms of elitism, condescension and mere charity. Seeing others as neighbor also resists all that brands them as “enemies” or “threats” or “strangers.” To be a neighbor means to seek to understand and serve people, communities and their needs. In the global and local communities in which our students move, they care for the people, space and ecology of a neighborhood; they work toward a common good.

Because all life is worthy of attention, these institutions commit themselves to identifying oppression and developing strategies that promote justice and heal the divisions that fragment the whole. A common calling (*vocare*) creates advocacy (*ad+vocare*) for the sake of the neighbor to reduce suffering, build up the

neighborhood and befriend the earth. Because these institutions affirm the connectedness of all forms and aspects of life in the world, they invite students to see themselves as parts of larger wholes. They encourage them to weigh the impact of their actions on other creatures, both human and non-human.

A Lutheran theological root that grounds a priority for vocation-centered education is God's generous concern for all creation. God's generosity reaches all humans through the fruitfulness of the created world and the actions of others. A profound gratitude for this divine generosity motivates human generosity. Cognizant of God's gift, people gladly "pay it forward," working for the common good. By naming ourselves and others as "neighbors" and by calling the common place they share a community, Luther emphasized a shared commitment to the well-being and sustainability of all.

An additional theological root is Lutheranism's view of humans as nested in larger communities, which liberates them from the prison of individualism (in Luther's colorful metaphor, a "heart turned-in on itself" or *cor incurvatus in se*). Because, in the world, humans function as God's hands, an important part of each person's vocation is working for justice—the proper balance between parts and a whole or between individual and community.

Finally, Luther's "theology of the cross" suggests that God is particularly present in and with those who suffer, a presence that beckons others toward solidarity with the marginalized. Lutheran higher education calls students beyond the rewards of upward mobility and financial security so that their lives will also be attentive to people who need them most and places that call out for healing.



## SO THAT ALL MAY FLOURISH

*Students of NECU institutions are welcomed, challenged and equipped so that they might serve a common good.*

These institutions of higher learning practice radical hospitality. This welcoming hospitality creates a place in which to re-assess the familiar and consider new options. A community of caring mentors and colleagues makes possible each student's intellectual growth, personal maturation and vocational discernment.

In their appreciation and cultivation of diversity in its many forms, Lutheran colleges and universities welcome all and learn from all. They practice civil discourse; they encourage inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. Denying conflict between faith and learning, they seek to draw on the resources of both to address human problems. Their hope is that, in so doing, students will feel called to reduce suffering and to improve the quality of life and the well-being of creation. Lutheran colleges and universities educate for lives of meaning, purpose and responsible service.

These institutions practice holistic education of mind, body and spirit. The essential relationality of Lutheran theology believes that individuals flourish only as they are embedded in larger communities, families, civic spaces and ecosystems that are also empowered to flourish. Cherishing and protecting healthy communities go hand-in-hand with cherishing and protecting the well-being of individuals. In a dominant culture where goods are increasingly privatized and fought over, graduates of Lutheran institutions can consider the whole, creatively imagine mutual benefit, and work for the health of natural and human communities.

A Lutheran theological root that grounds this educational priority of holistic education is the portrait of a God who came into the world as a human. Reversing all spiritual instincts to climb out of the body and escape a chaotic world, Christianity celebrates a God who deemed creation and creatures important enough to join them. The divine is present in ordinary life. Every person and every creature become potential vessels of grace, and the whole of life displays sacramental significance.

The hospitality of a Lutheran educational community is rooted in the hospitality of God. Luther's most basic insight was that humans are unable to



make themselves worthy of God. God instead takes the first step by reaching out to heal broken relationships, freeing people for flourishing. The divine-human dynamic repeats itself in human-human relationships. Human hospitality to others overcomes the fear of exclusion (“Do I belong here?”), the feeling of unworthiness (“Am I good enough?”), and the burden of self-justification (“I’m the expert—and you’re not!”). Hospitality makes deep learning possible.

## IN SUMMARY

Together, these educational communities train graduates who **are called and empowered to serve the neighbor so that all may flourish**. This vocation is shared by diverse institutions. While the history of each institution propels it from behind, a shared calling also draws the institutions forward, pulling them into a future that brings wholeness to the world. The Lutheran theological roots that these schools have inherited deepen their educational purpose, inform their educational commitments and anchor their educational priorities.

A rich and living Lutheran intellectual and educational tradition compels member institutions to be open to a wide variety of insights from people with a wide variety of backgrounds. They welcome all people of good will into their communities of learning and service. Like the tradition that grounds them, the 27 colleges and universities of the NECU are always in the process of being reformed (*semper reformanda*). Their foundational commitments promise to make them flexible, open to change, ready to partner, institutionally curious and intellectually alive.

They share a calling that is both rooted and open.

# Deep Roots, Big Questions, Bold Goals

Let us begin with the title. “Rooted” refers to the Lutheran tradition—to the sources and foundations of a particular approach to higher education and its role in the world. “Open” refers to the bold posture of receptivity to “insights from other religious and secular traditions.” This means that the effort to find and articulate a common calling reaches back into history, is continually opening forward into shared future, and in every moment invites both connection and commitment to Lutheran higher education. This approach is predicated upon an understanding of a God who is big enough for all human questions. The approach also demands that big questions about the world and human beings be pursued from the perspectives of all disciplines, and that the truths that are found are offered for the good of the whole.

“Asking questions that are big in a variety of ways is required if our graduates are to become equipped to tend the human heart and meet the needs of the wider world.”

Asking questions that are big in a variety of ways is required if our graduates are to become equipped to tend the human heart and meet the needs of the wider world. Big questions also turn back to put the questioners in question. They ask, with poet Mary Oliver, “What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” They are

questions that ask not only, “What are you going to do?,” but also, “Who are you going to be?” Though the roots of this education are specifically in the Lutheran tradition of higher education, the bigness of the questions extends the roots into the foundation of the world and the human condition.



Why ask such big questions? The document asserts three primary reasons for asking big questions:

1. Big questions shape character, transforming through education our students into the kinds of people we want our graduates to be.
2. Big questions reach deeply into the human heart and the call of conscience to help students connect their education with their vocational discernment, the ways they might give their training, their gifts, and their critical thinking to the world.
3. Big questions build religious literacy, which consists of the capacity to receive the gifts from multiple religious and non-religious traditions and the skills to convene those multiple perspectives for the sake of common good. The big questions asked in Lutheran higher education are aimed not just toward what students are good at, for their own sake, but also toward what passions students can apply to purposes in the world.

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To work on these questions, multiple forms of truth must be present at the table and in the classroom for study, examination, and conversation.

*Rooted and Open* boldly proclaims: “*The world needs our graduates, graduates who are intellectually acute, humbly open to others, vocationally wise, morally astute, and religiously sensitive.*” Not every institution of higher education has this as its goal, and not every graduate has these qualities. Perhaps not all graduates of Lutheran colleges and universities have these qualities, and yet it remains our bold goal to attend to all students in multiple ways, nourishing their sense of self in community as well as their intellect so they are prepared to contribute their energies and attentions to the world in which they live. Even as the Lutheran colleges and universities join together to make a statement of common calling, the outward face of each to the world is different, having its own context and witness.

*“Rooted and Open* boldly proclaims: ‘The world needs our graduates, graduates who are intellectually acute, humbly open to others, vocationally wise, morally astute, and religiously sensitive.’”

According to the most compact formulation of our common calling, students from all our colleges and universities are:

Called and empowered  
To serve the neighbor  
So that all may flourish

Each phrase has deep roots in the Lutheran tradition and an openness to the reach and the scope of our world today.

## Called and Empowered

From the beginning, Lutheran reformers promoted freedom of inquiry and meaningful work—with access to education for all children, regardless of gender or socioeconomic state. Our institutions are proud of that deep

root and what it set out to accomplish in the sixteenth century. This root continues to call and empower Lutheran colleges and universities to consider what freedom of

“An approach to higher education rooted in the Lutheran tradition prioritizes the liberal arts, ‘prepar[ing] students for roles they cannot yet envision and a future as yet unknown.’”

inquiry and access to education look like in the twenty-first century. An approach to higher education rooted in the Lutheran tradition prioritizes the liberal arts, “prepar[ing] students for roles they cannot yet envision and a future as yet unknown.” To be sure, Lutheran colleges and universities offer courses that are familiar across higher education and follow disciplines that are well-established. And yet, our curricula and co-curricula are not limited to how-to knowledge or we’ve-always-done-it-this-way experiences that are known, specific, and ready to apply right now. Instead, the aim throughout is the cultivation of critical thinking, embodied in questions such as: “How will it be?” “How can we?” “What if?” Critical thinking skills help now and can be called upon later in life and career, even when discipline-specific knowledge has changed dramatically.

Freedom of inquiry in Lutheran higher education is frequently referred to as a “third path” in higher education, drawing upon the work of Darrell Jodock. A first path in higher education assumes the separation of religion and education. It asks participants to check their religion at the door and not consider any religious forms of truth. A second path in higher education is sectarian, which advances a particular view of truth and draws that view of truth through all curricular and co-curricular activities. Lutheran higher education navigates a third path, where participants are permitted to talk about forms of religious truth alongside other forms of truth in and out of the classroom and where no one religious truth commands obedience or privilege (Jodock 13-14). This third path includes “investigation of religion in public academic spaces, rather than restricting religion to the private, personal realm” (Network). This

means that all students at Lutheran colleges and universities, whether personally religious or not, will have some facility in talking about forms of religious truth—how religious truth can be approached and what it can offer to public conversation.

## To Serve the Neighbor

Meaningful work from the perspective of Martin Luther and the Lutheran tradition of higher education reaches beyond a paycheck and personal satisfaction because it contributes to the world and serves the neighbor. At its best, students at Lutheran colleges and universities can both *see the neighbor* and the neighbor's needs and *be the neighbor*; they can be receptive to the gifts of neighbors as well as mindful of their needs. Education with the neighbor in mind situates every self within the ecology of the whole. Of necessity this education is vocation-centered, asking not just what students do but why they do it and for whom. In the words of *Rooted and Open*, "Vocation-centered education equips students to understand how the world, human beings, and communities function." This understanding of vocation is not individual or singular. It is not focused on the one right career path or betterment of self alone. Though Lutheran higher education is invested in helping students identify what makes their hearts sing, that concern is never allowed to turn inward for the sake of the student alone. Instead, the singing of the heart searches for harmony, unity, and counterpoint with the neighbor. Vocation-centered education is rooted in community and opens its fruits to community. It is oriented to cooperative relationships and meaningful work that can be of use in broader society.

"Though Lutheran higher education is invested in helping students identify what makes their hearts sing, that concern is never allowed to turn inward for the sake of the student alone. Instead, the singing of the heart searches for harmony, unity, and counterpoint with the neighbor."

## So that All may Flourish

Lutheran higher education aims at the whole person and toward just communities. Both of these aims are indicators of radical hospitality. Students are, of course, welcomed in their intellectual acuity, yet they are also welcomed and encouraged to flourish in all of the other ways they are involved in campus life and contribute to the community. Campuses are not social clubs. Rather, they are collectives working toward and trying to embody just communities that are principled and focused on the values that unite them. *Rooted and Open* puts it this way:

In their appreciation and cultivation of diversity in its many forms, Lutheran colleges and universities welcome all and learn from all. They practice civil discourse; they encourage inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. Denying conflict between faith and learning, they seek to draw on the resources of both to address human problems. Their hope is that, in so doing, students will feel called to reduce suffering and to improve the quality of life and the well-being of creation. Lutheran colleges and universities educate for lives of meaning, purpose, and responsible service.

The principles in this quotation imply practices in community that must continually be made new. How might our practices of welcome change as we encounter new people to welcome? How might we learn from *their* practices of welcome? What parts of God and the world do our neighbors see that we do not see? Can we get to the place where we take turns welcoming each other?

As we consider the importance of welcoming all, it is also important to clarify what we mean by "civil discourse." The words "civil" and "civility" are sometimes invoked with placidity, which forces a coolness or a niceness onto difficult aspects of living together. In this way, to be civil can sometimes mean to preserve order above all other concerns, which leaves in place dominant ideas and power structures. That is not the sort of civil discourse intended here. What is intended by "civil discourse" in this document is commitment to common life and conviction that the approach to liberal arts rooted in the Lutheran tradition of higher education is relevant to today's concerns.

Graduates from Lutheran colleges and universities are prepared to think with their neighbors about the pressing issues of the day and expected to contribute what they have learned for the sake of the common good.

The vision of the common good advanced at our institutions precedes and exceeds what is offered specifically from Lutheran traditions. Early Lutheran reformers, many of them professors at institutions with long histories, were motivated in their reforms by visions of the common good that they inherited. Successive generations of Lutheran higher education have also inherited visions of the common good from many different perspectives, both religious and secular. Lutheran colleges and universities today serve as meeting places for people from many different areas of life to exchange academic and applied knowledge in dialogue and to activate both cooperatively.

“Graduates from Lutheran colleges and universities are prepared to think with their neighbors about the pressing issues of the day and expected to contribute what they have learned for the sake of the common good.”

In these dialogues, the gifts of faith and reason are both essential, and each is incomplete without the other. Held together in cooperation and productive tension, both faith and reason aim toward the shared goal of reducing suffering and improving the quality of life for all of creation. Aiming toward big, audacious goals together gives the work at and beyond Lutheran colleges and universities meaning and purpose. Educators practice responsible service and

strive to call responsible service forward into the paths our graduates take in the wider world. This calling is big! Alone, we cannot do it, which is why we invoke a common calling and pledge to walk in it together.

I close with three questions to ponder as you read and reflect on the document:

1. How would you name your own rootedness and openness? How might you draw from your own rootedness and openness for this moment of your life and work?
2. Where does your personal sense of calling intersect with the common calling of NECU institutions? How does your personal sense of calling overlap with your own institution's calling?
3. How does your reception of the common calling shift your thinking on your vocation or the vocation of your institution? On what you or your institution should stop doing? On what you or your institution might begin to do?

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MARCIA J. BUNGE AND KATHI TUNHEIM

## *Rooted and Open* as Resource for Expanding Opportunities on Your Own Campus

Approximately 1000 colleges and universities in the United States are religiously-affiliated, and 26 of them are affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The ELCA's Network of Colleges and Universities (NECU)—which also includes Luther College at the University of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada—spans the coasts, from California Lutheran and Pacific Lutheran in the West to Gettysburg and Muhlenberg in the East and 22 in-between. NECU schools are also connected with many other institutions of Lutheran higher education worldwide. Although in the past Lutheranism was primarily centered in Germany and northern Europe, today Lutherans are found across the globe. The fastest growing Lutheran church in the world today is in Ethiopia, and the majority of citizens in Namibia, as in the Nordic countries, self-identify as Lutherans. The list of the ten largest Lutheran church bodies in the world includes not only Germany, Finland, and the Scandinavian countries but also Tanzania, Ethiopia, Madagascar, and Indonesia.

Although all 27 colleges and universities are part of NECU and the vast network of Lutheran higher education

worldwide, each one has its own distinctive and distinguished characteristics shaped by its particular history and leaders. Each began humbly by German or Scandinavian immigrants who highly valued Lutheran commitments to universal education, the liberal arts, and contributing to the common good. Finlandia was established by Finns; Grandview by Danes; Augustana (Rock Island), Gustavus Adolphus College, and Bethany by Swedes; and the rest by Germans and Norwegians. The ethnic beginnings of these institutions, their original geographic locations, and a vast array of



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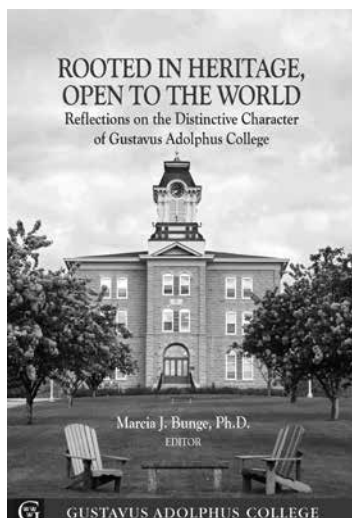


characters and events all played a role in shaping their particular missions and signature strengths.

All of the NECU schools have long welcomed individuals from diverse secular and religious backgrounds and world-views, and students, faculty, and staff often raise important questions about both the particular characteristics and shared Lutheran affiliation of their institution. They wonder, for example: What does the Lutheran affiliation mean? What does it mean for our institution or our students? Do I have the freedom to study or teach what I like? What is the ELCA? How does the college's affiliation with the ELCA influence this institution's current programs and future plans? What precisely is NECU? Why should I care?

Each institution has resources to help answer questions related to its particular mission, and NECU has now provided a document about the Network's shared commitments, *Rooted and Open: The Common Calling of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities*. This document states that our common calling is to "equip graduates who are called and empowered to serve the neighbor so that all may flourish," and it outlines shared educational commitments of the Network and its roots in the Lutheran intellectual tradition. The document helps readers understand why all NECU institutions are committed to the following: providing an excellent education rooted in the liberal arts; supporting academic freedom; attending to moral and spiritual life and the whole person; welcoming all students; and helping them discern and hone their unique gifts and talents so that they can serve others, seek justice, and contribute to the common good. Even as it highlights the "common calling" and

"Even as it highlights the 'common calling' and shared commitments of the Network, the document honors the 'particular callings' and distinctive histories, values, and gifts of each institution."



shared commitments of the Network, the document honors the "particular callings" and distinctive histories, values, and gifts of each institution. Thus, the document provides a helpful framework for appreciating the value of Lutheran higher education as well as sparking discussion about the particular strengths of each institution.

When coupled with resources from particular institutions, *Rooted and Open* provides an introduction to NECU and a valuable spring board for deeper conversations about an institution's distinctive characteristics, Lutheran affiliation, and

the benefits of NECU for faculty, staff, and students. One resource developed at our college prior to *Rooted and Open* that serves as a fitting complement to it is a book (aptly!) entitled, *Rooted in Heritage, Open to the World: Reflections on the Distinctive Character of Gustavus Adolphus College*. The volume aims to provide a multifaceted introduction to the particular mission, values, and heritage that help make Gustavus a distinctive place of learning. The book includes an introduction to the College's Lutheran heritage and 33 short chapters written by members of the staff and professors from various disciplines. Contributors speak about their experiences at Gustavus and offer examples and stories of their own appreciation of the College's distinctive characteristics and Lutheran heritage. These short chapters are divided into five main parts: Religious Diversity at a Lutheran College; Core Values Inside and Outside the Classroom; Distinctive Pursuits Rooted in Our Heritage; National and International Connections Facilitated by Our Lutheran Affiliation; and Poetry, People, and Sense of Place. The book also includes an appendix with selected primary texts by Martin Luther on education, vocation, and love of neighbor.

This book has been used by faculty, staff, students in a variety of settings to strengthen the understanding of and appreciation for the College and its Lutheran affiliation. For example, selections from the book have been discussed on various occasions for new members of the faculty and for faculty workshops. The book is also given to new members of the College's advancement team, which helps them connect to Gustavus and alumni. A professor who teaches a seminar for first-year students on interreligious

understanding and cooperation assigns the introduction and the book's section on Religious Diversity at a Lutheran College. Chapters in this section are written by professors who self-identify as Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, agnostic, Catholic, Lutheran, and Evangelical, and they all offer their perspectives on what they find rewarding and sometimes challenging about teaching at a college with a Lutheran heritage. Another professor uses the book in a course on "Lutheranism and Lutheran Diversity Worldwide." The book helps students, who come from diverse secular and religious backgrounds, to appreciate the unique Lutheran heritage of the college and how this heritage shapes its core values. Donors and alumni have also appreciated reading the book because it includes many stories about people and events who helped make Gustavus an excellent liberal arts college and welcoming place of learning.

The Gustavus Adolphus College Board of Trustees recently met to discuss the introduction to this book and NECU's *Rooted and Open*. President Rebecca Bergman asked the editor, Marcia Bunge, to lead a brief workshop on these resources with members of the Board and the President's cabinet. Participants read these two resources prior to the workshop, prompting a rich discussion about shared gifts of Lutheran higher education and the distinctive strengths of Gustavus. Since the resources clearly describe the Lutheran concept of vocation and other important Lutheran theological ideas that undergird the mission of ELCA colleges and universities, the discussion helped participants also to share and enrich their language for future discussions about the College. Furthermore, taking time to appreciate the robust Lutheran concept of vocation helped participants better understand a "vocation-centered" education that equips students to address the needs of the world.

Participants also shared elements of their own vocational journeys. Sharing brief stories with one another brought home the significance of Luther's concept of vocation and deepened relationships. At the conclusion of the workshop, participants remarked how proud they felt about the institution's 156-year history and its Swedish Lutheran heritage. They reported that by becoming more informed about the College's Lutheran roots they felt excited about its signature strengths and motivated to work together for its future.

Whether or not discussions of NECU's *Rooted and Open* are coupled with resources about an institution's particular

mission, any introduction to the document provides an excellent occasion to highlight several benefits and opportunities NECU offers faculty, staff, and students. Some of these include attending conferences and educational events, developing partnerships, and building relationships with others in similar capacities across the 27 NECU institutions. The following events and programs are just a few of the opportunities in which individuals can participate:

"Since the resources clearly describe the Lutheran concept of vocation and other important Lutheran theological ideas that undergird the mission of ELCA colleges and universities, the discussion helped participants also to share and enrich their language for future discussions about the College."

First, the Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference is a three-day, annual national event that brings together faculty and staff members of NECU institutions to explore the distinctive roles we play in higher education. The conference is open to all faculty and staff, and the majority of expenses are paid for five representatives per campus.

Second, LECNA Fellows Program provides a year-long executive leadership development program targeted to grow future higher education leaders for ELCA colleges and universities. Participants are selected and funded by institutional presidents and cabinets.

Third, The Association of Lutheran College Faculties provides opportunities for sharing research, pedagogy, and fellowship among the faculty and staff of colleges affiliated with Lutheran denominations and for Lutherans teaching in colleges and universities not associated with the church. The association hosts an annual conference on various themes of interest to faculty and staff, and all are welcome to attend.

Finally, Tuition Exchange Program offers the children of faculty and staff who work at an ELCA college or university a significant tuition benefit if they attend another ELCA institution or other approved liberal arts institutions across the country.

Professional partnerships can also develop between departments from various colleges that can be beneficial not only to our students but also to faculty and staff. Kathi Tunheim, Professor of Management and current Vice President of Mission, Strategy and Innovation at Gustavus, for example, partnered with the Dean of the Offutt Business School at Concordia College (Moorhead, Minnesota) to create a “Global Entrepreneurship in India” semester for business students at both schools. These students intern at both non-government organizations (NGOs) and for-profit corporations to compare and contrast the missions of these organizations.

Through similar relationships, St. Olaf professors reached out to the Economics and Management Department at Gustavus when they began their Ole Cup Competition, requesting a faculty judge from Gustavus. As a result, members of the faculty at Gustavus were inspired to create their own entrepreneurial competition. Many Gustavus alumni have engaged with the College and mentored our students, which has been extremely beneficial. Finally, during Tunheim’s recent sabbatical, she visited three ELCA colleges and studied their experiential learning, study away, and faculty development practices. Her research energized her teaching and benefited the Economics and Management Department’s strategic thinking and planning. These are just a few examples of benefits of being a member of NECU. As costs for all institutions rise, these partnerships provide valuable opportunities for sharing expertise, ideas, and resources.

Another substantial benefit of the Network is that it brings ELCA colleges and universities into fruitful relationships with a vast network of Lutheran institutions nationally and internationally. Many ELCA colleges and universities have long-standing connections, for example, with highly respected agencies such as Lutheran Social Service, Lutheran Disaster Relief, Lutheran World Relief, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, Lutheran Youth Core, Lutheran Volunteer Core, and Young Adults in Global Mission. These and other Lutheran institutions routinely hire students graduating from ELCA colleges and universities, and their alum often hold leadership positions in them. As part of NECU, faculty and students have also benefited from relationships to Lutheran churches and organizations in many parts of the world. Gustavus, for example, has

“Across the landscape of higher education NECU is quite unique in that its 27 colleges and universities sometimes compete against each other for students, yet they support each other in their missions, identity, and academic excellence.”

strong ties to Lutheran institutions in Sweden, Norway, Germany, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and South Africa. Through such relationships, Gustavus students, faculty, or staff who travel abroad to these parts of the world for J-term courses, concert tours, or research are frequently hosted by Lutheran congregations and agencies.

Across the landscape of higher education NECU is quite unique in that its 27 colleges and universities sometimes compete against each other for students, yet they support each other in their missions, identity, and academic excellence. The late Ernest Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, once praised these ELCA institutions as rare places in today’s world of higher education. He said, “Such schools had found the ability to probe both the deep places of the mind and the deep longings of the spirit” (Simmons 18). Boyer’s claim is a remarkable compliment, and it highlights the unique nature of this collaboration to share ideas and nurture relationships for the benefit of the common good.

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## “Faithful Nones” and the Importance of a Rooted and Open Pedagogy

I must start by admitting how new I am to the experience and tradition of NECU schools. I grew up in a Lutheran home with a strong Lutheran tradition on both sides of my family. I also grew up in an age of discovery, and my journey through college was just that. I was not of the generation who went to a “school of the church” and the liberal arts seemed impractical to a future engineer. A NECU school was not even on my radar. I attended a state school and graduated with my degree in engineering. Following seminary, I would serve in Bolivia leading a non-profit and later in Omaha as an ELCA Pastor.

All of that is to say that I am very new to the Lutheran higher-education world. My knowledge of NECU was limited to the reports I would read and hear at our synod assembly. I knew of Midland University and had physically been on campus but that was about it. That changed a little over two years ago when I began my work at Midland University in the development office. Then my journey of exploration of Lutheran higher education began as I sought to understand what made this school “Lutheran.” At the same time, I was to begin researching for my D.Min. thesis. I boldly (but mostly naively) selected institutional religious identity as my area of research.

I was exposed to a variety of perspectives of institutional identity in working with alumni, meeting students, and developing relationships with faculty and staff. They all pointed towards some definition of what it meant to them

that Midland was a Lutheran school, but these descriptions were as though describing landscape beyond a horizon yet unseen. Within the writings of *Intersections* and those by Robert Benne, Tom Christenson, and Darrell Jodock, I found a robust conversation about Lutheran theology, pedagogy, and vocation and some important frameworks.

My research sought out to discover something *definitive* within the perspectives and practices of our Lutheran students, but the data simply didn’t support this. I felt a little like I spent two years to describe what I didn’t find. As I spent time reflecting on my thesis I realized I was looking for distinction among groups while data was hinting at a distinctive group altogether—the “faithful nones”—and the implications of their particular form of religiosity. Understanding this group forced me to reflect on how we understand faith, religion, and spirituality. I read the recently released *Rooted and Open* and realized that many of our students are already living into a perspective on religiosity that our institutions seek to embrace.

There are two outcomes of this research that hold important insights for Lutheran education, which I explore in this article. First, I explore here a group I call



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the “faithful nones” and highlight the need for a deeper understanding of faith, religion, and spirituality that moves beyond a binary understanding of identity as religious or secular. Second, I explore how and why students express a desire to grow in their faith through an experience of diversity. Both of these research findings emphasize the importance of the educational approach outlined in *Rooted in Open*, which is well suited to engage students with a differentiated view of religion, faith, and spirituality.

## The Faithful Nones

A significant portion of my research (see Eggen in works cited) was a student survey of a broad student population (N=277). This survey evaluated student demographics along with several practices and perspectives of students. These data were used to explore several areas of student practices and perspectives within the context of a Lutheran school. One of the most significant outcomes of these data is the subsequent exploration of students who self-identified as “nones”—those not affiliated with any particular religious tradition. This led to a deeper appreciation for the nuanced religiosity of the “nones,” which in turn challenges monolithic portrayals of this group as unbelieving or secularists.

“The answers of the ‘faithful nones’ suggest that self-identifying as a ‘none’ does not entail the absence of an identity, but rather the presence of a particular and meaningful religious identity correlated with traditional faith practices and beliefs.”

This emerging understanding led me to view a group of these individuals as a distinctively different group. I refer to them as “faithful nones.” This group embraces faith, spirituality, and religion as differentiated concepts; they have a more defined separation of religion and faith than what is traditionally assumed.

My examination of the “faithful nones” begins with an analysis of how respondents selected and rated their religious identity. There is a unique subset of students

who responded to questions about religious identity and faith in a way which seemed to indicate that “none” meant something positive and substantive to them. I have traditionally understood an identity of “none” to be more of a negation of religious identity rather than a positively defined group. The answers of the “faithful nones” suggest that self-identifying as a “none” does not entail the absence of an identity, but rather the presence of a particular and meaningful religious identity correlated with traditional faith practices and beliefs.

### “None” as Religious Identity

The first element of my study is the student’s religious identity, where students were invited to select from one of nineteen options, one of which was “none” but also included “agnostic,” “atheist,” “non-denominational,” and “other Christian.” A religious identity of “none” was selected by 14.5 percent (n=42) of students. What was surprising was how some respondents answered this later question: “How strong is your religious identity?” I anticipated that those self-identified as “nones” would select the option for “no religious identity.” However, less than one-half of “nones” selected this option, while 51.9 percent (n=26) of nones rated their religious identity with some level of strength.

I initially struggled to understand these results, assuming they were likely errors, or an anomaly. My worldview did not include seeing “none” as someone’s individual religious expression. I assumed that those with individual religious expression would select atheist, agnostic, or possibly “other Christian” to indicate belief without affiliation. Yet the nones declined these options. At first, I thought that perhaps this was because of the negative societal perception of being atheist or agnostic in a small Midwest community. Or perhaps it was just a mistake in interpreting the data. After further discussion and subsequent exploration of the data, I found exactly the opposite.

Conversations with my own students help in this reconsideration considerably. It was the final week of a Christian thought class where we spent time discussing American civil religion, “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” (Smith and Denton), and perspectives on being “spiritual but not religious.” We concluded this discussion by reflecting together on the relationship between religion,

faith, and spirituality. I shared the concept of how it appeared from my own study that a number of students considered that being “none” was their religious identity

“Being ‘none’ isn’t the absence of a religious identity, it is these students’ identity.”

while also expressing some Christian beliefs. This group of students, including some planning to go into ministry, were completely unsurprised by these results. They found it very natural that someone would name their particular religious identity “none” and hold to some traditional Christian beliefs. Being “none” isn’t the absence of a religious identity, it is these students’ identity. The students found no contraction in identifying as a “none” and holding either deistic or Christian beliefs. This conversation alluded to a differentiated understanding of their belief system and their identity which disambiguated religion and faith.

### ***The Beliefs of Faithful Nones***

This conversation with my students led me to a secondary review of the survey data. I wanted to better understand how nones responded to questions about traditionally Christian beliefs, given that the nones held a set of values and practices which, in many ways, are not too dissimilar from the espoused beliefs of many church members. Nearly half of the nones, 48.3 percent (n=19), indicated a practice of prayer, and 14.6 percent (n=6) reportedly prayed daily or weekly. A majority hold a view of the Bible similar to many mainline denominations with 60 percent (n=25) selecting “the Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything should be taken literally, word for word” as their perspective on the Bible. Over one-third, 39 percent (n=16), indicated they believe in God with half of those respondents having some doubts and half indicating they have no doubts about their belief in God. Finally, over one-quarter of nones, 26.8 percent (n=11), said that “Jesus was the Son of God who was raised from the dead” best reflected their beliefs about Christ.

These general views, prayer practices, understandings of the Bible as the inspired word of God, and believing in

God and in Jesus are aligned with a mainline protestant belief system. The prevalence of these views grows when the group is narrowed to those who consider “none” as a religious identity—that is, when the group is narrowed to those who both select “none” as their religious identity but who do not select “no religious identity” when asked to rate the strength of that identity. Within this subset (N=42), 76 percent (n=19) believe in life after death, 68 percent (n=17) indicate some level of prayer life, 68 percent (n=17) see the Bible as the inspired word of God, 52 percent (n=13) express a belief in God, and 40 percent (n=10) believe that Jesus is the Son of God. These results suggest an understanding of “nones” who hold some traditionally Christian beliefs, practice an internally focused spiritual life, and yet still have limited engagement in organized religion and worship attendance. Individual faith and religious identity are even more differentiated than what is traditionally understood.

### ***Disambiguating Faith, Religion, and Spirituality***

In recent years there has been increasing awareness of the disambiguation of religion and spirituality, yet “faith” seems to many to be synonymous with either. This can be found in discussions of what it means to be “spiritual but not religious.” Those who critique an emphasis on spirituality believe that religious traditions, communities,

“Understanding the ‘faithful nones’ calls for a shift that further disambiguates faith from both spirituality and religion.”

and institutions are needed to sustain faith, while the other group believes that individual spirituality is the best expression of faith. In a conversation around what it means to be “spiritual but not religious” a group of my students responded with an immediate, instinctual retort that many previous generations were “more religious than spiritual.” It seems that both groups believe that their emphasis on religion or spirituality better bears and expresses “faith.”

Understanding the “faithful nones” calls for a shift that further disambiguates faith from both spirituality and religion. In particular, the “faithful nones” call for



an understanding of faith, religion, and spirituality which challenges a traditional paradigm that places an expression of faith subservient to that of religious identity or spirituality. A differentiation between faith, spirituality, and religion as three independent elements calls for a more profound understanding of all three. A differentiated understanding of the three would call for a more concrete definition of “religion” as a communal expression of faith that is based in culture and rituals, of “faith” as a personal set of beliefs in a higher power, and of “spirituality” as personal practices contributing to self-understanding and in support of their belief.

When I proposed these definition to my students, they expressed strong agreement for them and for the idea that these are not codependent. For these students, and as expressed in the survey by the “faithful nones,” religion, faith, and spirituality are independent of one another. They may be intersecting, but certainly they should be seen as three clearly differentiated phenomena.

I am helped here by the work of Peter Berger. In *The Many Altars of Modernity*, Berger explores what it means to live in an age of plurality. Berger begins to explore a multifaceted understanding of what he simply refers to as faith. Berger differentiates two elements of religion, an individual and communal expression, as “faith as based on individual choice rather than on fate or the accident of birth” and “faith as institutionalized in the form of the voluntary association” (Berger 49). He also explores a shift in how individuals engage in the communal expression of religion. Berger reminds us of the functional nature through which most individuals engage in religion. He also reminds us that people tend to pick and choose elements such as “people who claim to believe in the teachings of the Catholic Church also believe in reincarnation.” This is something I have certainly seen in my own experience as a pastor. Congregational members saw no conflict in being a Lutheran and going to a psychic. Congregation members may go to worship at one church, small group at another, and a parenting group at a third. Berger writes about this as a characteristic of living in a pluralistic age: “pluralism means that individuals put together their religious beliefs like a child uses LEGO pieces to construct an idiosyncratic edifice” (Berger 57).

The point in these examples is to remind us that a traditional framework of religion—where “religion”

encompasses a set of individual beliefs, a theological framework, communal practices, and collective identity—is no longer the reality through which most individuals view religion. For many today, there is now significant division between an “internalized religion” and “community religious practices.” (What I refer to as “faith” mirrors what Berger alludes to as the individualized religion, and my term “religion” would resemble his community religious practices.) What is clear is that Berger sees disambiguation between individual and communal religion in the age of plurality. For those engaging in religious practices, the outward, communal religion looks not to be something that must be adopted wholesale, but rather like a toolbox from which helpful elements might serve an individual’s expression.

One more component of Berger’s work gets us back to the issue of Lutheran higher education. In his introduction, Berger discusses the historical differentiation between societal functions which have been divided up into church, state, economy, education, and so forth. He reminds the reader of what he considers a basic sociological concept: “If it is to function in society, every institution must have a correlate in consciousness. Therefore if a differentiation has occurred between religious and other institutions in society, this differentiation must also be manifested in the consciousness of individuals” (Berger x). This becomes a foundational point for exploring how individuals begin to live this same type of plurality in their own lives. If, for example, the economy is a different institution than religion, then an individual has both an economic framework but also a religious framework for making decisions. If the principle that a societal institution must have a correlate in consciousness holds true, then the reverse may also be true, namely that a conscious understanding might have an institutional correlate. As we have seen, in the case of the “faithful nones,” the consciousness has made a shift in understanding faith, religion, and spirituality to be independent realities. Have societal institutions matched this differentiation?

## Faithful Nones and Higher Education

We don’t live in a secular age; we live in an age of plurality and one of those pluralisms is secularism. This is not

an all-or-nothing proposition, but a proposition which is repeatedly played out in the lives of individuals every day through a variety of social institutions. One aspect of the age of plurality is the internalized division between faith, spirituality, and religion; each is a separate decision and influences subsequent decisions in a different way. This is how it is possible for a student to be a faithful none. The institutional expression of religion and rituals has become secularized for them. They are a “none.” Yet their internal belief in a higher power is not secularized; they have a positive, substantive religious identity and express beliefs. Thus, in response to a question they likely see as relating to institution identification, they answer “none,” but this lack of identifying with institutional religion does not preclude the possibility of individual belief.

Perhaps this should not be so surprising for those of us in Lutheran higher education. For many years now the exploration of Lutheran identity in higher education has rejected a bifurcated approach to institutional religious identity. Christenson wrote of the “fallacy of the exclusive disjunction” (Christenson 12), whereby institutions see only possibilities of being a secular institution or a rigid, fundamental institution. Darrell Jodock likewise argues for a “third path” which “takes seriously both its religious heritage and religious and other forms of inclusiveness” (Jodock 24).

These perspectives are fully embodied, and perhaps foundational to, *Rooted and Open* as well: “Neither sectarian nor secular, NECU colleges and universities take a third path of being rooted in the Lutheran intellectual and educational traditions while being open to others.” This sense of rootedness, along with the Lutheran tradition of humility, allows for a pedagogical approach that invites others to explore religion. In other words, what we might call a Lutheran pedagogy is uniquely situated to teach others how to think religiously by teaching a religion without presumptively teaching it as *the* religion. Lutheran pedagogy brings with it a certain humility and inherent openness that seems to be the sort of approach readily engaged by a generation of students seeking religion outside of institutional definitions. NECU’s humility may even entail an openness to understanding religion and faith in a new way.

*Rooted and Open* is thus well positioned to engage the distinctive realities of faith, spirituality, and religion as

experienced by our students. Our institutional identities are more than religious (rooted) or secular (open)—but they are not less. Embracing our Lutheran identity does not mean we reject secularism or pluralism, because we are also not sectarian, even when the “sect” is Christianity.

“Lutheran pedagogy brings with it a certain humility and inherent openness that seems to be the sort of approach readily engaged by a generation of students seeking religion outside of institutional definitions.”

On some of our campuses, there seems to be an assumed claim that having a religious identity on campus is a deterrent to enrollment—that being an institution of faith is unattractive to a generation of secularists. That assumption relies on a sectarian understanding of Christianity, and *Rooted and Open* reminds us that that is not who we are. What my own research suggest is that sectarian understandings are not what students in the age of plurality want either. They don’t want to adopt wholesale a religion, nor to ignore religion, but rather to learn how to think religiously and spiritually. The perspectives of students call for plurality rather than secularism and an ability to teach religious understanding through a religion without teaching it as the religion. *Rooted and Open* properly positions religion and faith as a meaningful and necessary element of the educational experience without making it the point of that experience. It embraces a non-binary approach to religion and faith which stands well equipped to engage a new generation of students who are also navigating their own way through a pluralistic religious landscape and a rather complex understanding of personal faith.

## Conclusions

What is clear is that the framework of Generation Z rejects the binary notion of being secular *or* religious. The type of educational environment they seek is neither absent of religiosity nor defined by a narrow view of religion. This matches their own personal lives, where binary

understandings of secularism and religion simply do not fit within their frameworks or their experiences. That's not how they understand religion, spirituality, and faith. They too seek a "third path" which both disambiguates and integrates their personal belief system, religious expression, and personal spirituality.

The fundamental nature of *Rooted and Open* is one that invites this type of understanding. It does not require rigid belief systems or personal religious expressions, nor does it reject the importance of them. This framework moves beyond space for dialog and demands religious dialog as a part of the learning process itself. It invites others to "build religious literacy" not in a way of building one's own set of values, but by inviting an introspective understanding of faith and religion that leads to an actualized religious identity. Neither absent religion nor defined by a religion, the pedagogy of *Rooted and Open* is one which embraces core beliefs without requiring or expecting the institutionalization of these beliefs and the exclusion of others. A Lutheran pedagogy is one in which our faith is only enhanced through the inclusion of others, while the Lutheran heritage is one that continues to invite reflection on the meaning and value of institutionalized religion.

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# Finding Flourishing: Teaching Self-Care as Course Content

On the day that my intro-level students turn in their major research paper, they come to class to find the lights dimmed and white noise playing in the background. At this point in the term, the indicators of their stress and exhaustion are obvious—many are visibly moving slower, collapsing into desks and staring into space rather than talking to their classmates. Students who wore impeccable makeup at the start of term have often dropped that routine; others who always came to class well-dressed are now prioritizing comfort in sweatpants and loose shirts. Many carry oversized cups of coffee. A few, to be blunt, do not smell their best.

Professors, administrators, or professionals working at colleges and universities find this sight to be as expected as sunrise and as predictable as the seasons. We see our students sacrificing sleep, hygiene, and hobbies as the term winds up, and most of us accept this as part of the college experience. Yet, as conversations about the mental health of our students continue to mount in our professional space, and as we provide difficult and sometimes inconvenient emotional labor for our students who are anxious, struggling, and fearful, we may come to the conclusion that it is not always ideal to leave students to whatever coping and self-care practices they have cobbled together over 18-20 years of life experience. This is part of the reason for my aforementioned dimly lit classroom towards the end of term; when students are stretched nearly to breaking, I have found great value in teaching

self-care and stress-coping practices to students directly. Moreover, I find that doing so affirms the Lutheran commitment to “radical hospitality” and creates space for the “holistic education of mind, body and spirit” (Network) in a setting where the development of the mind is often prioritized above other formative needs.

Here and throughout, I use “self-care,” “self-awareness,” and “coping” at different points to talk about the facets of what I consider to be one overarching skill set—that of recognizing one’s deeply felt needs and finding ways to prioritize meeting those needs. This includes the more obvious physiological needs (for hydration, food, sleep, and hygiene) as well as the less apparent but highly relevant mental and emotional needs (for companionship, silence, and a sense of direction and purpose, among others) of college students. Academic work on the subject tends to come from the social sciences and often uses the term “mindfulness” to indicate a specific type of self-awareness or meditation technique. While these studies are limited, overall they indicate that introducing mindfulness in spaces of higher learning tends to be associated with less stress in the lives of college students. (See Kaiseler, Martin,



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Ramasubramanian, and Dvořáková in Works Cited for some recent, small-scale examples of introducing mindfulness to young adults and adults and its association with reduced self-reported stress.)

While mindfulness is a helpful term, I avoid using it because it tends to denote specific meditative practices; I prefer broader terminology to remind readers that teaching self-care, self-awareness, and better stress-coping skills need not take the shape of focused meditation. Indeed, I would argue that such learning will be more effective when professors find ways to mesh self-care with the particulars of the discipline and content that they teach; this will look markedly different in a philosophy class versus a biology class.

“Learning will be more effective when professors find ways to mesh self-care with the particulars of the discipline and content that they teach.”

In the first section of this essay, I take some time to explore why teaching self-care *as course content*, alongside and integrated into the regular subject content of introductory college courses, is a worthwhile practice for college professors at NECU schools to explore. While I will speak directly to a particular audience—specifically, professors at Lutheran colleges and universities who teach introductory-level courses to “traditional” college students—I anticipate and intend that this information be useful to those in a variety of student-related positions beyond that subset. The second portion of this essay is dedicated to discussing specific self-awareness and self-care exercises that can be integrated into a variety of types of classes and why I have found them effective both in encouraging self-care skills and for excellent pedagogy in the Lutheran tradition.

## Why?

Asking busy professors to integrate even more content into what are typically already jam-packed introductory courses is no small task. Rightly, then, we spend time here

discussing the significance of this integration through the lens of Lutheran higher educational values as evinced by the new document, *Rooted and Open: The Common Calling of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities*. We will also give some context to the particulars of the lives of many traditional college students to argue that teaching self-care and coping directly is an effective and pedagogically beneficial use of classroom time.

As *Rooted and Open* states, “Vocation-centered education equips students to understand how the world, human beings, and communities function, as well as what they need to be personally fulfilled and healthy.” Service to others and care of self are understood here as intimately linked; if we assume that personal fulfillment and a healthy life are composed of more than financial security and the trappings of a consumerist culture, we must create space for students to discern what that feels like. Is fulfillment the same as feeling busy and important, or does it come from feeling deeply connected to others? Is health about only physical wellbeing, or does it extend into the sense of feeling supported and balanced in one’s emotional and mental life? Many sources of potential fulfillment are highly communal; by helping students tap into their inner worlds, we encourage them to see how they are related to the world around them in the truest sense of vocation.

“Is fulfillment the same as feeling busy and important, or does it come from feeling deeply connected to others?”

Vocation-centered education also comes with some understanding of “what one will do with one’s life,” even though the answers to that question tend to be far more numerous and varied than explicitly career-focused students might expect. Anyone who has taught first-years and sophomores knows of the common, sometimes frantic dance of major-switching as students realize that their carefully laid, parentally-approved plans to become a doctor, teacher, lawyer, or accountant are not matching up to their interests and aptitudes now that they have begun higher-level learning. Hard work and determination is not

always enough to yield good grades and comprehension, and this can come as a surprise and a blow to students who are used to high achievement. Inculcating a greater sense of self-awareness and self-care can aid students in realizing when their intended vocational path is unrealistic and can help them bridge the gap between losing part of their anticipated identity and reaching into new spaces to explore where their energy and aptitude are better directed.

Teaching self-care can also function as a demonstration of the “radical hospitality” of Lutheran higher education, a sense of welcome and belonging that is described in *Rooted and Open*. Welcome entails being shaped by “a community of caring mentors and colleagues” wherein students are able “to re-assess the familiar and consider new options.” When I first began crafting self-awareness activities to use in class, I was primarily focused on using them as a vehicle for course content; it wasn’t until students began to reflect on their experiences in assignments that I noticed how much they considered these activities to be evidence of my values. They took my insistence that we talk about self-care as a sign that I was invested in them, that I cared whether they were doing well or not. Like most liberal arts professors, I have always cared about my students’ wellbeing, but taking the time in class session to ask about it demonstrated this priority in a unique way. By teaching self-care in the classroom, professors can ally with students and equip them to work through significant stressors in their lives. Self-care within classrooms lives out this mission of hospitable mentorship in a way that benefits more students than any one educator can serve during office hours.

This hospitable environment, in my experience, does indeed prompt students to “re-assess the familiar” by communicating that self-care is worthwhile enough to teach and discuss at the academic level. Pedagogy-conscious professors may be familiar with the concept of an “implicit curriculum,” that which we teach subliminally with our structures, and the “null curriculum,” that which is not taught (which implies that it is not important or not appropriate to teach) [Eisner 97]. When we spend time in class reviewing a concept or lecturing over particular material, we are not just communicating the content itself as part of our explicit curriculum; we are also implicitly signaling that we value this content, so much so that we are

giving it special time and attention. Teaching self-care and self-awareness comes packaged with the message: “This is important and you should know how to do it.” Especially for students who view foregoing sleep or proper meals as a sort of academic martyrdom that demonstrates how serious and determined they are to get good grades, this new spin on the curriculum pushes back on the idea that destructive self-sacrifice is praiseworthy. They are given space to re-assess whether their all-nighters are indeed producing the outcomes they want, or if they are participating in practices that “look like” being a good student while not actually boosting the quality of their work.

“When students observe us regularly walking into the classroom overtired and overburdened, disinterested in their questions or mental states, they begin to absorb the idea that this is what appropriate professional life looks like. Fortunately, the inverse is also true.”

Finally, integrating self-care content with course content allows professors to model our insights about the proper balance of our professional, personal, and other vocations. *Rooted and Open* asserts, “The essential relationality of Lutheran theology believes that individuals flourish only as they are embedded in larger communities, families, civic spaces and ecosystems that are also empowered to flourish.” Professors know that balancing personal life with teaching, grading, committee work, advising, and research is difficult. If we don’t pay attention to ourselves and our own boundaries, our work and mental lives suffer. When students observe us regularly walking into the classroom overtired and overburdened, disinterested in their questions or mental states, they begin to absorb the idea that this is what appropriate professional life looks like. Fortunately, the inverse is also true.

Many of us have fought hard to establish the boundaries that keep us healthy and sane; teaching self-care is one way we can proudly share what we have learned. Personally, any time I introduce a self-care related activity in the classroom, I also participate, knowing that



I cannot reasonably expect my students to take these practices seriously if I do not. Prioritizing these activities for students also forces the professor—still overburdened and busy and trying to find equilibrium—to reflect on the state of her or his own attempted balance. Teaching self-care to students makes us re-teach it to ourselves, ideally resulting in professors who are more in touch with their mental and emotional realities and thus better, more reflective teachers, able to better be part of the empowered and life-giving community that we hope our students experience.

“Self-care does not make sense in a consumerist mindset unless it results in greater productivity, but self-care makes excellent sense in light of vocational formation because it holds the standard that all people are inherently worthy of being well.”

The Lutheran tradition has been formed around the powerful Christian idea that human beings are worthy not because of what we do, but because of what and who we are. Embedded in this theological concept is “a freedom from false ideas about earning one’s own worthiness” (Network), a powerful counter-message to a consumerist culture and to anxious students who attach great value to their eventual earning potential. Self-care does not make sense in a consumerist mindset unless it results in greater productivity, but self-care makes excellent sense in light of vocational formation because it holds the standard that all people are inherently worthy of being well. This insight is not and should not be exclusive to those who claim a Christian identity. From this conviction flows the gratitude that inspires our students to want not only a good life for themselves, but a good life for the whole of humanity and creation. It is not enough as educators in Lutheran-related schools to teach our subjects, however well; our broader goal is to improve the lives of the students we have so that they will, in turn, create a better world for those around them.

## How?

As a religion professor, I have certain advantages in being able to integrate self-care content and connect it back to specific course content (e.g., a lesson on meditation as a common spiritual practice in Christianity lends itself to constructing in-class or extra credit opportunities for students to try sitting in silence). However, most of my favorite and most effective self-care activities could just as easily be used in classes of any type. Below I offer a few outlines for self-care content or activities and explore some of the related pedagogical benefits that can result.

The technique I use most frequently and regularly adapt is a simple “one to five” rating system; I open many classes by asking how my students are feeling energy-wise, and they respond by holding up between one and five fingers, one meaning “mostly asleep” and five meaning “ready to take on the world.” In these few seconds, I am asking students to consider, recognize, label, and express a part of their internal, mental state. This technique can easily be reframed to have them rate their level of stress, how well they understood the readings for the day, or how prepared they feel for an upcoming exam or paper. Being able to rate one’s feelings in a numerical fashion may not be an explicit self-care practice that reduces stress, but it is a crucial first step in developing the self-awareness that students will need to use when considering how to cope with stress. Used consistently at the beginning of class, students begin to “check in” with themselves out of habit whether prompted or not.

This practice takes less than a minute and is useful even beyond the intent to give students practice at self-reflection and to demonstrate the value of hospitality. A teacher can, at a glance, gather data on their students’ mental state and adapt the lecture, discussion, or activity of the day to be more pedagogically effective. For example, if I see a low-energy room, I will typically make students leave their seats to gather in small groups rather than having them cluster up where they are sitting because the physical movement helps keep them awake and engaged. However, I have found that even if the energy (or stress level, or comprehension) does not match my intended process for the class, I can help students bridge the gap by acknowledging that there is a mismatch and explaining

how they can still engage. For example: “I know that it’s harder to get a lively discussion going when so many of you are sleep-deprived, so keep your response papers in front of you so you can remember what questions or reactions you had.” Or: “It looks like a lot of you are on high ebb, but we have a lot of content that I have to get through in lecture—use that energy to take really detailed notes and I’ll give you a stretch break midway through.” Such explanations express hospitality by signaling respect for the students as complex human persons without interrupting the flow of the class.

Another highly successful self-care technique I have used is one that requires students to sit in silence for 90 seconds. This is a strategy I developed after recognizing that while talking about self-care is important, it can be difficult to convince overburdened, overcommitted students that they have enough time to be good to themselves and, perhaps more importantly, that they are permitted to take that time despite the other obligations and stressors demanding their attention. In short, my students were not attempting much self-care unless I “forced” them to do so by making it an in-class activity. I precede this practice by discussing multitasking and monotasking and the potential for anxiety reduction after a short time period of trying to focus on only one thing. I facilitate this technique by giving students something different to do each time we practice it; this could be done by verbally articulating a new strategy each time, or by passing around a bowl filled with slips of paper explaining a unique 90-second activity. These slips of paper have suggestions ranging from simple body-scanning, finger-stretching, or deep breathing to mentally singing one’s favorite song, thinking of something one is looking forward to doing later that day, or focusing on a pretty color one sees in the room. Students have often communicated to me that their favorites are the tasks that tell them to get up and go to the bathroom to wash their hands or that remind them to rehydrate—extremely simple assignments that they might not otherwise think of as self-care.

I find this technique especially effective at communicating that self-care is easily integrated into one’s daily life and should not be viewed as another “chore” that students should add to their increasingly long to-do lists. This activity also helps detach self-care from performative

or culturally-approved practices that can become as much about showing off to others as treating oneself well. (Working out and eating an exacting diet can fall into this category since both are regularly touted in United States culture as being evidence of self-discipline.) This tactic is also self-contained, short, and low-commitment; if students are asked to doodle for 90 seconds and don’t feel any differently afterwards than they did before, they have learned that this particular practice might not be effective for them. Along the same lines, students gain a sense that self-care can and does work differently for other people and even for themselves, depending on the day. Beyond these practicalities, my experience has been that students find the “random chance” aspect fun and entertaining, and sometimes are able to transition into a more positive frame of mind simply because I suggested that it might happen if they take a moment to mentally switch gears. This practice offers a different sense of what we mean when we talk about formation of mind, body, and spirit; focusing one’s mental energy in one place can make the body feel differently, just as recognizing the sensations of one’s body can quiet the mind. Having the entire room full

“This practice offers a different sense of what we mean when we talk about formation of mind, body, and spirit; focusing one’s mental energy in one place can make the body feel differently, just as recognizing the sensations of one’s body can quiet the mind.”

of students enact unique self-care practices all at once, before and after which they often show neighbors what their “assignment” was for that 90 seconds, can inculcate a sense of community that is inherent in spirituality.

Finally, integrating self-care practices can take the form of larger-scale assignments that mesh well with other course content, especially those that might require sustained focus or demand that students not use technology for a set period of time. In my religion courses, I introduce the topic of meditation and retreats as common threads in most major religious traditions and then invite

students to try out these practices for extra credit on their own time by taking a four-hour retreat from socializing and technology or by practicing meditation for fifteen minutes daily for a week. After noticing that the students who were most likely to avail themselves to these extra credit opportunities were also often those who had the fewest demands on their non-class time, I also integrated a Spiritual Practices Day as a full class period where students were briefly introduced to spiritually-related or self-care practices from a variety of religious traditions (modified so that they can comfortably be used by those of any or no religious affiliation). These have included meditation with affirmations/mantras, using prayer beads, tracing a finger labyrinth, and drawing mandalas, among other practices.

In both extra credit and classroom occasions, students are required to turn in a short write-up of their experiences to ensure that they reflect upon their “before and after” state and comment on whether they would try such activities again. While I typically have one or two students in any given class who are unable to break out of a production-oriented mindset and become anxious and frustrated at being forced to “do nothing,” a clear majority of students in my courses express that they have learned something about taking breaks from their complicated lives. The takeaways are diverse. Some students gain clarity about what skill sets they can develop for coping while others come to the realization that switching their phones off for several hours tends to decrease their stress level. But the intended result for each student is some sort of greater self-knowledge packaged with a practice they can attempt when they notice their stress becoming less manageable.

I prioritize these larger experiences because they communicate the possibility (or necessity) of taking a step back from one’s life for short periods of time and demonstrate to students that “doing nothing” for awhile can have marked benefits to their mental and emotional health. Students who struggled to get into a focused state in 90 seconds of quiet often have an easier time when they are trying for a more sustained period of time, especially as I caution them that the first five or so minutes tend to be the most difficult as they transition between mindsets and that, if they stick with the practice, the remaining 20 or

30 minutes tend to fly by. Learners who are also athletes, artists, and gamers already have some sense of how this “flow” state works because they experience it in their own lives by pushing through the first few minutes of practicing until their mind and body begin to operate in sync and distractions fade. Making this connection explicitly, prior to beginning a long-running practice, can help students find familiarity and lessen their initial nervousness. These periods of forced non-production again tie into the Lutheran concept that humans are worthwhile not because of what they do, but because of what and who they are. One does not need to “earn” the right to relax or feel well.

Constructing assignments or class days around these focused self-care structures might be easier for professors who teach in the humanities—for example, requiring daily pages or writing retreats in a creative writing course, or full, focused, uninterrupted conversations to practice a foreign language without the aid of translation technology in language courses. Social sciences might make good use of introspective assignments as well, especially in classes that revolve around research, since self-awareness of one’s biases is crucial to producing reliable research; asking a student to bracket their prior experiences or thoughts about their subject of research encourages introspection. I have also seen science courses, especially those focused on environmentalism and/or the natural world, helpfully incorporate excursions or hikes that put students in new and unfamiliar space. Adding in small components of self-reflection before and after (e.g., “How does it feel to you to be in a prairie setting? Did you spend a lot of time outdoors as a child? How do you see this experience relating to your coursework?”) could launch contextually helpful discussions about how humans see themselves in relationship to the creatures, landscapes, and processes they study scientifically. Professors might choose to explicitly frame these activities as promoting self-awareness and developing self-care skill, but much of the same pedagogical and mind/body/spirit benefit will occur even without such explanation. These thoughts are preliminary of course; individual professors are the best equipped to explore how self-awareness and self-care practices can be integrated into existing assignments or class time.

## Conclusion

One of the most challenging parts of teaching, in my experience, is wondering if students were actually impacted by my classes. Do they retain any of this information I painstakingly lay out for them? Did they actually make progress on critical thinking, or have they just figured out how to make their papers sound that way? I have found the same struggle inherent in teaching self-care; I can provide the content and the opportunity, but sometimes I am surprised by who does and does not take advantage. Even so, I have enough moments that affirm this strategy to feel confident that it is worth my and their time. One boisterous and lively student described experiencing silence for four hours as “life changing.” At the end of my last spring term, a quiet student came to my office after the last day of class just to tell me that his best friend had died a few months ago and that the 90-second reflections we did in class were the

“By teaching self-care, I find a space to balance my job in teaching course content with my job of equipping students for a life outside the classroom, and I am grateful to be in a Lutheran context that sees those goals as interrelated.”

only times each week that he “felt okay” for a little while. By teaching self-care, I find a space to balance my job in teaching course content with my job of equipping students for a life outside the classroom, and I am grateful to be in a Lutheran context that sees those goals as interrelated.

While teaching self-care and coping in the classroom need not be an exclusively Lutheran approach to growing in mind, body, and spirit in the college setting, professors in Lutheran settings can use these practices in the classroom to demonstrate their own and their institution’s

commitment to holistic learning and to reap pedagogical rewards with their introductory-level students. By displaying radical hospitality and encouraging students to think vocationally, professors can become allies with students to help them develop critical thinking and self-awareness that is useful both academically and personally. Additionally, professors can use these opportunities to check their own self-care practices, extending this hospitality to themselves and peers in hopes of crafting a healthier, more robust institutional community. This essay is meant only to begin a conversation that will reap its fullest benefits in context with each NECU institution’s own mission and vision.

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Midland University FREMONT, NEBRASKA

Muhlenberg College ALLENTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

Newberry College NEWBERRY, SOUTH CAROLINA

Pacific Lutheran University TACOMA, WASHINGTON

Roanoke College SALEM, VIRGINIA

St. Olaf College NORTHFIELD, MINNESOTA

Susquehanna University SELINGSGROVE, PENNSYLVANIA

Texas Lutheran University SEGUIN, TEXAS

Thiel College GREENVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

Wagner College STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK

Wartburg College WAVERLY, IOWA

Wittenberg University SPRINGFIELD, OHIO



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