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

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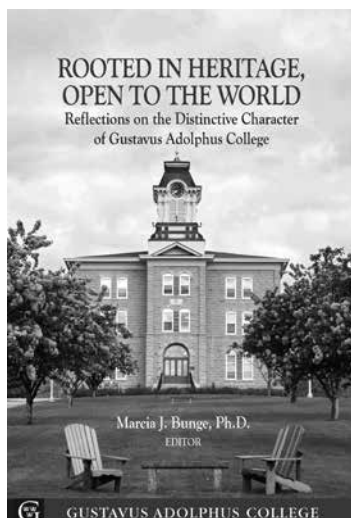
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characters and events all played a role in shaping their particular missions and signature strengths.

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

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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:

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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

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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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