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Guest Editorial: Moral Deliberation in NECU Classrooms

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ERNEST L. SIMMONS

GUEST EDITORIAL

Moral Deliberation in NECU Classrooms

Early on in its existence, the ELCA determined that it was necessary to continue the practice of its predecessor bodies in producing documents of careful reflection on social issues to benefit congregations, which were understood as “communities of moral deliberation,” according to the 1991 ELCA statement, *The Church in Society*. Known as social statements, these expressions of Lutheran social teaching are intended to assist both individuals and communities of faith in addressing significant current social issues with integrity, coherence, and responsible and informed faith. (See Roger Willer’s essay in the present issue of *Intersections*.) This effort has produced twelve social statements and thirteen social messages on a variety of topics ranging from the environment and economics to immigration and genetics. While these statements were initially formulated for congregational use, the question of a current study undertaken by the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU) is whether these statements may also be of use in classrooms on our campuses. Could their utilization increase the level of campus ethical reflection such that our campuses become *academic* communities of moral deliberation?

Martin Luther was a relational thinker who placed Christian life in a simultaneous relationship before both God and neighbor. The faith which inwardly embraces the justifying grace of God is then expressed outwardly in loving service to neighbor, made explicit through one’s vocation in the world. Our colleges and universities over the

last 25 years have intentionally raised awareness of vocation for our students, who thereby see their work as a calling, above and beyond a mere career. At a time when “conversation” on challenging topics is absent or divisive, our campuses are one of the few places where reasoned and respectful

dialogue can occur without rancor or retribution. These social statements may provide a resource for such college-wide discussions. They may raise the communal level of ethical reflection while acquainting our students with the rich history of Lutheran ethical reflection.

It is the intention of this NECU project to determine if these outcomes are achievable. We began with a pilot workshop on the ELCA social statement on economic life, *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*, among business and finance faculty in July, 2019, at Augsburg University. The working group will be exploring other statements and disciplines over the next two years to determine if they can help faculty attend to ethical issues within their disciplines. Lutheran social teaching may help our campuses address the classic Lutheran question, “What does this mean?” Thoughtful and informed faith for responsible action in the world can do no less.



Ernest L. Simmons is Theologian in Residence and Professor Emeritus of Religion at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. He is co-chair of the NECU working group on Lutheran Social Teaching, which led a pilot consultation in July, 2019 at Augsburg College in Minneapolis. Participants centrally reflected on potential uses of the 1999 ELCA social statement, *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All* within their business, finance, and leadership classrooms.]