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FALL 2020

Intersections

Faith, Learning, and the Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education



IN THIS ISSUE

The Tradition's Wisdom in a Time of Pandemics

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 Lutheran Higher Education Conference, together lifting up the vocation of Lutheran colleges and universities. It aims to raise the level of awareness among faculty, staff, and administration about the Lutheran heritage and church-relatedness of their institutions, especially as these **intersect** with contemporary challenges, opportunities, and initiatives.

About the Cover and Artist

Tom Stancliffe

Cross of Life

Stainless Steel and Stained Glass

Photo taken by Julie Drewes of Wartburg College, Waverly, Iowa

Tom Stancliffe, professor of art at the University of Northern Iowa, fabricated the 600-pound cross. It stands 12-feet high and sits on a 1.5-ton limestone base quarried by Weber Stone Company of Stone City, which matches the pillars and foundation of the Wartburg Chapel. "It is intentionally open, not solid, to contribute to the sense of openness to which the church strives," Stancliffe says. "Stainless steel reflects the light of day and moods of the sky in ways that augment the desire for lightness. The arrangement of the iconographic seven mercies is organic as compared to the framework and intended to undulate and suggest the body of Christ. Lighting adorns the sculpture from both the front and back."

Wartburg Chapel's Cross of Life was inspired by *Lebenskreuz* (Life Cross) woodcarvings, which depict the Seven Acts of Mercy outlined in Matthew 25:35-40. Wartburg College visitors to Neuendettelsau, Germany were particularly taken with woodcrafting workshops, where people with disabilities crafted handmade items, including the *Lebenskreuz*. Those woodworking workshops were part of Diakoneo (from *diakonia*, or "service"), which was founded by the same person who founded Wartburg College, Wilhelm Löhe. In 1854, Löhe began a social ministry program for disadvantaged populations in his hometown of Neuendettelsau. This move came two years after Löhe had directed Georg M. Grossmann to establish a pastoral ministry training school for German immigrants in the United States—a school that would become Wartburg College.

Matthew 25:35-40, known as the Seven Acts of Mercy or the Parable of the Judgments, was an endless source of inspiration for Löhe. In 2019, with blessings from the Diakoneo community, Wartburg College marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Chapel's construction with this sculptural representation of a *Lebenskreuz*. The sculpture publicly represents the College's commitments to faith and service as guided by Matthew 25's acts of mercy. Caryn Riswold lifts up the importance of those commitments in relation to our contemporary pandemics in the first essay of this volume.

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From the Publisher



When a character on the old television drama, *The West Wing*, asked whether President Bartlett was angry about her politically damaging lapse in judgment, she was told, “He is actually more upset that you could not come up with a retort better than, ‘If the shoe fits, wear it.’”

The tiresome use of a hackneyed expression often shows a lack of imagination, as this character joked. Sometimes, however, using a well-worn phrase is the best way to express a truth. Applying hackneyed higher education expressions to NECU colleges and universities in 2020 is a case in point. Two of them—“you are not just a number” and the “college experience”—tell the truth about our institutions as they have responded to the challenges of Covid-19 and sustained their educational missions when doing so.

“You are not just a number” at our colleges and universities, we often proclaim. It is a hackneyed expression, but at NECU institutions, it is also the truth. Care for students as individuals is real at our schools, even under the conditions of the pandemic. NECU colleges and universities attended to student success and well-being long before the higher education industry discovered “student-centered” education, and our commitment to students has not waned or been de-railed because of Covid-19.

We also offer an “experience” that allows students to grow into their fullest capacities as ethically informed and spiritually astute persons. This type of educational “experience” is the truth at our colleges and universities, and it has remained so even during the pandemic. Despite the pandemic’s complications, many students have been anxious to return to our campuses. A number of NECU institutions have even seen retention numbers rise. That’s because students are not just “numbers,” and because they “experience” an education that calls and empowers them to serve the neighbor so that all may flourish.

Please do not misunderstand. Adjusting to the pandemic has been incredibly tough. The pandemic has pushed already stressed budgets to the breaking point, requiring many beloved campus employees to be furloughed or laid off. Administrators and faculty have had to work continuously since last spring to revise and restructure instructional practices and campus life. Nothing is close to what we used to call normal. Nonetheless, core truths about higher education, encapsulated by expressions often over-used when times were much easier, still describe our realities.

The pandemic has ravaged our nation and world. It has threatened the well-being of our college communities. Our schools, however, have “risen to the challenge”—a third well worn, but truthful, phrase. Through the herculean efforts of governance boards, administrators, faculty, and students, the mission of Lutheran higher education is alive and well. In the NECU community during the Covid-19 pandemic, the hackney expressions are the simple truth.

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

From the Editor

Here's a story of which we cannot see the ending.

The story begins in mid-March, after a novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) reached American shores, and it became clear that this was serious—really, really serious. Restaurants and shops closed down. Most of our NECU schools told their students not to return to classes after spring break; instead, school would move online. States mandated their residents to stay at home unless their work was deemed essential. A shortage of toilet paper in early March gave way to a shortage of morgues by the end of April. People taped construction paper hearts to their windows and left thank you notes and hand sanitizer for UPS workers. Sports disappeared. *Flattening the curve*, *social distancing*, *six feet apart*, and *sheltering-in-place* became household terms.

Interwoven with this crisis in personal and public health was the hemorrhaging of the economy. By the end of July, the GDP had plummeted to almost two-thirds of its previous annual rate. The U.S. unemployment rate, which averages at about 5.75 percent since World War II, skyrocketed to almost 15 percent in April. While Covid-19 seemed, at least at first, not to discriminate between its victims, the pandemic-driven recession, like the coronavirus itself, immediately targeted the most vulnerable. Grocery store and fast food workers deemed “essential” wondered whether that really meant “disposable.”

Then, the divisions became politicized. The debate over how and whether to reopen the economy started to fall along partisan lines, with maskless libertarians protesting shelter-in-place orders and demanding their right to work, as mask-shaming liberals boycotted businesses that neglected safety precautions. The pandemic-driven recession is certainly a symptom of Covid-19, but treating it can worsen the disease. States in the Sun Belt who reopened aggressively around Memorial Day soon saw a spike in cases and shut back down by the Fourth of July.

Some now wonder whether a global capitalistic economy, with safety nets for few and the exploitation of many, primarily experiences the effect of the health crisis or is something closer to its cause.

While the epidemic outbreak and economic meltdown happened in lockstep, a third pandemic broke out later in the summer, surprising many with its force and speed. Many of us who, in the words of Ta-Nehisi Coates, “believe ourselves white” responded to the belated news reports of Ahmaud Arberry’s murder on February 23 much like we had responded to early reports of the coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan, China—with interest in and mild concern for something affecting *other* people. The same was true for Breonna Taylor’s death on March 13 by the Louisville Police Department. But when George Floyd died under the knee of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin on May 25, our nation’s long-time pandemic of police brutality and systemic racism fully presented itself to all America. An accompanying outbreak of uprisings, vigils, and protests hit Minneapolis and spread throughout the world. In, with, and under the pandemic of Covid-19 is the equally deadly pandemic of police brutality, widespread white supremacy, and the mass incarcerations and executions of Black America.

Taking institutionalized racism alongside an extractive economy, partisan politics, and global contagion, it becomes difficult to sort out the primary disease from symptoms and underlying conditions. Is this one pandemic or many? If the latter, they certainly feed off one another. We know, for example, that higher contraction and death rates of Black, Brown, and Native Americans correlates in turn with insufficient health care, untreated chronic



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preconditions, the working conditions of essential/disposable workers, and other structural sins.

It matters how we tell this story. To be liberally educated means to be able to critically examine such stories, to hear them with critical and self-critical ears. Who are the heroes, and what are their flaws? Who is villainized? Is redemption and healing still open to them? What kind of story is this? Whose interests does it serve? Who gets to tell it?

Actually, the ability to critically investigate the stories we tell is only half of what it means to be liberally educated. The other half involves the ability to tell stories and thus to make meaning in the first place. Liberal arts colleges, especially those that are church-related, want our students to form character as well as acquire skills. To form and know your character is to come to know yourself as a character in a larger story. It is to find yourself in a story that you did not create but can fully own and narrate. It is to understand yourself and your world as having a plot, meaning, and purpose—above and beyond the random incidences

and coincidences that too often decide how we live. This is another way of saying that Lutheran liberal arts schools educate for *vocation*. They want students to form the kinds of selves and live the kinds of lives that are attuned to—and can capably respond to—the needs and callings of others.

So, the story of our Lutheran schools must be a story about responsibility, about the ability to respond to the unbidden call to educate in unprecedented ways, and to do so through multiple, crisscrossing pandemics. That's not easy, to say the least. And yet, with our lives stripped down—very few sports and musical ensembles (if any) on campus, fewer off-campus parties (we hope), real conversations with exhausted students dropping into our virtual office hours—this may be the right moment to reflect on why each of us is here. In this long and painful time, we might just hear a still, small voice reminding us of the larger purposes of education and the crucial importance of our commonplace callings.

SAVE THE DATE FOR NEXT SUMMER'S

Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education Conference

2021 THEME | **CALLED TO PLACE**

The gathering will explore how the unique physical and cultural geographies of NECU campuses shape their callings toward building just communities.

The planning committee is considering options for a virtual or in-person conference in July 2021. Please look for further announcements in early 2021.

CARYN D. RISWOLD

A New Image for an Ancient Call: Lutheran Higher Education Amidst Pandemics Today

When the Wartburg College community gathered in October 2019 to dedicate the *Lebenskreuz* sculpture featured on the cover of this issue of *Intersections*, we could not have known how the academic year would end. We could not have understood how painfully necessary its reminder of Jesus's call to tend to our neighbors' needs would become in just one semester's time.

The design has particular connection to the history of Wartburg College and its institutional vocation. It comes from the Diakoneo in Neuendettelsau, Germany, where Wilhelm Löhe founded a social ministry enterprise in 1854,

as a response to the Industrial Revolution's legacy of deteriorating social conditions for disadvantaged populations. This move came just two short years after Löhe had directed Georg M. Grossmann to establish a pastoral ministry training school for German immigrants in the United States—a school that would become Wartburg College. (Wartburg College)

The sculpture is a 12-foot tall stainless steel and stained glass version of the smaller wooden crosses crafted in the Diakoneo's workshops, "where people with disabilities are

provided vocational training, job coaches, and work opportunities crafting handmade items, including the *Lebenskreuz*" (Wartburg College). One of these sits on the altar of the Wartburg College Chapel. The design notably features panels depicting the acts of mercy narrated in Matthew 25:35-40:



"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer then, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Caryn D. Riswold is Professor of Religion and serves as the Mike and Marge McCoy Family Distinguished Chair in Lutheran Heritage and Mission at Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa. She is the author of three books, most recently, *Feminism and Christianity: Questions and Answers in the Third Wave* (Cascade 2009). She writes, speaks, blogs, and tweets regularly at the intersection of religion, feminism, social justice, and pop culture. You can find her online [@feminismxianity](#).]

We had no way to know in 2019 that this ancient summons to serve the neighbor would take on renewed urgency for our campus communities in the coming year, communities that are, in the word of *Rooted and Open*, “called and empowered to serve the neighbor so that all may flourish” (NECU). In what follows, I pair the works of mercy with the commitments articulated in *Rooted and Open* so that each might guide us through tumultuous times.

Called and Empowered: “I was sick and you took care of me.”

The Covid-19 pandemic pushed every community across the globe to focus on care for its sick and dying neighbors. College communities like ours were forced to identify potential sites for quarantining infected students, develop processes to protect vulnerable members of the community, and ultimately create overnight plans to evacuate campuses.

As a new academic year commenced, new plans yet again had to be developed by Campus Health Recovery teams taking into account the needs for rapid testing, contact tracing, quarantines, and return-to-learn plans that include mask mandates and reconfigured classroom spaces. With a text like Matthew 25 before us, and a piece of art visually compelling us, care for the sick and attention to the dying has become a central call of a Lutheran college and its graduates in 2020.

To Serve the Neighbor: “I was hungry and you gave me food”; “I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.”

The economic shutdown that was a result of the spread of Covid-19 revealed another pandemic, as exhibited in lines at food banks, weekly unemployment claims that shattered record highs in United States economic history, and shuttered businesses and campuses that will never return to our communities. The hungry and thirsty in our communities had fewer places to turn for support; even congressional bailout packages prioritized corporate protections over rent-relief.

Feeding the hungry and giving sustenance to the thirsty means attending to the embodied needs of our neighbor. Students who had to return home often found themselves with unemployed parents and lost jobs for themselves.

Even on our campuses, for the students who were unable to leave because they didn’t have a safe home to return to or a country that would allow them to return, food insecurity reached new levels, with drastically reduced dining options and increased reliance on food pantry services. Colleges were called to rethink what it means to feed the hungry and sustain the thirsty in our own residence halls as well as in our communities.

So That All May Flourish: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”

The murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020, and the public demands for accountability, justice, and transformation of our white supremacist society called every community to examine who is and is not welcomed, who is and is not supported and protected. For predominantly white colleges and universities, which includes many ELCA schools, this included a reckoning with the experiences of students and alumni of color. These students should be emboldened to tell their stories, make their pain public, and demand that the institution adhere to the very values it espouses, yet often fails to enact.

Welcoming the stranger is about listening and seeing across lines of difference, including racial difference. Welcoming requires naming and letting go of fear, finding a space where one can be vulnerable and safe at the same time. To speak of welcoming is also to presume a power dynamic embedded in the roles of host and visitor, one that also demands examination and radical reframing. Matthew 25 is a text that pushes us to do that work of reframing and humbling.

As the public work of racial reckoning continued into the summer, the Department of Homeland Security proposed to change a policy that would have forced deportation of any international student enrolled at a college or university whose education had to move to remote-delivery or online instruction due to the pandemic. This literal rejection of the visitor, the stranger, prompted a wave of resistance, including statements from individual college presidents like this one:

We will move heaven and earth to ensure that you can continue taking courses in a way that satisfies the U.S. government. Not only are you welcome on

this campus, you are Wartburg Knights, and, as such, you are as entitled to be in this community, on this campus, as I am. (Colson)

Though this proposed change to student visa regulations was rescinded in response to lawsuits and amicus briefs from leading higher education organizations and institutions, it happened amidst the myriad pandemics to which we are called to respond. Like the other pandemics, it is a product of the structures that continue to disenfranchise members of our campus communities.

Deadly Structures and the Cross of Life

In her analysis of Matthew 25, womanist theologian Mitzi J. Smith notes that

it places more emphasis on *acts* of social justice (feeding the hungry, visiting the sick and imprisoned) than on actually *changing* those systems that promote the perpetual existence of poverty, hunger, prison nations and enslavement, and sickness, as opposed to equity, health, wholeness, protections, and freedom for all. (Smith 92)

She argues that “systemic change is necessary to destroy poverty, inequities, and injustice” because “I don’t believe we love a God who encourages the normalization of violence” (92). So yes, these acts of mercy are necessary “to keep people alive and healthy in the meantime,” but let us not lose sight of a larger call—to eradicate the systems and structures that produced such pandemics in the first place.

Lebenskreuz means “cross of life,” a term which itself captures a paradox embedded in Martin Luther’s call for Christians to be theologians of the cross, wherein an instrument of torture and death becomes a source of life and divine accompaniment. “God can be found only in suffering and the cross,” writes Luther. For this reason, a person “deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross” (“Heidelberg” 52). God is found in the unexpected places, at the margins of society,

in suffering and pain, confounding the best of human wisdom and calling us to serve our neighbors in precisely those places and times.

In Luther’s own 1527 letter, “Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague,” he repeatedly refers to Matthew 25 and the acts of mercy that Jesus commands. At one point, he writes, “if it were Christ or his mother who were laid low by illness, everybody would be so solicitous and would gladly become a servant or helper....And yet they don’t hear what Christ himself says, ‘As you did to one of the least, you did it to me’ [Matt. 25:40]” (130).

May the presence of this sculpture on our campus, and on this cover, be a public reminder of the calling of Lutheran colleges and universities to welcome the stranger, feed the hungry and thirsty, care for the sick and dying, and tend to the imprisoned. The pandemics we navigate today are not new, and dismantling the structures that produced them requires educated citizens who can advocate for systemic change and do the hard and messy work to transform the social and political conditions that produced them.

So that all may truly flourish.

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CARL HUGHES

Learning from Luther on Covid-19



Plague, pestilence, pandemic—these are not new phenomena. As someone who studies the history of theology, I think that one of the blessings of being part of a religious tradition is being able to look back on how people of faith in ages past have grappled with the scourges they faced.

I have been thinking lately of a short treatise that Martin Luther wrote in 1527, titled “Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague.” With all his talk of evil “vapors,” “mists,” and “spirits,” Luther definitely sounds like someone from another era. Then again, he also seems to understand the basics of respiratory transmission. Throughout the treatise, he actually shows a surprising degree of understanding of the nature of contagion and what we would today call public health. In fact, I would say that he has a lot of practical and spiritual guidance for our cities and our country as we struggle with the Covid-19 pandemic.

Luther’s response to pandemic centers around the theme of community. He reminds us that, like it or not, “we are bound to each other.” We live next to each other, we eat each other’s food, and we breathe each other’s air. On the one hand, he says, it is community that makes a pandemic possible, just like it makes a mass fire possible. On the other hand, he insists that the very thing that puts us at risk is also the very thing that can save us. If there’s a fire

burning in our house, it is our neighbors who will help us put it out. So in a time of plague, God calls neighbors to take care of neighbors and to work together to restore the health of the community.

What does it mean to be part of a community during a time of plague? It starts, as it always does, with looking out for others rather than just ourselves. Like Jesus before him, Luther says that loving God means loving people. As he puts it, “service to God is service to our neighbor.”

For Luther, serving one’s neighbor in a time of plague requires first and foremost following the advice of medical experts. He insists that God has “created medicines” and “provided us with guidance” from doctors. He says that to put everything in God’s hands and then ignore experts’ advice would be like refusing to fetch water when your neighbor’s house is on fire.

“What does it mean to be part of a community during a time of plague?”

In Luther’s time as in our own, doctor’s orders started with vigilance about sanitation. Sure, pray to God for protection, Luther says, but then “fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine, and take it.” Luther practically issues a lock-down order: “Shun persons and places wherever your neighbor does not need your presence.” He goes so far as to say that negligence in these matters is akin to murder. He has especially harsh words for

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anyone who has symptoms of the disease and doesn't take precautions not to infect others.

Within the community, Luther says that some people have special responsibilities. For example, doctors and nurses have a calling from God to care for the sick and the dying. In our time as in Luther's, following this calling puts their own lives at risk. Luther promises that God is with them in what they do and says that they should be honored in the community for their selflessness.

Similarly, Luther argues that civic officials are called to be competent and responsible leaders in a time of crisis, always looking out, not for their own interests, but for the good of the whole. He insists that they have a particular duty to look out for the poor and the weak. When they flee from these responsibilities, he says, they sin against God.

Like it does for most, the pandemic currently sweeping our country and my city makes me fearful. As someone married to a hospital nurse, I am especially worried for my wife's safety and that of my family. Still, Luther reminds

me that we have faced pandemics like this before. We can get through them, with the help of God, if we work together for the good of all.

"Luther argues that civic officials are called to be competent and responsible leaders in a time of crisis, always looking out, not for their own interests, but for the good of the whole."

So honor medical professionals and trust their advice. Thank grocery store workers, delivery personnel, and all those who risk their safety for the benefit of others. Remember that whenever we wash our hands, or check in on a neighbor in need, or stay home when we would rather go out, we are truly doing God's work. Finally, as Luther would certainly remind us, have faith that even when we fail, God will never abandon our community or anyone within it.

KRISTA HUGHES

Radical Hospitality on Haunted Grounds: Anti-Racism in Lutheran Higher Education



Selma, Charlottesville, and Louisville are all within an easy day's drive of the Newberry College campus where I work.

Only a couple of hours down the road stands Mother Emmanuel A.M.E. Church, where in July 2015 a young white man murdered nine Black worshippers during their

evening Bible Study. That same young white man was raised in an ELCA congregation located within commuting distance of our campus.

The founder of our college, the Rev. Dr. John Bachman, was a Lutheran pastor who wrote eloquent theological defenses of slavery and white supremacy and offered the opening prayer of the South Carolina Secession Convention in 1860, four years after the college's founding.

Our campus sits on land that once was home to the Cherokee people before German and Scots-Irish immigrants moved in and cotton was made king.

We at Newberry live, work, teach, mentor, and coach on haunted grounds in a haunted land.

While bearing a distinct racist and colonial past, the Southeastern United States is, of course, not alone in being haunted land. What does it mean to engage in anti-racist work on haunted ground? This is the question I put before all of us in the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU), especially those of us who are white.¹ My original assignment for this essay was to reflect upon anti-racism and Lutheran Higher Education (hereafter LHE). Other scholars and practitioners have already begun the crucial work of such reflection in a range of places, including in

"What does it mean to engage in anti-racist work on haunted ground?"

a recent issue of *Intersections* (Fall 2019). Likewise, NECU institutions are engaging in the active work of anti-racism on their campuses, strategically revising policies, piloting programs, allocating resources, revisiting history, shifting curricula, and searching souls. These efforts and their fruits are to be celebrated and, where appropriate, duplicated. It is also the case that, like Newberry, all NECU

Krista E. Hughes is the Director of the Muller Center for Ethics, Vocation, and Civic Engagement and Associate Professor of Religion at Newberry College in Newberry, South Carolina. She is also a facilitator for the community transformation organization, *Speaking Down Barriers*. A white child of the South who left, lived, and traveled widely, and then returned to put down roots, she seeks to draw on the South's beauty and richness while reckoning alongside others with its destructive legacies. She prays to be haunted year-round, not just in October.

institutions struggle to balance our Lutheran institutional mission “to serve the neighbor that all may flourish” (NECU 3) with the realities of stressed resources, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

“If we seek to become robustly anti-racist, we must find ways to dwell in the discomfort and to face the white supremacy that has indelibly shaped our institutions.”

Yet more fundamentally, all NECU institutions are historically, predominately, and persistently white. To acknowledge this is more than a statement of fact. We must embrace it as a confession: that we have been and we still are, despite our missional intentions, institutional instruments of white supremacy. Even having written that statement, I find that my stomach clinches and my mouth goes dry every time I read it. If you experience something similar, I encourage you to take a deep breath and to keep reading, for in the words of James Baldwin, we cannot fix what we will not face. If we seek to become robustly anti-racist, we must find ways to dwell in the discomfort and to face the white supremacy that has indelibly shaped our institutions.

Wherever we are located, the question of anti-racism and LHE is haunted. In this piece, I want to reflect on the possibilities of opening ourselves to such hauntings as a means of better attuning ourselves to the transformative work of anti-racism. I specifically want to link the LHE value of *radical hospitality* to the potentially productive value of allowing ourselves to be haunted. This may strike the reader as an attempt at seasonal playfulness. It is not. Rather, I offer that hauntings can become callings, so that we may imagine and embody more equitable ways of being in the world.

Institutional Anti-Racism: Limits and Possibilities

If the heritage of Lutheran higher education is steeped in whiteness, is anti-racist LHE even possible? I appeal to historian of race Ibram X. Kendi, who suggests that while it is not possible for white people to be *non-racist*, it is possible for white people to do *anti-racist* work. If

this is true of persons, it can also be true of institutions, including NECU institutions, which fall into the category of “predominately white colleges and universities” (PWCUs). Martin Luther’s notion that Christians are “simultaneously saint and sinner” may help us to understand this paradox through a more dialectical understanding of how we can both perpetuate racism (as persons and organizations trapped in larger inequitable systems) *and* actively strive toward racial equity and justice.

People, of course, make up institutions. This means that individual persons within an institution have their own work to do. It is also the case that racial injustice and oppression persist largely by means of policies and structures that transcend individual persons. In *Understanding and Dismantling Racism*, antiracism trainer and pastor Joseph Barndt offers a “continuum on becoming an anti-racist multicultural institution.” The continuum ranges from stage 1, the segregated institution (common prior to the 1960s), to stage 6, an “anti-racist, multicultural institution” that is fully committed to “the struggle to dismantle racism in the wider community” and where “clear lines of mutual accountability are built between the institution and racially oppressed people in the larger society” (234-35). Most NECU institutions would fall on the continuum around stages 3 and 4, with a handful of institutions showing some nascent characteristics of stage 5. Barndt describes those stages as follows:

Stage 3: A Multicultural Institution intentionally pursues diversity and inclusion through policies and practices and considers itself non-racist by opening its doors to people of color. But there is also a lack of institutional awareness about persistent patterns of white privilege and little effort to change power structures, decision-making processes, policies, and the culture as a whole.

Stage 4: An Antiracist Institution demonstrates among its constituencies a growing awareness of systemic racism as a barrier to diversity, equity, and inclusion and an increasing commitment to eliminate inherent white privilege. Likewise, a critical mass of leadership and other constituencies claim an anti-racist institutional identity and vision.

Stage 5: A Transforming Institution translates this identity and vision into actual structural changes that guarantee the full participation of persons of color in decision-making and power-sharing at all institutional levels; that foster genuine openness to a wide range of cultural world views; and that establish mutually accountable anti-racist relationships. (234-35)

Regardless of stage, the institutional work of anti-racism is never complete, of course. Rather than viewing this perpetual work as a burden, I encourage us to see it as a promise. This means we can simultaneously and without contradiction continue to confess and repent from the white supremacist heritage of our LHE institutions *and* celebrate the work of anti-racism on NECU campuses. NECU institutions are doing tremendous work across the United States. We have appointed vice presidents for diversity, equity, and inclusion; targeted strategic plans; supported student vigils, protests, and movements; organized faculty and staff reading groups; planned athletics initiatives; established institutes serving their surrounding communities; won grants that equip congregations to do the work of anti-racism; shifted toward inclusive pedagogy and de-colonial curricula; revised wide-ranging campus policies; introduced new student scholarships focused on social justice; redesigned first-year experience programs centered around intercultural competency—and more. We can and should celebrate the anti-racist work of NECU institutions.

“We can simultaneously and without contradiction continue to confess and repent from the white supremacist heritage of our LHE institutions *and* celebrate the work of anti-racism on NECU campuses.”

We also are called to confess: This work has only just begun. This work is happening unevenly across the network. This work, done even adequately, requires resources that are scarce in the current climate of higher education and even scarcer in the age of Covid-19. This work pushes

against centuries of history. This work may alienate certain donors. This work may or may not be “good business.”

“There is no vaccine or easy cure for white supremacy.”

What might motivate persistence as we strive to meet the ethical imperative of our missions while contending with the forces of history and capitalism? Notice I am not asking what will solve the problem. There is no vaccine or easy cure for white supremacy. My question is modest yet vital: What might motivate us to continue doing the steady, careful work of anti-racism?

Radical Hospitality

There are many possible motivators, and here I suggest just one among others. I call us to consider the LHE value of “radical hospitality.” *Rooted and Open* articulates a common mission for the colleges and universities of the ELCA. Part of that mission, the document states, is to “practice radical hospitality,” that is, to “welcome all and learn from all” by valuing the unique gifts of each student who steps onto campus. Modeled on God’s hospitality to humanity, “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” (7-8).

This is a beautiful vision—and a real challenge to make real for PWCUs. It takes us right to the heart of the question of anti-racism in LHE. The key is the difference between welcome and belonging. Hospitality for many of us brings to mind a host welcoming a guest into one’s home or to one’s table. The hyperbole of the Spanish greeting, *Mi casa es su casa*, reveals the limits of hospitality. You may welcome me warmly into your home, but you do not literally mean, “Please move in. Feel free to leave your shoes wherever you like, eat everything in the fridge, and stay as long as you want.” We need to distinguish welcome and belonging. *Radical* hospitality exceeds “welcome.” We are not simply welcoming students to our table. While our students may

not stay forever, for many of them campus becomes their home for four or so years. At a certain point, ideally sooner rather than later, they should not expect to be welcomed. They should expect to *belong*, to be such a part of the community that they become agents of welcome for others.

This includes our Black and Brown students. Dr. Monica Smith, Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Augustana College (Illinois), puts the notion of radical hospitality to the equity and inclusion test when she says:

Students of color at PWCUs [expect] that *the institution will transform to meet their needs* so that they can thrive, so that they can embrace the academic experience without the distractions and damage that microaggressions can cause... They hunger for their identities to be affirmed so that they can consider their vocations, rather than merely *surviving* their college experience. (Smith 8)

That many NECU institutions are *not* accomplishing this is a reality we must name with courage and humility. In our efforts to provide a quality education, to widen vocational vistas, and to increase the social mobility of our Black and Brown students (all good and worthy things), we still inevitably do harm because white supremacy is woven into our institutional DNA. Too often “success” on our campuses requires Black and Brown students to become “more white”—to suppress modes of relation, language and speech, habits and practices, and self-expressions that bear their unique cultures. This is an acute loss for them but also a loss for the PWCUs they attend. As Smith notes, “diversity will happen.... Inclusion is a *choice*” (7).

What Smith commends is an institutional culture that, on Barndt’s continuum, is a stage 5 heading toward stage 6. Moreover, what Smith is calling our NECU institutions to is a form of hospitality so radical that we must open ourselves to being fundamentally changed. Are we ready for that? Are we willing? This would be, after all, a hospitality so genuinely radical that it may lead to a complete unraveling of institutional identity, to the point we might even have to ask if anything “Lutheran” would remain.

The theological concept of *kenosis* may point the way forward. The doctrine of *kenosis*, based on Philippians 2, refers to Jesus’s “self-emptying” of his own will and divine

status in order to become human and an instrument of God’s will. This becomes definitive for Jesus in his life, ministry, and death—namely, his own self-giving for the sake of others’ flourishing. It is precisely in decentering himself that he becomes most characteristically himself. It may be that the most “Lutheran” thing a NECU institution could do is strive to empty itself of its white supremacist ways by centering the perspectives, practices, and agency of our non-white students and constituencies. This is, of course, easier said than done. Consider it we must.

“It may be that the most ‘Lutheran’ thing a NECU institution could do is strive to empty itself of its white supremacist ways by centering the perspectives, practices, and agency of our non-white students and constituencies.”

Anti-racism is active work. It is something we *do*. But for white people and for persistently white institutions, we must also attend to the transformative *receptivity* that anti-racism requires. Hospitality is about receiving the other. Radical hospitality is about receiving the other in such a way that we open ourselves to being changed—and indeed being changed in ways we cannot predict or control. Opening ourselves to that which might disturb us is a practice that is at once active and receptive. Which brings me back to hauntings.

Haunted and Called

The specters of both racism and anti-racism are haunting. It is not only the manifestations of systemic racism that can haunt. So can the call to anti-racist work: the magnitude of the call, our sense that we are not up to the task, the dire implications for Black and Brown lives of our falling short. It can be enough to immobilize us. But I offer that the work of anti-racism *should* haunt us, as individuals and as institutions, and that part of genuinely radical hospitality is opening ourselves to that which haunts or disturbs us. In this sense, that which haunts us may be what ultimately calls us.

Inspired by the work of theorist Gayatri Spivak, theologian Mayra Rivera reflects on a positive sense of haunting, something unusual in the Christian tradition. Rivera observes that the one called the *Holy Ghost* is also called the *Spirit of Truth* and the *Advocate*, implicitly suggesting that in some cases there may be little that distinguishes being haunted from being inspired—or, we might say, called (125). In addition to being called by our missional commitments to equity and justice, we as individuals and institutions may also be called by that which haunts us. Aspirations can be too easily ignored in the day-to-day hustle. That which troubles us, not so much. In Rivera’s words, “May we pray to be haunted” (135). Being haunted can keep us from slipping into either complacency or despair. It can keep us curious and committed. It can also point individuals to their unique piece of anti-racism work.

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Just as we may pursue callings, there are many and varied means to pursue hauntings, to go in search of that which might lure us or goad us or shake us toward our most faithful next steps. We can explore *history*, distant and recent, to better understand the forces that shape our contexts near and far. We can educate ourselves about broader *social realities* that may seem far from our own lives. Diving deep into a specific issue—for example, mass incarceration, redlining, voter suppression, or disproportionate maternal mortality rates for Black women—makes it more real and more urgent, transforming the “issue” from an abstract idea to a lived reality. We can train our gaze to notice *institutional dynamics* on our campus that perpetuate inequities and marginalization. We can attune our ears to *personal stories*, told by our students, colleagues, and neighbors.

We can look to *the arts*: from essays, novels, music, and television to street murals and poetry slams. Any one of these avenues promises to disturb our equilibrium.

All of our NECU institutions are marked by the deep histories and current realities of systemic racism. Still, Newberry’s particular story is not St. Olaf’s story or Grand View’s story or California Lutheran’s story. I invite you to ask yourself and to engage in conversation with your campus colleagues: What haunts *your* institutions, the wider communities in which they are located, and the persons who walk the halls and sidewalks of *your* campuses? May each NECU campus, in its own unique place, listen for the wisdom in such hauntings—for what they might tell us about how to create genuine communities of belonging, communities of such radical hospitality that “all may flourish” both within and beyond our campus boundaries.

Endnote

1. Throughout this essay, I use the word “we” in potentially slippery and problematic ways. I use it primarily to refer to white people at the predominately white institutions of the ELCA colleges and universities because that is my primary audience for this essay. My intent is not to diminish or exclude the contributions of Black and other POC members of these institutions, but rather to call white people like me to account in the work of anti-racism.

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Activism, Justice, and the Danger of Silence

In this interview, *Intersections* editor Jason Mahn talks with Augustana College alumna, Dezi Gillon, to learn more about the callings to justice-work among students of color, and how he and other white professors can better support them as they live out those callings.



Jason: I remember vividly the die-in that you and others at Augustana organized as part of the emerging Black Lives Matter movement five years ago. Would you please describe some of your other activism in college and how you started to think about protest and activism in relation to who you are, and who and what you feel called to be?

Dezi: My urge to participate in activism at Augustana came from my desire to be heard and to find community. This was after the acquittal of George Zimmerman, Trayvon Martin's murderer, and my anger and desperation couldn't be ignored. The moment swept me and others into a whirlwind of organizing and disrupting systems of oppression that affected us and those we loved.

The beginning of the BLM movement was a moment that encapsulated feelings of anger and resentment I had towards white people growing up in Chicago and Evanston. I also grew up with two parents who were very active in

their local Black communities. My father was a community organizer and social worker and my mother did outreach work through the church we attended. At the beginning of my junior year, I could feel the support of my family back home and my community at Augustana. I felt as though I needed to do something.

I was fortunate to be surrounded by friends who also felt a call to action. The idea to organize protests at Augustana came after a number of seminars addressing the current events involving the Black Lives Matter movement. I remember walking away from those discussions feeling underwhelmed and frustrated at the lack of attention this matter was getting at our school.

What I loved so much about our community was that it was student led, trauma informed, and centered Black students. Although we reached out to Augustana faculty

Dezi Gillon (they/them) is a teaching artist and healer living on occupied Potawatomi territory—what is known today as Rogers Park, Chicago. In 2016, they graduated from Augustana College (Rock Island, Illinois) with Religion and Sociology majors, having participated in Interfaith Understanding, Black Student Union, AugiEquality, and Micah House, a residential intentional community. They went on to graduate from Union Theological Seminary (New York) with an MDiv in 2019. The conversation here was first published as "Hearing the Call to Action" at vocationmatters.org, the blogsite of the Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education (NetVUE).

and staff for advising, we also had the guidance of writers and activists such as Angela Davis, Alicia Garza, bell hooks, James Baldwin, and so many more. We led various demonstrations on campus as well as a die-in. We also worked with the local Black Lives Matter chapter in the Quad Cities where we participated in a few local protests.

Jason: You talk about the “call to action” of you and your friends as emerging from places of disappointment, anger, and resentment. But you also speak of positive influencers and mentors, including your parents’ engagement with Black communities and famous Black writers who inspired you to act. Thinking back on those college years now, did your call to activism feel more like filling a void and emerging out of pain or following those who gave you hope and courage?

Dezi: While there was and is deep pain, for the most part my call to action came from a passionate desire to feel more connected to my community of fellow Black and Brown students. I love us, and I wanted to fight for us—for our love and existence, as well as for our representation at Augustana. I was also very grateful for fellow white students who joined our organizing and care work. I felt inspired by folks in my community and people I was meeting in Chicago and following on social media. There was no time to be silent or to cater to requests to be more gentle with white professors and students. Even though there was pain, we were determined to fight for one another in community.

Jason: Did the calling you felt to fight for and support a community of Black and other students of color carry over into your life and work since graduating from college?

Dezi: Yes! That time in undergrad has had such a significant impact on my life. After finishing my bachelor’s degree I decided to go to Union Theological Seminary in New York City. There I participated in organizing for undocumented folks who were seeking asylum in church and in school as well as accompaniment in court proceedings.

During my time in NYC, I also deepened my exploration into spirituality and Blackness. There was such a diversity of Black experiences in that city. I started becoming closer to my West African roots in my spiritual

practices. I started grappling with very complex questions regarding my Christian identity.

While doing social justice education and programming with the Sadie Nash Leadership Project, I also discovered that work with youth and environmental justice were large parts of my vocation. This work and so much more brought me to do the restorative justice work I do now. As I am now settling back into Chicago, I want to continue to learn more about transformative justice and youth work. Using art and transformative practices and following the leadership of youth, I want to invest myself in justice for the communities that I am a part of.

Jason: You mention how art, spirituality, and activism all compose parts of your identity and calling. Can you give us a sense of how those three go together—especially for the younger communities in which you are a part?

Dezi: I actually found these fit together quite easily for me. I have always been an artist. Sometimes I am a very active artist and other times my creativity seems blocked. Creating art and being fascinated by the art around me has informed my calling for justice and my connection to the spirit.

“Tying together art, spirituality, and activism was second nature to me.”

When I moved to NYC and started school at Union Theological Seminary, I had access to so much art and spiritual faith practices. These were woven together so tightly that at times I couldn’t tell them apart. Being around other artists, especially artists whose work tied directly to their spiritual life, helped me unravel the cultural aesthetics of Black Christianity and Black American lived experiences. I became fascinated with the arts and spiritual life.

I began to prioritize art and garden-based learning in my facilitation style as well as in my academic and personal life. Art became a portal into understanding and storytelling and I wanted to incorporate that into the way I taught. I also want folks to think more critically about the land and their relationship to it and to the people in their local community. Tying together art, spirituality, and

activism was second nature to me. Any limitations did not come from me, but from the boxes that other people put me in. I wanted to break out of those boxes and into something that documented the lives of my community.

Jason: What advice would you give to Black students studying at predominantly white institutions? How about to white teachers like me who are trying to learn how to better support students as they fight for change in an unjust world?

Dezi: Whew, these are big questions! The advice I would give to current Black students at PWIs is to try to find your people. Find people who support all of you—not just some of you. I am so grateful for the leadership of Black students and the space they take up on college campuses. Don't let white people and non-black POC put you into boxes that stifle your strengths. And if you feel like you are doing work you should be getting paid for, chances are you are. Know your worth and demand your seat at the table.

“By staying silent you actually speak volumes.”

When I think about the advice I'd give to teachers, I think of the Maya Angelou quote, “I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” You have the power to shape the way Black folks feel on your campus. I experienced not only the silence of my fellow students, but also of my professors. I remember the silence being frustrating and cruel. At times, the silence was almost louder than words of solidarity. There is no neutral ground. By staying silent you actually speak volumes. You are a resource to students, and should use the power that you have to open doors for students and support students when they need you. Do not become another barrier to voices who are learning to speak out.

Leadership in Lutheran Key at a Time of Pandemics



All of us on college and university campuses face incredible challenges brought on by the pandemics of Covid-19 and systemic racism. Many if not most of us are looking for guidance on how to rise to meet these unprecedented moments. There are many places from which to seek

guidance, inspiration, and hope—from movement spokespersons to trusted faculty and staff on our campuses.

I'm at St. Olaf College where the college's mission includes the language of being "nourished by Lutheran tradition." In addition to numerous contemporary voices of wisdom, I propose that the tradition might also offer insight for the living of these days. Sixteenth-century reformer Martin Luther challenged the religious hierarchies and systems of his day, calling for reforms of structures that harmed those who were often ignored by the powerful. For Luther, the Christian story of God becoming human, suffering, and dying on the cross means that God is not to be found among the powerful, but rather among the suffering. Therefore, Luther believed, being attentive to the pain of those in our midst means attending to the spaces where God is present.

One of Luther's big ideas is that we cannot earn our own salvation; we can't justify ourselves or earn our way

to heaven. Therefore, our living is in response to the gift of life we are given rather than an attempt at achievement on our part.

Because our living isn't about proving ourselves to God or to others, Luther understood humanity to be freed up to focus on the needs of our neighbors. Not to the exclusion of our own basic needs, but caring for those in need, he believed, should be our primary orientation.

Drawing on these insights from Luther, I suggest that leadership in a Lutheran key in a time of great hardship includes:

1. Being attentive (to the pain)
2. Being responsive (to the pain)
3. Being nourished (that is, fortified for your role as leader)

Let's take a closer look at each of these in turn.

Being Attentive (to the Pain)

Martin Luther was a pastor and a monk dedicated to studying, preaching, and teaching. While many religious leaders of his day were focused on building grand cathedrals and amassing wealth for the church, Luther paid attention to those who were being exploited under the current church system. The church was getting rich by charging parishioners to participate in practices such as

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indulgences and the viewing of relics, practices billed as enhancing one's status before God. Luther spent his days speaking out about such practices, exposing the economic harm these practices were causing for those who were already struggling.

During this time of the dual pandemics of 2020, we are keenly aware of large-scale suffering all around us. At the time that I write this, there have been over one million cases of Covid-19 diagnosed worldwide and the over 200,000 American deaths caused by the virus. Equally painful, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and countless other Black and Brown people have been killed by the police or harmed by other societal structures. We are steeped in anger, grief, and lament.

The language of trauma is becoming more a part of our collective vocabulary as we seek to better understand long-term effects of such suffering. Theologian Shelly Rambo calls trauma "the suffering that remains" (15). When something traumatic happens, we experience a kind of death, the death of bodily safety or integrity, the death of health, the death of a particular way of life. But life continues on and the suffering that accompanies us is the trauma.

"Leadership in a Lutheran key calls on leaders to pay attention to where God is—in and amidst the pain."

Leadership in this time of pandemics calls us to attend to the suffering and trauma of those around us—to notice it, inquire about it, call attention to it. For Luther, the story of Jesus's life, which leads to crucifixion, illustrates that God is where the suffering is, that God is present with those who suffer from the virus, from the pandemic of racism, from the trauma of illness and police brutality and more. Leadership in a Lutheran key calls on leaders to pay attention to where God is—in and amidst the pain.

Being Responsive (to the Pain)

Even though Luther was a professor of Old Testament, he didn't spend his days holed up in a monastery writing big ideas about God and the world. Instead, he spent time on

issues calling for his attention. It is important to acknowledge that he didn't always live up to his own insistence that Christian faith frees Christians up to serve the needs of the neighbor. Still, his vision of Christian life and dogged emphasis on love of neighbor led him to take action in ways that helped support the needs of those around him who were suffering.

Students, faculty, staff, and administrative leaders often have strong visions for what their student organization or team or department might be able to accomplish. Many of us have several big ideas we plan to implement.

And yet, we are more aware this year than most that life doesn't always go as planned. Leadership in a time of pandemic includes responding to those who are in pain, especially those within our circle of care. Whether it is those in one's student organization or residence hall, in one's department, office, or team, being a leader involves working with others to address the needs of those in your community.

Some of the initiatives we've been hoping to implement may not happen. Our roles—our vocations—as leaders may entail tasks that we haven't yet envisioned, but that are called for in this time of pandemics. Given the unprecedented reality of the Covid-19 and systemic racism pandemics, being responsive to the needs of others may be the most important action we take in these exhausting days.

Being Nourished for the Work Ahead

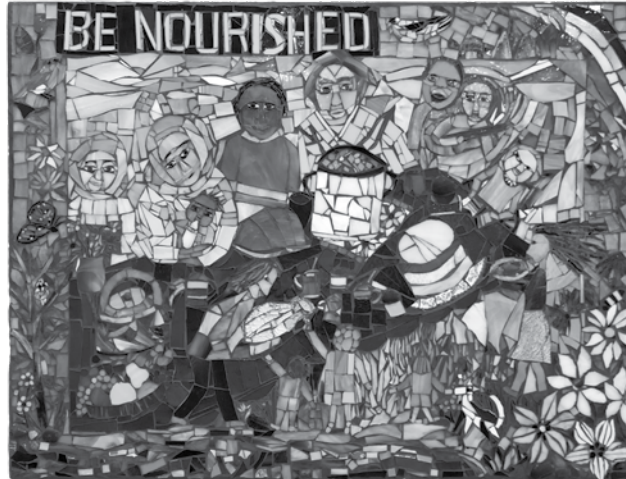
Being an attentive, responsive leader takes time, energy, courage, and stamina. We also must be nourished for this demanding calling.

Looking back at life of Martin Luther, he also took being nourished very seriously. Luther was known for his almost-nightly "table talk" gatherings at his home, where friends, students, and colleagues would gather around the Luthers' table to eat, drink, and debate issues that mattered in their lives. To live most fully into the leadership roles to which we now are being called, we are in need of multiple forms of nourishment—of good food and drink, of quality time with friends, of time for deep conversations about the issues that matter most to us.

A couple years ago, I invited Lena Gardner, then one of the leaders of Black Lives Matter Minneapolis, to speak to one of my classes. As an activist, she has offered

trainings throughout the country on the methods and approaches of Black Lives Matter. She told my students that when she asks these groups what they need the most to continue their work, they often tell her that they need spiritual nourishment. Their spirits need nourishing in order to help sustain them in their role leaders.

There's a mosaic that now hangs on a wall in the Lutheran Center at St. Olaf that was created last fall as part of the Center's launch (see above image). It was created by two Lutheran pastors, Patrick and Luisa Hansel, who served a mostly immigrant church in Minneapolis until their retirement the summer



before. Several dozen members of the St. Olaf community participated in putting pieces of the mosaic together. It captures the sense of what it means to be nourished to do the work that matters most in this world. The people in the mosaic come from different religious and cultural backgrounds and gather around a table where they are nourished

by food and drink. They are nourished by the rich natural world that surrounds them and by their connections to one another. I think the mosaic provides a vision of what nourishment for the work ahead might look like.

This is an incredibly challenging time to be a leader. But your campus, your neighborhood, your communities needs you. We'll be better at being community because of your attentiveness, responsiveness, and the ways you'll come together with others to nourish and be nourished as you help us move toward better days.

"To live most fully into the leadership roles to which we now are being called, we are in need of multiple forms of nourishment—of good food and drink, of quality time with friends, of time for deep conversations about the issues that matter most to us."

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PAUL PRIBBENOW

Through Truth to Freedom— by Way of Reconciliation

As the traditional academic year begins, colleges and universities are in the news. The news is not good, full of dire warnings about student behavior, online learning, unhappy faculty and staff. In fact, the news and public opinion about higher education seems to foretell failure in the midst of this pandemic.

As a long-time university president, I am not naive about the unprecedented challenges we face on our campuses this fall. I give thanks for the tireless work of our students, faculty, and staff, along with the public health experts who are helping us keep each other safe and healthy. I wonder, though, if we might upend this failure narrative with a reminder of the unique role that higher education is called to play in historic moments just like this.

As we conclude our year-long celebration of Augsburg University's 150th anniversary, in the midst of these uncharted times, I have been reflecting on Augsburg's motto, "Through truth to freedom." I wonder whether and how we might recover its power for our academic and public missions, especially in a time when the relevance of higher education is being scrutinized. These words from Christian scripture were adopted as our motto in 1969, on the occasion of Augsburg's 100th anniversary. That was also a moment when campuses and the country were reeling from similar forms of anxiety and unrest.

"Through truth to freedom" strikes me as a compelling response to a moment when we find ourselves living at the intersection of three pandemics. The Covid-19 pandemic

has disrupted all aspects of how we live and work, and has pointedly illustrated the tension between public health and economic well-being. Following in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, an economic pandemic threatens our social fabric with massive unemployment and business closures worldwide. And, most recently, the racial inequities exacerbated by the senseless murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers has created a third pandemic, which threatens to tear our country apart. Surely, this uncharted terrain presents unique challenges for all of us as citizens. We are trying to imagine how we will navigate to some as-yet-unknown future.



"I wonder, though, if we might upend this failure narrative with a reminder of the unique role that higher education is called to play in historic moments just like this.

In a recent public presentation, Mary Lowe from Augsburg's religion department offered a provocative challenge when she asked us what it might mean to educate

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our students for freedom. What a countercultural notion! Educated for freedom from ignorance, from oppression, from division and hatred and violence. Educated for freedom to make the world fairer and more just and healthier, to be good neighbors, to take care of creation. Educated for freedom for the sake of the world, for the good of others, for the promise of wonder and creativity.

But is this path through truth to freedom as linear as the motto seems to claim? Often, the search for truth uncovers separations and sins that demand reconciliation before there is freedom. This, in fact, may be the most important work for our colleges and universities: to educate for truth and freedom—but by way of reconciliation.

In his recent book, *Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Lessons For Our Own*, Princeton Professor Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. describes the lie that persists in the United States—the lie of white supremacy and its insidious implications, America's own original sin that must be confessed so that there might be reconciliation and finally, freedom, true freedom.

In our Cedar-Riverside neighborhood in Minneapolis, our remarkably diverse Augsburg students and faculty engage every day with our immigrant neighbors—primarily Somali-Americans, devout Muslims—and we witness to their struggles with Islamophobia, racist behavior, with poverty. It is only when we face and confess the lies, that we find common ground, reconciliation, the genuine opportunity to live as neighbors aspiring for freedom. This, I would argue, is the authentic work of democracy, an ethic of living *with* each other.

Through truth to freedom by way of reconciliation is a fitting motto for all higher education in these times. The

questions we will ask at Augsburg are at the heart of our academic mission and our commitment to social justice. They are questions I believe all of higher education is poised to pursue. They include this one at the core: Where is the truth in the midst of these pandemics?

"It is only when we face and confess the lies, that we find common ground, reconciliation, the genuine opportunity to live as neighbors aspiring for freedom."

Further, what is the truth about keeping each other healthy in the face of a novel coronavirus? What is the truth in an economy that more and more creates remarkable inequities? What is the truth in centuries of systemic racism and oppression?

In pursuing the truths, we will find the sins and lies that we tell each other about knowledge and privilege and justice. Only when we face the truth, will we confess our complicity in the sin and lies we tell, and humbly seek to be reconciled with each other and with the creation. Only then will we be freed for the work we are called to do as "informed citizens, thoughtful stewards, critical thinkers, and responsible leaders" (Augsburg's mission).

That, it seems to me, is a much more compelling story of higher education in these pandemic times. I can't wait to see all that we will do together to strengthen our democracy.

LENA HANN

Finding Purpose in Chaos: Reflection In and Beyond the Public Health Classroom

In February 2020, I began teaching a new course designed specifically for undergraduate public health majors: “Professionalism in Public Health Practice.” The course aimed to prepare students for internships, jobs, and graduate programs in our field. The course’s original goal was practice-based: What knowledge and skills do students need to take the next step in their careers? The syllabus was packed with résumé and cover letter workshops, how to read a job posting, and how to network with professionals in the workforce. Recent alumni visited to answer questions about how they

“If there was ever a time to be a public health student, this was it.”

studied for the GRE, what internships they completed, and how they decided whether to work right away or go to graduate school first. Students brainstormed ways to market themselves at career fairs and how to sit for interviews. It was an extremely informative but, admittedly, also rather prescriptive, focusing on the *how* of professional preparation.

Lena R. Hann is an assistant professor of public health at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. Before joining academia, she spent the formative years of her career working in sexual and reproductive health clinics. Her current research focuses on stigma in health and best practices for patient-centered care.

Six weeks into the semester, the coronavirus pandemic hit the United States. By March, I sat before a classroom full of public health almost-grads who were asking if they would be sent home in order to keep everyone safe. Some reported up-to-the-minute news regarding the virus’s spread, government responses (or lack thereof), and regional school closures. Others shared concern about family members on the medical front lines who weren’t allowed to leave work after viral exposure. One student worried about where she would live if we went to distance learning because her parents were immunocompromised. The tension in the room was thick, but there was also an edge of hope. If there was ever a time to be a public health student, this was it.

Our college announced an early spring break the next day. Students quickly packed (most of them, only for a few weeks away), and then scattered to their hometowns. We didn’t know what was about to happen, or how long it would last. We didn’t get to say a proper goodbye, or even, “see you on Zoom.” There was no closure, only chaos, soon followed by confusion.



This was my first pandemic as both a public health professional and a faculty member. While students were tasked with adjusting to their new normal of virtual learning, I was confronted with the reality that this professionalism course was simultaneously urgent and already outdated. What changes would I need to make for it to be as meaningful as it was useful?

"In focusing on the *how* of professional preparation, I hadn't asked them to pause and direct their attention to *why* they wanted to pursue public health in the first place."

Throughout my previous eleven years of teaching, I'd come to realize how prescriptive public health education as a whole can be. Considering the rigorous standards set forth by accrediting bodies and students' growing demand for pre-professional training (especially in the health sciences), my public health courses had fallen into a rhythm (or rut?)—one that addressed competencies and outcomes that students would need for their post-baccalaureate path. Students were eager to complete their required courses and internships, graduate, and move on to the next adventure. In focusing on the *how* of professional preparation, I hadn't asked them to pause and direct their attention to *why* they wanted to pursue public health in the first place.

Still, our alumni regularly write to me and reflect on how their Augustana experience helped them navigate their vocational path. Many trace that path backwards to identify those "a-ha" moments that changed the trajectory of their lives. It was these alumni who, over the course of more than 25 years, had found their way into public health even before Augustana formalized a public health major and pre-professional workshops. Those students were called to public health through some special experience or moment, a moment of asking why, one that helped a nebulous jumble of ideas and desires solidify into a calling.

Of course, this is one of the ultimate goals of a residential, Lutheran liberal arts college where students live, learn, work, and serve together. These alumni stories, combined with an Education-for-Vocation faculty seminar

at Augustana College that NetVUE funded and in which I participated, led me to recalibrate the second half of my professionalism course. I asked students to reflect on their goals in public health: What originally brought them to public health? What were their interests before the pandemic? Where did they feel they were being called *now*? And why?

One business and public health student, Tracey, was in the middle of an internship with the local American Red Cross when the pandemic hit, and she had to move home to Connecticut. She felt called to continue helping others, and so signed up to work at a nursing home. Knowing that she was putting herself in harm's way, she said she would rather try to help the vulnerable than sit home and worry.

Hannah, double majoring in political science and public health, shifted her plans of pursuing health policy work in order to join a service organization and help in disaster areas. She immediately deployed from Illinois to California to help provide shelter to people evacuating the wildfires.

Older alumni, too, have reached out to me to reflect on where their public health journeys have led since leaving Augustana and as the pandemic hit. Sara, who studied religion and public health, started working at a regional food bank in Ohio only two weeks before her state lockdown made the demand for their services skyrocket. She shared, "Augustana taught me how intertwined our community and individual health is, and how important it is to ask deeper questions when coordinating an effort. How will this affect someone different from me? In what ways can we honor and respect someone's humanity even during this time of emergency?"

"In what ways can we honor and respect someone's humanity even during this time of emergency?"

Alyssa, an alumna with majors in public health and communication studies, now researches the impact of postpartum depression on Latinx communities for her doctoral program in Seattle. Her team explores how Covid-19 and the increasing impacts of institutional racism may exacerbate this already serious issue for underrepresented mothers.

Darielle, a Masters in Public Health (MPH) candidate in Chicago, described how her time at Augustana prepared her to be flexible, especially during unpredictable situations: “Augie pushed me to persevere, to be resilient and humble...which has helped me remain optimistic during the pandemic and social injustices.” She plans to use this optimism and resilience in her new role researching opioid use disorder and treatment therapies.

Nikki, who pursued her Bachelor in Science of Nursing (BSN) and became a registered nurse, reflects deeply on how her nursing and public health backgrounds blended to make sense of the chaos during the early days of the pandemic:

2020 was “The Year of the Nurse,” celebrating the 200th anniversary of the birth of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing. At the beginning of the year, nurses hoped for recognition via safer staffing ratios, better pay, and more independence in our practice. Covid-19 shook the entire healthcare system to its core and we are just now beginning to pick up the pieces. It was easy to get lost in the horror of it all; no one had any answers and we were working with limited supplies. [But] our experiences and reliance on one another made us stronger.

Reflecting on her Augustana education, Nikki said the liberal arts helped her understand not only the how of nursing, but also the why:

When I started as a nurse, I always assumed “helping” patients meant improving their health. I have learned, unfortunately, that this is not always possible. Helping patients in palliative or hospice situations can mean helping them accept their illness or death. Some patients are managing their illness fine physically but have a hard time grasping the mental and emotional side of being ill, like being scared and secluded from their family. Talking to these patients, making them laugh, or holding their tablet during a Zoom call is as

important as monitoring their oxygen saturation. I’ve come to understand that in order to help someone you have to understand their *perception* of health. I learned this in medical anthropology, and through my experiences, I was able to apply it in real life.

These alumni stories show us that public health can and should be rooted deeply in the Lutheran approach to the liberal arts, with its institutional commitment to vocational reflection. Combining skills-based public health courses (the “how”) with opportunities for introspection and exploration (the “why”) allows students to examine their role in serving others and make meaning as health practitioners. The liberal arts curriculum provides even more opportunities to connect other areas of study with their public health goals. This is demonstrated in the fact that the alumni I’ve here quoted majored in the diverse fields of business, communication studies, nursing, political science, and religion.

The pandemic is far from over, but hearing testimonies from public health students and alumni who have shifted their plans in order to serve others in new ways has strengthened my resolve to include more deliberate reflection in all of my courses. Augustana’s mission calls us to offer a “challenging education that develops the qualities of mind, spirit, and body necessary for students to discern their life’s calling of leadership and service in a diverse and changing world.” This year has shown us exactly how important it is to find purpose in chaos, and I look forward to seeing our next generation of Augustana public health graduates find their calling in our ever-diverse and changing world.¹

Endnote

1. I want to acknowledge and thank the many Augustana College public health alumni who have shared their vocational journeys with me, especially Alyssa Hernandez, MS; Sara Hovren, BA; Tracey Keane, BA; Nikki Montgomery, BA, BSN-RN; Hannah Norris, BA; and Darielle Sherrod, MPH(c).

KARA BAYLOR

The Long Pilgrimage of 2020-21



Pilgrimage (n.) 1. Intentional dislocation, for the sake of transformation, where the body teaches the soul.

Definition by Martha Stortz, Professor Emerita, Augsburg University

It was the second or third time that I attended the gathering of the ELCA Campus Pastors. There, I heard Marty Stortz give this definition of the word *pilgrimage*. Words usually have to be put to music for them to stick in my head, but her words have stuck with me for years; no need for a melody. Maybe it is because they are so true for the work we all do on college and university campuses.

Intentional dislocation—that is what students always do when they come to college. They intentionally make the choice to pick themselves up from their homes to be a part of a new community in a new location. The academic year of 2020-21 has had more dislocation than we could have ever imaged. It has also made all of us more intentional, including students. Just moving to campuses this year demanded more intentionality than usual. Facing a global pandemic, students had to make the difficult choice about whether to suspend their college pilgrimage, to take online classes, or to return to our campuses.

Wherever and however they go to college, they do so for the sake of transformation. They do not come to college in the hopes of staying the same. They come to college to

learn, to take in new ideas, and to discover more about their gifts and skills, and how each can be leveraged for the flourishing of communities.

Each year, they grow and change and push themselves to try new things. Each year, they seek deeper understanding of themselves and others. They do all this for the sake of themselves and all those around them: friends, family members, and future colleagues they have yet to meet and cannot yet imagine.

The 2020-2021 academic year is like no other in the modern era. The college pilgrimage this year can feel desolate and interminable, with too many mundane days leaving us little energy for coping with mountainous terrain. Many of our classrooms mix virtual students with others sitting six feet apart. Many of them are moving in and out of quarantine. Many are finding it difficult to make friends with the people down the hall because everyone's doors are expected to be closed; this is especially hard on first year students. Student organizations are primarily meeting online; energy for additional time on Zoom is very low. Opportunities to meet others who may see the world differently, and who would otherwise play a vital role in a student's transformation, aren't readily available.

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This year calls us to be more intentional. Where will we put our energy while on this pilgrimage? This year asks us to listen even more closely to what our bodies are telling us about the state of our souls. Where will we find transformation despite and because of the dislocation?

The discomfort of this moment may be a sign that things need to change; it may also mean growth and transformation. Discomfort may mean you need to move away from an expectation, idea, or activity. It may also indicate growing pains that students need to push through as they start to see the world in a new way. When students—as well as educators—are worn out, they should stop and think about what is essential to each day.

“This year calls us to be more intentional. ”

All of us should be learning to say “yes” to the things that are life-giving and “no” to things that deplete us. Ask questions that will help you be discerning in these moments. You will need those questions for your entire life.

The long pilgrimage of 2020-21 is unlike any other journey any of us have been on. It is calling us to be even more intentional with each step we take. We are called to be more open to the ways we can be transformed.

Called to Flourish: An Ethic of Care



The first month of the 2020-21 academic year was pretty horrible. The 52 year-old husband of a dear friend of mine died from cancer. Two of my cousin's college-aged children were quarantined (separately, different colleges) with Covid-19. One of the kindest human beings I know

was diagnosed with ALS; another friend's mother received severe burns over a large part of her body in a kitchen fire; another friend's three-year-old son has had to have two surgeries. The two-year old grandson of my sister's next door neighbor snuck through a dog door and fell in a swimming pool and drowned. Three (or four, or five, I've lost count) hurricanes threatened the Gulf Coast where my daughter lives. And, of course, there are the multiple pandemics of COVID-19, racism/white supremacy, and political dysfunction. We have transitioned from living in a collective state of acute anxiety and trauma to a state of chronic anxiety and trauma. It is simply too much; compassion fatigue is setting in. Everyone I know is functioning in overdrive, trying to work from home, homeschool, plan weddings and funerals and have and care for children, and do all of this without any of the normal social support that we would rely on in a non-pandemic world. Many are no longer trying to keep their heads above water, but are struggling to hold their breath instead.

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And yet, we are called to flourish.

Rooted and Open is the NECU (Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities) document that outlines the vision of vocation shared by all of the ELCA colleges and universities. Though we live out this common calling in very particular, contextual ways, we begin from the same foundation. That foundational, shared vocation is as follows: "Called and empowered to serve the neighbor so that all may flourish." This describes both *our* vocation and the vocation we are called to inculcate in our students.

Called to Flourish

Several years ago, after extended conversation and a period of silent prayer, my spiritual director said to me, "I have an image of an orchid." He paused and then went on, "It is growing through broken asphalt. And not just growing but flourishing." He went on to explain that as this image had come to him he had argued with himself, "That can't be. Orchids require attention and care. They don't just grow. They certainly don't flourish untended." And yet, he said, the image remained. This image has stuck with me. What does it mean to flourish—especially in less than ideal circumstances?

"What does it mean to flourish—especially in less than ideal circumstances?"

In music, flourishes are extra notes; notes that are not essential or necessary to the musical piece, but that give it a little extra something, something beautiful. This is similarly true of rhetorical flourishes—clever, colorful, sometimes comedic turns of speech that are unnecessary, but improve the affective appeal of a lecture or sermon or conversation. Flourishing, in other words, is more than mere surviving. To flourish is another way of speaking of the scriptural/theological understanding of abundant life.

Flourishing—as my spiritual director noted—requires attention and care. This fall semester, Lenoir-Rhyne University, like many schools, has operated with a modified hybrid model. Every class I teach is divided in half and I get one sixty-minute class period per week of in-person instruction with each half of the class. With such a sharp reduction in instructional time (roughly one-third the time with students we had this time last year), it would be easy to hyper-focus on content in order to “get through” everything it feels like we might need to get through in a semester. Instead, I begin every class with a check-in. We remind one another of our names because, with only one hour a week together, sitting spread out, not doing any in-person small group work, and masked, I do not assume the students have had a chance to get to know one another. And then I ask a question that invites everyone to share how they are coping, and hopefully flourishing, during this strangest and most difficult semester we have ever had or even imagined.

In these conversations we have learned about the death of grandparents, the suicide of a father, and the illness of siblings. We have also learned about life-giving artistic, athletic, and spiritual practices that are nurturing and sustaining each of us, often with invitations to teach each other. (As a result of these conversations, one of my students has taught me to crochet. This has been her life-saving coping mechanism; she crochets constantly, including in class. She came to class early one day to get me started on my own, much simpler, project; she and I now spend an hour a week crocheting and talking together.)

This check-in generally takes anywhere from ten to fifteen minutes, which is a significant percentage of our hour together. But in and through these conversations, each mini-section of each class has developed

into its own community. Not long ago, when I came into the classroom one student (one who serves as a pastor already in his congregation) had brought a vial of anointing oil and was showing another student how to give a blessing. Her fiancé is ill and the student-pastor wanted to help and support her. Ten or fifteen minutes a week over the course of the past six weeks has created pockets of communities of care for one another.

Called to Care

We are called to flourish and we are called to care: to care for ourselves, for one another, and for the world. These two things—flourishing and caring—are directly related to one another. Not only is the flourishing of others tied up in my caring, and my flourishing tied up in the caring of others, but my own flourishing is *of a piece* with my caring for others. Humans are created to live in community, caring for one another.

“Not only is the flourishing of others tied up in my caring, and my flourishing tied up in the caring of others, but my own flourishing is of a piece with my caring for others.”

Care is one of the “Core Values” at Lenoir-Rhyne University. I imagine this is the case for many of our institutions. “Care” is not an abstract idea; it is an active verb that includes self-care, compassion for others, stewardship of resources (personal and communal), and a commitment to the common good. Creating and sustaining an academic and social environment in which habits of care can be developed and nurtured is one of the ways that liberal arts universities live out their promise of educating the whole person and of transforming minds and hearts, which is also language many of us employ in our institutional mission statements.

The vision of care that our institutions embrace cannot be limited to a concern for self. The self, the individual, does matter. And we are called to be good stewards of our selves—body, mind, and spirit. But this care for



self has an outward-facing orientation. A liberal arts education rooted in the Lutheran theological tradition focuses us not merely on ourselves, but also on the greater world of which we are a part.

Although *Rooted and Open* does not speak of care in a time of pandemic, it does remind us that we are called to prepare—and push—students for “meaningful work and active participation in just, loving communities.”

Care is meaningful work. It is a way of participating in the transformation of the world. As Lutheran institutions of higher education we are shaped by Lutheran social ethics even if we are not individually Lutherans (or even Christians). Lutheran social ethics are based on the belief that we are all called to live out our faith (whatever our specific faith commitments may be) through acts of love and service to the neighbor. Such acts create, nurture, and sustain the very communities that in turn create, nurture, and sustain us. Care transforms. It transforms us, our neighbor, and our world.

In addition to being its own meaningful work, care creates meaning. In her new book, *Untamed*, Glennon Doyle says, “The moral arc of our life bends toward meaning—especially if we bend it that way with all our damn might” (Doyle 34) The work of care is not always easy. It takes time, attention, and energy. But as institutions of higher education our calling to educate is not a call to fill empty heads with important facts. It is to help young adults launch as people who recognize they are capable of changing the world through their own experiences of transformation.

Martin Luther famously said that it is not God who needs our good works, but our neighbor. The Lutheran

intellectual tradition is based, in large part, on a theological understanding of freedom; through Christ we are free from any legalistic requirements to earn God’s love. Because there is nothing I have to do or even can do to make God love me more, I am free to extend this same love to my neighbor. It is in this way that God extends care to all of God’s world. We are invited to be the ripples of God’s care and provision in the world.

Called to Community

I have read countless self-care articles since Covid-19 began. Most of them, rightly, include the airline/oxygen mask analogy. I am of no good to others if I do not take care of myself first. And this is, of course, true. The theological and vocational problem with the way this analogy is usually used is that it puts the emphasis in the wrong place. We aren’t called to care for ourselves before caring for others as an act of self-protection. It isn’t: “take care of yourself first and *then* if you are able help others.” Rather, we are called to care for ourselves *so that* we can extend care to others. Self-care is not an end unto itself but a means to a greater communal end. It is the act of caring that is primary.

“Even in the midst of social or physical distancing, we are interdependent.”

This past summer Lenoir-Rhyne held an online multi-disciplinary course on Covid-19 that was open to the public as well as to students. At the end of the course, some of my colleagues conducted a survey on behaviors and beliefs around public health and Covid-19. The results of this survey suggested that the more strongly someone believed that wearing a mask helped protect others, the more likely they were to wear a mask. This finding is consistent with other similar research on motivation and altruism. Despite much seeming evidence to the contrary, we are a fairly altruistic species; helping one another is written into our DNA.

We are bound together in community. Even in the midst of social or physical distancing, we are interdependent.

My health depends on you and yours on me. The reality of our interdependence highlights our responsibility for one another. In North Carolina, where I live, early on in the pandemic under our stay-at-home order, which effectively shut down everything but essential businesses, including churches, a small group of churches filed a lawsuit arguing that churches should be exempt, on constitutional grounds, from the order. A federal judge sided with the churches. The churches in this case may have been legally correct that they have a constitutional “right” to gather, but there is an even stronger *responsibility* to act as good stewards of individual and community health.

The ELCA has a rich tradition of writing social statements, which are teaching and policy documents that cover a wide range of social and ethical issues. In 2003 the ELCA approved a statement on health and healthcare, “Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor.” This document articulates that Lutheran Christians are compelled by both love and justice and that “Achieving these obligations of love and justice requires sacrifice, goodwill, fairness, and an abiding commitment to place personal and social responsibilities of love and justice above narrower individual, institutional, and political self-interests” (ELCA 20). Our institutional commitments to justice move us beyond care for ourselves and our insistence on our own rights. They lead us to focus on the neighborhood ecology, the common good, of which we are a small part.

To be in community is to be gifted through and through. In his article, “Gift and Calling,” Darrel Jodock stresses the recognition of our own giftedness. All that I am and all that I have is gift. This includes the myriad communities of which I am a part. Referring to our calling to share our gifts with others, “to become absorbed in the needs of others” (Jodock 11), Jodock says, “This notion that gifts come to us from God through others has a corollary—and this is that God’s gifts reach others through us. Not only are others the channels and means whereby we receive gifts, but we are called to be the channels and means whereby gifts reach others. Our giftedness yields a task, a calling” (12).

Martin Luther lived through a global pandemic of the bubonic plague in 1527 in Wittenberg, Germany. During this plague Luther and his wife, Katie, opened up their home to those who were sick and in need of care. Luther argued that it was his duty—and the duty of all—to do all what one could to improve the circumstances of one’s community.

Concluding Reflections

We are called to use our gifts in care for one another, for our communities, and for the world, that all may flourish. Perhaps it is hard to recognize flourishing in this time of pandemic, but it is all around us. As I was working on this article, I posed the question on Facebook, “where have you witnessed flourishing during Covid-19?” I received all manner of answers: more time spent learning skills and hobbies, gardening, deepened relationships, churches learning to create genuine online community, even leaders of non-profits (which I expected to be suffering right now) who see flourishing in the quality and depth of the relationships within their communities. One of my students whose grandfather died early in the semester shared with me how grateful she was to have had the time during the pandemic to eat ice cream with him every night. Every night. It’s an extra “flourish” that she would not have taken the time for in a pre-Covid world. And though her grandfather died, their relationship was given space to flourish in his final months.

“Perhaps it is hard to recognize flourishing in this time of pandemic, but it is all around us.”

Flourishing is more than surviving; it is more than just getting by. But it ends up that what we need to flourish might not be all that complex. We are called to active care of and for ourselves, our communities, and the world. It is hard and meaningful work, but it isn’t complicated.

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Called to the Moment: A New Vocation for Lutheran Colleges



Lutherans and Lutheran colleges talk about vocation and calling, often assigning almost mystical or magical qualities to the discernment thereof. When I hear this talk, I sometimes wonder if the discovery involves a voice like the one in *Field of Dreams*, or perhaps a lightning bolt. I

suppose that sometimes it does.

Many are familiar with Frederick Buechner's oft-cited description of vocation: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." Working at a Lutheran college for the last 15 years, I've heard college presidents, faculty, and chaplains quote Buechner or come up with their own way of describing what is supposed to happen to an 18 to 22-year-old in college.

The 26 Lutheran colleges and universities have even united around a common mission related to vocation, as articulated in the statement, *Rooted and Open*. There, they summarize their collective work as follows:

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.

There is plenty of Biblical and scholarly work that reinforces this claim to vocation, and I consider it a great privilege to serve a Lutheran college and to raise my children in an ELCA congregation. But I do worry a bit about the often grandiose and erudite descriptions of calling and vocation, especially on college campuses.

I've been thinking about this since hearing a delightful sermon by Pastor Katy Warren, associate pastor at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Davenport, Iowa, where I am a member. Pastor Katy had the tough job of preaching a sermon through a mask, during a brief in-person, midday service of communion following the derecho (inland hurricane) that clobbered Iowa in August of 2020.

It had been quite a week—100 mile-per-hour winds, splintered trees, decimated crops, days without electricity and other services. Needless to say, we were not prepared and the damage was awful. I didn't envy Pastor Katy's assignment to make sense of it all.

She chose to read from 1 Peter 4: 8-11, which was an effective passage for the moment. Verse 10 stood out to me: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others." Pastor Katy then shared stories of line workers from across the nation rushing to Iowa's

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rescue, neighbors with power setting up charging stations for those without, strangers with chainsaws helping those with downed trees, restaurants offering freezer space, and other acts of kindness and generosity.

“Were those line workers, neighbors, restaurant owners, and chainsaw-wielding neighbors thinking about meeting the world’s deep need with their deep gladness?”

Following the service, I found myself thinking about how the message related to my own life and the work of Lutheran colleges. Were those line workers, neighbors, restaurant owners, and chainsaw-wielding neighbors thinking about meeting the world’s deep need with their deep gladness? I suppose it’s possible, but I doubt it.

This spring, summer, and into the fall, I’ve witnessed something similar at Augustana College. So many of my amazing colleagues on campus have helped where and when they have been needed throughout the pandemic. People have stepped in and up to help—the athletic trainer-turned-telecounseling outreach coordinator; the counselor now an expert contract tracer; the Sports Information Director now coordinating campus-wide surveillance testing; the hesitant email user now an

expert in meeting virtually with all kinds of stakeholders. Seeing such responsiveness has made me wonder about the emphasis we place on calling. Perhaps there is more room to focus on the immediate needs of those around us, while also encouraging the discovery that accompanies vocational reflection.

I believe we should pair our important message about vocation and calling with the kinds of things we witness in the moment, such as the aftermath of the derecho here in Iowa and the campus’s response to the pandemic and changing needs.

Rather than asking college students to identify and follow their path in life, should we simply make a stronger case for responding to the moment? For just showing up, giving what you have, helping exactly where and when needed, no matter what your background?

“Should we simply make a stronger case for responding to the moment?”

We might call it “meeting immediate need with a deep willingness,” or simply, “called to the moment.” For liberal arts students educated as versatile, critical thinkers, it might be a natural impulse. I, for one, think making that case might be the true vocation of a Lutheran college.

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Bethany College LINDSBORG, KANSAS
California Lutheran University THOUSAND OAKS, CALIFORNIA
Capital University COLUMBUS, OHIO
Carthage College KENOSHA, WISCONSIN
Concordia College MOORHEAD, MINNESOTA
Finlandia University HANCOCK, MICHIGAN
Gettysburg College GETTYSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA
Grand View University DES MOINES, IOWA
Gustavus Adolphus College ST. PETER, MINNESOTA
Lenoir-Rhyne University HICKORY, NORTH CAROLINA
Luther College DECORAH, IOWA
Luther College, University of Regina REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN
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 SELINGROVE, PENNSYLVANIA
Texas Lutheran University SEGUIN, TEXAS
Thiel College GREENVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA
Wagner College STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK
Wartburg College WAVERLY, IOWA
Wittenberg University SPRINGFIELD, OHIO



**Evangelical Lutheran
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