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FALL 2022

Intersections

Faith, Learning, and the Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education



IN THIS ISSUE

Why All This Talk About Vocation?

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

The Hagfors Center at Augsburg University in Minneapolis, the location of the 2022 Vocation of a Lutheran Higher Education Conference, is a physical representation of the University's commitment to living into vocation within their community. The building itself—which houses religion, business, and science in one location—blends community in a way not often seen on college campuses. The space itself mixes disciplines in ways that offer and invite new perspectives on vocation. In bold on the wall, the University proclaims its latest rallying cry, bringing us back to the heart of vocation: "We are called." Further, we are called to think critically, as changemakers in the world, as beings called into action for truth and justice, as people living into our vocation. Turning attention to the inset: the inscriptions in the windows, the hymn "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," handwritten by Martin Luther, is overlaid with the cell structure of an American elm tree. Other artwork within the walls of the Hagfors Center demonstrates the commitment to be representative of Augsburg's diverse community of students, moving towards equity and inclusion through public art, on their campus, and in the world.

CALL FOR ARTISTS: Submit your design for Spring 2023 "Vocation [in] Disruption."

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FROM THE EDITOR

Why All This Talk About Vocation?



“Why all this talk about vocation?” This question, the theme of last summer’s conference for Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education, was the first in-person gathering for the group since 2019, which increased the joy in seeing one another while also raising the stakes of why

we gather. Why, amidst all of the disruptions to higher education and continuing concerns about community spread of COVID, would we gather for presentations, workshops, and conversations about vocation? Mark Wilhelm offered a deceptively simple answer to the question in his keynote address, printed in this issue: *“Lutheran higher education...is vocation-based education.”*

We talk about vocation because we must: it is who we are and what we do, even if incompletely, clumsily, and unjustly at times. Wilhelm, who has served Lutheran higher education in various capacities for multiple decades and will retire in late January of 2023, calls us to “constructive work” and “corrective work” in the next decade of our work in vocation, a call that resonates with many authors in this issue.

In this issue you will read several responses to Wilhelm’s keynote address, offered in panel format at the conference

and printed here for continued conversations among us on our college/university campuses. Each in their own way, Marit Trelstad, Vic Thasiah, Drew Tucker, Mary-Paula Cancienne, and Paul Pribbenow are already pushing, via vocation, toward constructive work and corrective work, outlining a living-together in higher education that widens and deepens the work as well as the narrative of what we do when we gather to learn and to teach for the sake of the world. Vocation must not be a mark of privilege, but must instead lead us boldly into reforms that call into question and even undo unjust systems of which we are part.

Julius Crump and Madyson Ray, both of whom attended the Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education conference for the first time last summer, write in compelling ways about why the work of vocation is essential to joy and purpose in learning as well as authentic relationships between professors and students.

The final two pieces are companions, since Elli Cucksey shares the constructive work she did in her role as librarian as a response to her experience as a student of Womanist theology with Beverly Wallace. In Wallace’s co-authored piece with Yolanda Norton, they root the work of vocation in the soul (“Doing the Work One’s Soul Must Have”). Engaging Womanist theology through coursework and the Black Girl Magic Academy, and cultivating spaces of freedom and empowerment through the Beyoncé Mass and Womanist Experiential Learning Initiative, Norton and Wallace invite

Colleen Windham-Hughes, PhD, MDiv, was born into and ordained by the United Methodist Church, yet became Lutheran (ELCA) over time, due in part to over a decade at California Lutheran University, where she holds the Wilbert and Darlene Carlson Endowed Chair of Youth and Family Ministry and serves as associate dean of Interdisciplinary Programs and Community Outreach.

ELCA colleges and universities to host existing events and expand the work to undergraduate campuses.

Take action based on what you read here

- 1) Reach out to one of the authors printed here and continue conversation about, or schedule an event that lives out, our shared calling to “vocation-based education.”
- 2) Complete the short survey we have designed to understand Intersections’ past and chart its future.

- 3) Contribute to the Spring 2023 issue: “Vocation (in) Disruption.” We invite pieces on finding vocation amidst disruption as well as being called to disruption as a vocation. Perspectives from all areas of Higher Education at Lutheran colleges and universities are welcome, including students. Submissions are due 15 January 2023.

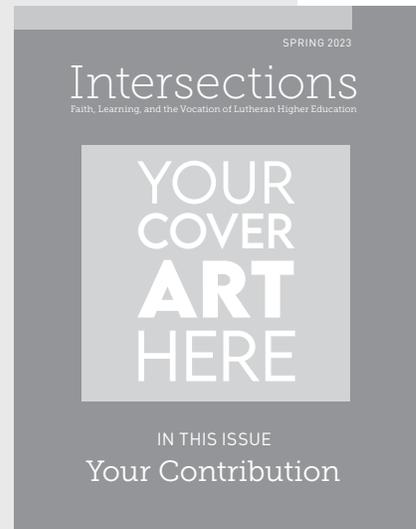
There are several mic-drop moments in this issue; do not miss them!

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Spring 2023 “Vocation (in) Disruption”

We invite pieces on finding vocation amidst disruption as well as being called to disruption as a vocation. Perspectives from all areas of Higher Education at Lutheran colleges and universities are welcome, including students. We publish both short reflections of 500-600 words and features of 1000-2000 words. If you would like to be in conversation about an idea that is brewing, please be in touch with the editorial team: Colleen Windham-Hughes, windhamh@callutheran.edu and/or Jessica Easter, jeaster@callutheran.edu

DUE: 15 January 2023



MARK WILHELM

FROM THE PUBLISHER

Why All This Talk About Understanding the Mission of NECU Member Institutions as a Vocation?

Introduction: Lutheran Higher Education is Vocation-Based Education



The theme of the 2022 Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education Conference asks the question, “Why all this talk about vocation?” The answer: We talk about vocation in the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities because the concept of vocation provides an accurate understanding of

the mission of the institutions in our community. Lutheran higher education (LHE) *is* vocation-based education. So, why all the talk? We do so because, for the Lutheran intellectual and educational tradition, the mission of a college or university is rooted in and explained by the concept of vocation. LHE, properly understood and implemented, is vocation-based education.

The received understanding of Lutheran higher education as a service for Lutherans is an artifact of the era of European Lutheran immigration. Lutheran colleges and universities were all founded in that era as service agencies

to meet the higher education needs of Lutheran young adults. Even though that era is long over, Lutheran higher education has only recently recovered vocation-based higher education as the authentic description of the mission of LHE. After presenting a description of what has been recovered, I will then describe my sense that it is time review and assess our commitment to vocation-based education. It has been approximately 50 years since the work began to recover the Lutheran Reformation’s understanding of vocation-based education. After five decades, it is time to take stock, address shortcomings, correct missteps, and place ourselves in a stronger position to reaffirm our common commitment to vocation-based higher education.

Vocation-Based Education: Higher Education in a Lutheran Key

We begin with an overview of vocation-based education as the authentic expression of LHE by employing a simple musical metaphor. Even as the selected key, major or minor, sets the tone and is the musical foundation for a song, the

Mark Wilhelm, PhD, MDiv, is the Executive Director of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities. He will retire January 31, 2023.

concept of vocation sets the tone and is the conceptual foundation for the mission of LHE. Practices central to a vocation-based mission in higher education as conceived in the 16th century Lutheran reformation are these:

First, education is to be available to the entire community. The Lutheran movement of reform in 16th century Europe was not just about reform of religion and the church. It was also about the reform of society. One of the hallmarks of the reform of society brought about by the Lutheran reformation was an insistence that education should be provided to the community as a whole—including the revolutionary argument for the education of women—instead of just the wealthy through private tutors or through training for church leadership in monasteries. Access to education for the whole community is a core practice of LHE, rooted in the Lutheran Reformation of the 16th century.

Remember, as I mentioned earlier, that LHE is an educational tradition that was the first to insist upon education being available to the entire community. Lutheranism taught that God wanted all to be educated, giving the best opportunity to our cities and communities to thrive under wise leaders who would govern well. The commitment is most polemically and brazenly resident in an anecdote attributed to Martin Luther in which he is to have said that he would prefer to be governed by a well-educated and wise Muslim than an uneducated, stupid Christian. This was a bold statement about championing universal education in a time when the Ottoman Empire was threatening to conquer Christian Europe.

Vocation-based education commits an institution to provide access to all, open to all, and is the foundation for your institution's freedom to be composed of persons from multiple backgrounds, as well as Lutherans, and to serve diverse constituencies as well as the constituency called the Lutheran church. Because it is a Lutheran institution of higher education, your mission is to educate whoever constitutes your institution's community. Embracing vocation-based education as an institutional commitment is to embrace the foundational rationale for the demographic, personnel and enrollment changes that have occurred over the last seventy-five years at ELCA-related institutions and for your current mission to serve a diversity of key constituencies.

Second, vocation-based education defines education as the community calling individuals to discover their purpose in life and how they can use their education to benefit others as well as themselves; to serve the neighbor and contribute to the common good. Education is not just about receiving knowledge but about the use of knowledge and about developing an understanding of the communal obligations that come with knowledge. Vocation-based education certainly enables students to fulfill their personal needs and wishes, but vocation-based education also enables students to discover a sense of purpose through discerning how their lives will benefit the common good. A commitment to educating students to live meaningful, purposeful lives that benefit the common good as well as the individual is a defining practice of vocation-based education. We have come to discuss this practice often and in a variety of settings, such as this annual conference and our engagement with the Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education.

Third, vocation-based education is holistic education. It is education that engages the whole scope of human knowledge and invites students as whole persons—body, mind, and spirit, into learning. It is an education rooted in the liberal arts, and it is the prerequisite to education having the capacity described above, namely, to call students to understand that knowledge is to benefit the common good as well as the individual.

A fourth practice of vocation-based education that receives less attention, even though it has been named in conversations about vocation and higher education in our Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU). This less discussed practice is that a commitment to vocation-based education is an institutional commitment embodied in the practices of individuals. One of the reasons that NECU is concerned to sponsor "all this talk about vocation," including these annual conferences, is to encourage your college or university to understand and claim that, as an institution, it has a vocation and that its vocation is fulfilled when students discover their vocations. If I were to turn the question posed on the cover of our conference program into a declarative statement, it would read, "We have all this talk about vocation because NECU member colleges and universities should understand that their institutions have a vocation as surely as students, faculty, staff, and administrators do.

It is easy to avoid developing and sustaining an institutional commitment to vocation-based education by reducing the vocation-based education to one, often optional, tool—typically co-curricular programming—for assisting with the education of students. My friend, David Cunningham, who is director of NetVUE, does exactly that in his chapter, “Colleges Have Callings, Too: Vocational Reflection at the Institutional Level,” which is found in NetVUE’s second volume of scholarly articles, *Vocation Across the Academy: A New Vocabulary for Higher Education*. David argues in his chapter, that colleges and universities should add the richness of vocational reflection to their development of mission statements. Even as a student’s education can be enhanced by exposure to vocational reflection, so too, David suggests, vocational reflection at the institutional level can enhance a college or university’s understanding of its mission.

“Vocation-based education—an institutional commitment to community-wide, holistic education that calls students to use knowledge for the common good as well as personal benefit—defines the mission of Lutheran higher education.”

For LHE, David’s suggestion, while praiseworthy, is an example of reducing vocation to a programmatic application of the concept that keeps the concept of vocation from defining the institution’s calling, purpose, and mission. It provides a way of thinking helpfully about the mission; it does not define the mission. And it does not truly express what it means to claim that “institutions have a calling, too.” For LHE, the calling or vocation of an institution of higher education to hold in trust a commitment to vocation-based education. An institution’s vocation is not to use vocational reflection occasionally as an adjunct to strategic planning by its trustees—although that is good to do—nor is it to provide vocational reflection opportunities for its students—although that is also important to do. For LHE, the calling or vocation of a college or university is to ensure that its total educational mission, curricular and co-curricular, is vocation-based education.

Vocation-based education—an institutional commitment to community-wide, holistic education that calls students to use knowledge for the common good as well as personal benefit—defines the mission of Lutheran higher education. Resting on this foundation supports the delivery of an educational excellence. Doing so also protects institutions against forces favoring the commodification of education or those who would encourage your institution to succumb to educational fads.

Toward New Work and Correcting Things Not Done Well or Ignored

Having offered an overview of higher education in a Lutheran key, let us now turn to my belief that it is time to review and assess our work in reclaiming an understanding of LHE as vocation-based education.

This review and assessment must be done not because we erred when we recovered the theological concept of vocation as the driver of the mission of LHE. Instead, we must do so because we have work left undone, despite all the efforts in recent decades to restore and reclaim vocation-based education. This new work will include confessing and correcting mistakes and shortcomings made along the way in the movement to restore vocation to its central place. Taking-up work left undone, as well as confessing and correcting our past missteps, will allow us to more completely affirm and more deeply embrace vocation-based education as the shared mission of our community of higher education.

By my lights, we should address several constructive and corrective tasks. There may be more that other could identify.

First, let me turn to the constructive work we still need to do.

A. Constructive Work

A major task for NECU is the creation of a comprehensive list and definitions of key subsidiary vocation-based educational practices. The purpose is not to restrict or dictate your individual institution’s programs. Your institutions will continue to embody vocation-based education in a variety of ways. Nonetheless, it would be helpful if we could develop a list and definitions of high-level, subsidiary practices for our shared mission.

Several of your institutions have created such lists, sometimes for internal coaching or professional development programming and sometimes for marketing and communications purposes. *Rooted and Open: The Common Call of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities* also discusses key, high-level practices of LHE. We have, however, never developed and agreed upon a list as the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities. Our collective enterprise would be enhanced by a shared list.

Some of the practices that would certainly be included are:

Humility in the fulfillment of our vocation. We approach our academic mission to educate for vocation not with arrogance but with a spirit of humility, always open to testing our commitments and ideas with insights from others. A Lutheran understanding of humility requires not a spirit of personal degradation but a willingness to recognize the interests and needs of others. Humility involves not putting oneself down but lifting another up. The concept of humility in the task of education is closely related to vocation-based education's core practice of education as a calling to understand knowledge as a benefit for the common good as well as one's own interests.

A spirit of service. Service, within and without the campus and engaged in humility for the sake of the common good is a principal feature of vocation-based education.

Freedom of inquiry and expression. The questioning of received knowledge as well as an openness to exploring new learnings, all without fear, must make a shared list. As expressed in Pacific Lutheran University's statement about what it calls the "core elements" of LHE, all need to recall that the modern notion of academic freedom is not rooted in secular sources but in the intellectual tradition springing from the Lutheran reform of education in the 16th century. I will add that no straight line exists from 16th century Germany to the modern academy, but as the PLU statement states: "...It was the 16th century Lutheran reformers who first advanced the notion that freedom from coercion or reprisal was the singular condition in which teaching, learning, and research could take place." A concern academic freedom was derived from the foundational Lutheran theological conviction about the freedom of the Christian person. The Lutheran

Reformation's reform of society extended this freedom to schools free of coercion and reprisal.

Other nominees. One surely would be the conviction that interfaith relationships enrich learning, as in the description of the Bernard Christensen legacy at Augsburg University. Care for the earth as well as human community would be another, as would be a welcoming spirit of hospitality in the exercise of higher education.

Whatever the list's content, an agreed upon list with common definitions would helpfully provide a shared vocabulary and ideals for our collective work.

Three other critiques of our recovery of vocation-based education deserve further attention and public discussion.

"Vocation" as an intrusion of religion into higher

education. A standing critique of vocation-based education is that it represents an inappropriate and potentially dangerous intrusion of religion into higher education. Widespread interest in considering vocational reflection as a tool for higher education has not eliminated the distrust felt by some about borrowing any theological concept to inform educational practice. NECU should foster more dialogue about the congruity between the ideals of the academy and the educational ideals of the Lutheran intellectual tradition. This dialogue should include an honest assessment of the sad history of the Christian churches attempt to limit free inquiry in higher education and a clearer articulation of the protections for free inquiry and academic autonomy afforded by the Lutheran intellectual and educational tradition.

Privilege. Some object that a commitment to vocation-based education is an arrogant exercise in privilege. The earliest commentary on this issue that I am aware of was made by the theologian Robert McAfee Brown, in his 1961 book, *The Spirit of Protestantism*. Brown notes, as do contemporary critics, that a sense of vocation in one's daily work is not readily shared by those whose work is drudgery and whose lives in general have no time for reflection about vocation. A response to this critique requires recognizing and admitting that our engagement with vocation-based is a luxury by the world's standards. But all aspects of private, residential, liberal arts-based higher education are a privilege in

today's world. We must redouble efforts to acknowledge the obligation that having this privilege imposes on us. We must commit ourselves to enhancing the common good, including the promotion of economic justice. We must also better describe that the Lutheran concept of vocation, at its root, defines the value and dignity of all human life and activity. It is a claim that one's primary vocation in life can be outside of work-for-pay and that one can take pride in contributing to society through less-than-desirable work (as my father did at a furniture company after giving up his preferred work as a dairy farmer) while finding one's true vocation outside of work-for-pay.

Secularists' objections to God who calls. The critique is that a commitment to vocation-based education is impossible for those who do not accept the existence of God. How can one practice vocation-based education if there is no god who calls? The critique sometime contains an implicit, adjunct charge to the more general critique that vocation-based education is an inappropriate intrusion of religion into the academic enterprise of higher education.

It is true that, in Christianity, the one who calls is God through Christ. In the Lutheran church and its theology, Christians are to discern how God is calling them to live. In Lutheranism, this discernment always occurs in community. That insight about the role of community in discerning one's vocation provides a response to the critique that vocation requires a caller. Those involved with LHE, but who are not Christian or theistic, are not required to affirm that God is calling them to their vocation. They should, however, come to understand that we are all in some form of community and that the voice of our community has a role in discerning our vocation. None of us is self-generated. The "community" of our parents gifted us with life, and the ongoing gifts of community, including assistance with vocational discernment, remain important for us all.

We have, however, underplayed this insight in our work. We must strengthen it the future.

B. Corrective Work

In the future, NECU must also address those things we have avoided or minimized despite the existence of resources in the Lutheran intellectual tradition for the work. Two concerns stand out for immediate attention:

Affirming the diversity of our institutions and redoubling our commitments to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in vocation-based education.

DEIJ. NECU institutions have embraced the movement toward commonly known as diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in higher education. The embarrassment is that our institutions did not make this move until external forces pushed the agenda.

The Lutheran tradition is part of the larger Christian movement, which at its best, has been a champion of what we now call DEIJ. The biblical prophets' call for economic justice, the Christian insistence that God shows no favorites but welcomes all, the biblical commands to offer hospitality, and the rejection of a second century proposal to eliminate the diversity in the four gospels of the New Testament by harmonizing them into a single narrative are all testimony that we should have received the message! We need to confess that we should have been in the lead for DEIJ, not among those who reacted to calls from others.

NECU should more actively confess our past failures related to DEIJ and double-down on our new commitments. Notable African American alumni of NECU institutions have universally commented in conversations with me that, although they are deeply grateful for their education and the opportunity to attend a NECU college or university, they never felt truly welcomed or part of their college or university community as a student. They urge a clear-eyed look at our past and an ever-stronger contemporary commitment to DEIJ.

In the effort to more fully embrace DEIJ, we should continue to take full advantage of the resources provided by secular agencies and the best of our political ideals about equality. We should, however, remember that we have a resource richer than the insistence on equal rights. The Lutheran tradition, along with others in the religious community, calls for DEIJ based on what Dr. King called "the beloved community." The answer to racism and injustice lies more in embracing the trajectory of the moral arc of the university bending toward justice and living into the beloved community than mere assertion of political rights. We have much to offer through living out our vocation as LHE.

Diverse Constituencies/Multiple Vocations. In our effort to reclaim a shared vocation to vocation-based education, it has been too easy to forget that this common calling

or vocation is lived out in specific places and contexts, resulting in a rich diversity of institutionally specific missions. By failing to emphasize the diversity of missions rooted in the shared work and mission of NECU institutions, we have inadvertently failed to recognize and celebrate how our 27 distinctive institutions serve a wide array of publics, bringing different expressions of the gifts of LHE to many.

By failing to actively celebrate the diversity among its institutions, NECU has failed to tutor our member institutions that they need not bracket their Lutheran identity when reaching out to their diverse constituencies. NECU should help member institutions to understand that their Lutheran affiliation invites service to a diversity of constituencies. Serving a variety of constituencies is as much a measure of a college or university's "Lutheran-ness" as is a NECU member's service to the Lutheran community. A college or university does not need abandon or bracket a Lutheran identity when serving non-Lutheran constituencies. The vocation to do so is baked into a Lutheran affiliation. We should have made this truth clearer in describing the openness of LHE in NECU's statement, *Rooted and Open*.

Making use of an undeveloped resource within the Lutheran intellectual tradition could help us learn to celebrate serving diverse communities as an integral part of an institution of LHE. The contemporary Lutheran insight that individuals have multiple vocations should be extrapolated to describe the vocation of a Lutheran institution's relationship with multiple constituencies.

I have multiple vocations: I am a husband, a pastor, a higher education bureaucrat, a registered member of the democratic party, and member of St. Luke's Lutheran Church of Logan Square in Chicago. Each vocation is distinctive. In each role I have different tasks, but they are all founded on the vocation to which God has called me. I did not need to tell the Broadway Democrats (where I was a member while living in New York) that I was a Christian and that I understood my Democratic Party membership to be an expression of my vocation as a disciple of Jesus, but I also did not need to hide it. In the same way, a college or university can be member of NECU and affiliated with the ELCA (or ELCIC) while at the same time relating to other groups and communities with other educational interests without in any way abandoning or needing to bracket its Lutheran institutional identity. Sharing that identity directly

with diverse constituencies is not a necessity, but a college or university should also not feel compelled to hide or mask its NECU identity.

NECU has committed itself in its recently adopted strategic plan to improve our collective understanding of the richly diverse expressions of Lutheran identity among NECU institutions. It's a first, albeit overdue, step toward repairing this lapse in shared work.

Conclusion

In all our future work, fostering a kinder and gentler attitude in our conversations about embracing a common calling to vocation-based education will be important. The concept is quite foreign to many people as an organizing principle for high education, and we need to be kind in our effort to restore LHE's original focus on vocation-based education. As I noted above, we must recognize that many in the academy distrust drawing on any theological concepts or religious traditions as resources for higher education owing to the occasionally foolish—even arrogant and astonishingly parochial—actions by the churches who have sponsored higher education in the United States. Hence, some persons will have difficulty with the concept of vocation and oppose using the term. Even persons coming from a Christian perspective have difficulty with vocation-based education because of they (mistakenly) fear it represents a lukewarm version of LHE, education that is sort-of Lutheran without being too Lutheran. Vocation-based education's Lutheran authenticity is not self-evident even to some who come to higher education out of a Christian commitment. So, the difficulty is felt by persons at our institutions from within the academy and from persons active in the Lutheran church as well as the academy. Leaning into an understanding of LHE as vocation-based education is a long-term project. We need a gentile perspective as we pursue the task.

Our journey as the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities has only recently begun. As we strive to reclaim a living heritage for higher education bequeathed to us from the 16th century Lutheran Reformation, we have incomplete work to conclude, mid-course corrections to execute, and some new work to take-up as we continue to live into the 500-year-old intellectual and educational tradition of LHE.

MARIT TRELSTAD

RESPONSE TO MARK WILHELM:

Vocation, Mission and Privilege



In Mark Wilhelm's keynote address, he offered a three core insights from his years serving as the Executive Director of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU). First, that vocation is not simply an aspect of centers, curricular and co-curricular at our NECU institutions. Vocation

is the foundational and distinctive shared mission of all our colleges and universities that shapes and is shaped by our unique contexts and curricular emphases. As the NECU shared vision document *Rooted and Open* states, an education in Lutheran Higher Education is an education with a shared purpose. It educates students who are: "*Called and empowered to serve the neighbor so that all may flourish*" (3). This empowerment and vision is the vocation of our institutions themselves. Our various mission statements emerge from this common vocation that is carried out in every discipline and every co-curricular aspect of our campuses. Thus Mark Wilhelm claimed that vocation is the most central and most foundational center for Lutheran Higher Education. At the same time, this shared vocation is necessarily carried out in distinct and unique ways that are shaped by our institutional contexts.

Rooted and Open offers that a Lutheran Higher Education endeavors to "1. Shape character, 2. Invite

vocational discernment and 3. Build religious literacy" (2). It pushes "beyond careerism" and allows students to "gain fluency in the language of meaning and purpose" (2). Wilhelm was advancing his observation that vocation is the overall mission of Lutheran Higher Education rather than an aspect of it. In the context of my institution of Pacific Lutheran University (PLU), I find Wilhelm's idea a helpful reorientation. When discussing curriculum, for example, faculty conversation often circles back to ask how we are engaging students in the second commitment—inviting vocational discernment—over the course of their education. Are there particular classes or departments who are primarily responsible for this? Courses within the Humanities are usually targeted to address vocation. At this, many Humanities faculty push back that language courses or courses in writing or logic do not automatically connect to vocation. Further complicating matters, other divisions, colleges or pre-professional programs often comment that their courses are bound by discipline-specific content and cannot devote course time to vocational discernment. Most faculty feel ill-equipped by their discipline or academic training to engage students on the topic of vocation altogether. But here is where Wilhelm's comments can interrupt this rather unfruitful conversation: vocation and mission are inextricably intertwined at NECU institutions. And every discipline is engaged in serving the mission of its institution and faculty are most likely required in hiring, promotion and tenure processes

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to explain how their teaching, service and scholarship align with the mission of the institution.

Consider this example from my own institution that may share similarities with your own. PLU's mission statement is the following: "PLU seeks to *educate students for lives of thoughtful inquiry, service, leadership and care* — for other people, for their communities and for the Earth." And, to intentionally repeat, NECU's shared vocational mission is educate students who are: "*Called and empowered to serve the neighbor so that all may flourish*" (3). In order to accomplish these missions, we build curricular and co-curricular opportunities for students to do this wisely. In the context of Lutheran Higher Education, this vocation entails an education in the liberal arts, global contexts, diversity and sustainability, and the academic study of religion. Along with Wilhelm, I would argue that our mission statements in Lutheran Higher Education are indeed vocations or callings into the world and that these shape the form of our total institutional projects in unique ways, depending on context. We are not looking for ways to "shoe horn" in vocational reflection. We are asking each discipline and all faculty to explicitly engage students in reflecting on how their disciplinary work and overall education connects to the mission of our individual colleges and universities or the mission described in *Rooted and Open*.

Each discipline and faculty member will approach this broader sense of institutional mission as vocation uniquely. What does it mean to "flourish?" And how do we assure that "all" are given the opportunity? What does "care" and "service" mean and how does one avoid patronizing, colonial or patriarchal assumptions that turn "care" into a tool of coercion? How can human interests and planetary ecological interests live together? What are one's own individual gifts and needs and how do these connect to the needs of others and the earth? To what communities and individuals do you hold yourself and your education accountable? While we may not address every related question in each discipline, surely we all touch on some mission-based bigger questions that, quite simply, are vocational discernment regarding individual and communal calling.

In his second and third points, Wilhelm offered reflections on "things we have avoided or minimized despite the existence of resources in the Lutheran intellectual

tradition": 1) Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) and; 2) Acknowledging multiple constituencies and multiple vocations within our NECU colleges and universities even as we share a common vocation within Lutheran Higher Education. He offered "It has been too easy to forget that this common calling or vocation is lived out in specific places and contexts, resulting in a rich diversity of institutionally specific missions."

In my response to Wilhelm at the conference, I offered that a lens informed by intersectionality brings our attention to individual, communal and even institutional identities and how these exist within multiple gifts and challenges that inform the collective and individual work of students, staff, faculty and administrators. Every context and every individual—and thus each NECU institution—is shaped by unique social, racial, economic, and regional factors. The common vocation of NECU institutions to educate "so that all may flourish" will be shaped by the insights, questions and challenges that our unique contexts and identities we bring to that mission—on institutional and individual levels.

In our current educational context, some of our NECU institutions struggle to connect and explain how commitments to DEIJ are inextricably necessary to Lutheran Higher Education. Commitment to education that serves the good of all and inclusive education was the focus of Lutheran Higher Education from its very beginnings. The Reformer Martin Luther sought to provide public access for all to education. And this education was to foster wise, just and caring people within society and the family. It was a holistic education focused on the arts, faith, sciences, humanities —all aspects of the total human being—so that one can envision new models for greater justice and care for individuals and their communities. Today, books like Patrick Reyes' *The Purpose Gap: Empowering Communities of Color to Find Meaning and Thrive* (2021), invite us to reflect on structural obstacles to thriving and how one can create space for new conditions to foster empowerment for the most marginalized.

Vocational reflection, if conceived as individuals contemplating their own individual and precious lives alone, can appear to be only a matter of privilege. Indeed, questioning this connection between vocation and privilege is widely discussed on my own campus. This is a fault, partly, of focusing on vocational material

that highlights individual reflection (often men, mostly white, almost always economically privileged) on one's own vocation. While students, faculty and staff at our educational institutions need space for such reflection—not attended to by much of our culture—it needs to be accompanied, again, by intersectional awareness and discussion. One's own path in the world, and discerning its direction, is inextricably woven into complicated and sometimes nutritious relational networks.

Vocational reflection is not just for the elite or privileged. In fact, in my responses to Wilhelm's plenary speech, I offered that privilege often can mask or negate the pressing need for vocational reflection. When the world is simply handed to you, no matter what you do, there is little impetus to discern who you are and what the world needs from you. For students of marginalized identities, vocational reflection can literally be a matter

of survival. For example, a queer-identifying student may need to develop a strong enough sense of self, connection and purpose to leave "home," breaking ties with family and communities of origin just to survive. From working with students and vocation, I have also had many conversations with students from marginalized communities who struggle to reconcile their own gifts and longings with the expectations from their communities or family. These are deep, painful vocational questions of wise students but they are not made from positions of privilege. I am distressed that assumptions that vocation or vocational reflection is a matter of privilege erase the incredibly difficult work these students do to carve a purposeful path for themselves in the world. Deep reflection on DEIJ as it impacts our students and their communities is inherent to vocational discernment that leads to survival and, ideally, flourishing.

RESPONSE TO MARK WILHELM:

DEI, Great; DWS (Dismantling White Supremacy), Even Better

The purpose of higher education at Lutheran colleges and universities is to contribute to the flourishing of all. DEI is great, but if Lutheran colleges and universities want to up their game, DWS (dismantling white supremacy) is even better. Dismantling white supremacy is essential to the flourishing of all. Thus, it should be a core practice of our higher education.

The protests and rebellion around the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and others have helped the wider/whiter public in the United States understand both the importance and urgency of dismantling white supremacy. Around the same time, Trump-appointed, Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Kevin McAleenan confirmed white supremacy to be our greatest domestic threat.

Given how hot this summer has been, we could also make connections between white supremacy on the one hand, and climate disruption and environmental degradation on the other, like James Cone does.

“The logic that led to slavery and segregation in the Americas, colonization and apartheid in Africa, and the role of white supremacy throughout the world is the same one that leads to the exploitation of animals and the ravaging of nature. It is a mechanistic and

instrumental logic that defines everything and everybody in terms of their contribution to the development and defense of white world supremacy.”

What is white supremacy, and what is a key harm to BIPOC communities? According to Frances Ansley,



“White supremacy is a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily re-enacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings.”

If any part of the above quote describes business as usual at our colleges and universities, it's time for a long, hard look at ourselves in light of our commitment to the flourishing of all.

There are some Lutheran sensibilities that can help us make dismantling white supremacy a core practice of higher education. I'll just mention three.

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1) To Lutherans, self-righteousness is totally sus. Lutheran understandings of human beings as created and loved by God, and of infinite worth, make them skeptical about self-justification, attempts to earn and prove your worth. We're thus free to see our beauty and our flaws.

My own higher education has often felt like a seemingly endless valorization, endorsement, and aggrandizement of the West and whiteness. Whether it's been about the Enlightenment/Enwhitenment, science and technology, industry and development, or equality and democracy, the sense of white superiority has been at once tedious and terrible. But if classic scary movies have taught us anything, it's that what you disavow comes back to haunt you. We're being haunted by the legacies of genocide, slavery, and colonialism today. It's time to interrogate this past, undo its impacts in the present, and work for a better future.

"It's time to interrogate this past, undo its impacts in the present, and work for a better future."

2) To Lutherans, the death of Jesus was a decolonial shockwave, still reverberating across space and time. We're all living in a state of thrownness because of it. It turns out that the eye-averting execution of this thirty-something, Palestinian-Jewish construction worker—condemned for blasphemy by his religious community and viewed as a threat to society by the political regime—inspires our solidarity with marginalized peoples, those subordinated by white supremacy. It also turns out that this particular death generates momentum in decolonizing higher education. It's time to rewrite general education based on a more diverse and inclusive range of sources.

3) Finally, Lutheran colleges and universities are supposed to deliver higher education that lays a foundation for critical thinking that can still register awe. Dismantling white supremacy means more awe, and thus more wonder and joy, based on a much richer, broader cross-section of human experience. It also contributes to intellectual curiosity and humility.

How can Lutheran colleges and universities make a stronger commitment to DEI? By making the dismantling of white supremacy a core practice of higher education.

ANDREW TUCKER

RESPONSE TO MARK WILHELM:

Distinguishing Between Identity and Vocation

This response to Mark Wilhelm's proposal for *Diversity of Vocations Among Lutheran Colleges and Universities* is what the Forum for Theological Exploration might call a "next most faithful step" in the process. That step is simply stated and difficult to manifest: we, as NECU institutions, must faithfully and effectively differentiate vocations and identities. For NECU institutions to robustly engage a unique diversity of vocations connected to their Lutheran rootedness, it's vital to appreciate the distinction of identity and vocation, and the contributions of identities to vocations. This distinction is a key element in my book, *4D Formation: Exploring Vocation in Community*, where I sum the distinction this way: Your identity is who you are, your vocation is what you do. Of course, we have not one vocation, but many. So perhaps it is better said this way: your vocations are how you put your identity to work in different contexts and seasons of life.

There are a number of relevant considerations. First, there's something of a Venn diagram of identity and vocation. We live much of our lives in the area where the two circles overlap. Consider, for instance, our language. I say, "I am a pastor, a professor, a voter, and a husband." I also say, "I am a straight, white, cisgender, invisibly disabled man." One is a set of vocations. Another is a set

of identities. The verb "to be" complicates our understanding of the separation of vocation and identity.

A second point was contained in the first: we not only have a multitude of vocations. We also have a plurality of identities. Of course, our work as NECU is focused on our shared calling, coming out of a shared identity of Lutheran higher education, but that is not the only shared identity we have. We're also North American institutions. We're Independent institutions. It's essential for us to focus on our vocations as they flow out of our identity as Lutheran higher education institutions, and we should also investigate how other identities impact our vocations.

Third, not only do our identities impact how we live out our vocations. The communities in which we serve give particular timbre to the calling. So, even if you transplanted Capital University to, let's say, St. Thomas in the USVI—that's one of those unanswered prayers I keep bringing before God—and even if our identity remained functionally the same, the flavor profile of our vocations would shift



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because of where we're planted. To embrace the identity of a Lutheran higher education institution is to embrace our place in the pluralistic project of higher education. Our diverse constituencies deserve clarity on how being a part of the Lutheran higher education tradition impacts their educational experience.

Finally, we must admit that not all work is holy work for us. Not all work is vocation, and not every vocation is ours to take up. From within the Lutheran tradition, we can point to the words of Jesus, who said he came to give life to the full, or life abundant. Vocation is work that is life-giving, that amplifies the integrity of others, rather than diminishes or destroys life. In an age of increasing

responsibility and decreasing resources, we cannot do all work. We cannot even do all good work. Reflecting on what life-giving work we're called to do in our specific contexts can enable us to say no, both to that work that is not our vocation because it's good work that belongs to someone else, and to that work that is not vocation because it is destructive, rather than constructive.

In short, by understanding that a diversity of institutional vocations is related to a diversity of institutional identities, we can more healthfully live out our identities and more faithfully embody our vocations in the unique communities we're called to serve.

MARY-PAULA CANCIENNE

RESPONSE TO MARK WILHELM:

Vocation—Wide Perspective Questions

Part of the mission of higher education that is rooted in the Christian traditions is to help students awoken to an experience of living that is beyond the sense of “Is this all there is” and, paradoxically, to one of seeing and understanding the simple and ordinary wonder in what is, probably is, maybe is, and in questions of why it isn’t. Considering the topic of vocation in our arena of education, is there a slight turn-of-the-prism that could further help us tap into *vocation* as the fascinating as well as holy ordinary drama and journey that it is?

According to Iain McGilchrist, humanity, especially in the Western world, but increasingly all around the world, has come to prioritize seeing through micro lenses that offer insulated silos of understanding. While humanity has benefited from micro lenses, such as specializations developed in science, economics, humanities, and the arts, a micro approach limits our understanding of the interconnectedness of life and our life stories, individually and collectively, presently and historically.

Instead, McGilchrist claims we should begin with macro views, wide perspectives that make it possible to grasp how life and life events are connected, then attend to the details at the micro, narrower focus level, where we drill into skill development, subject learning, disciplinary

functions, issues, and tasks. More so, after the details are attended to, he directs us to return to a broad, comprehensive, integrated focus, made that much more credible and richer because of the research, work and practice carried out at the micro level. What are beginning macro perspectives on vocation that can help us grasp the holy and holistic significance of each journey, and our collective journey together in these times (McGilchrist)?

We find evidence of pushing against siloed perspectives in higher education, as in inter-discipline studies, department project collaborations, plenary presentations where multiple disciplines are represented, and president advisory councils populated by wide, diverse representation. This is not to slight in any way the necessary work of specialization, but to advocate for the need to bridge specifics with other perspectives so to enrich the dialogue and our understandings, holding singularity under a wide umbrella. We might ask, “How would Homer, Confucius, Plato, Teresa of Ávila, Martin Luther, an Alaska Native



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leader, Nelson Mandela, Jane Goodall, “Captain Kirk,” or a journalist refugee from any number of oppressive nation states begin to express the drama of a wide perspective vocation story today, mindful of how we got to where we are (or think we are) and where we might be going?

Story is drama because there is tension and conflict wrestling for resolution. Our lives are drama because life is at its core tension, working for resolution, which only leads to another tension, another valley to cross, mountain to climb, meal to cook, problem to solve, river to appreciate, and child to love. Just learning to stand up and walk is a match against gravity, an early phase of a long adventure. However, without tension there is no becoming. Even trees need the wind to gain strength and resiliency. Certainly, the backdrop story of the Passion of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection is a drama-tension against and within which we interpret and re-interpret our lives again-and-again. Familiar with its archetypal plot, we interpret our experience of life through it, drawing forth meaning from the juxtaposition.

Today, meaning communicated through many national epic stories is being challenged. In the United States, these include traditional stories of Christopher Columbus, the founding fathers, and the way U.S. history is told in general. Many stories are being stretched to include more perspectives and questions. Because underlying conflicts were hidden or buried within status-quo-stories and were never resolved, tensions festered untold without the light of day. So, now, we are wrestling with the long shadow of having enslaved human beings who were instrumental in the building of a nation and its wealth, as well as on land grabs, broken treaties, and policies that brought to near

extinction native populations. We are working our way back to a wider story so we might go forward. There are oppressive corollaries for how we have told the story of Earth.

The wide perspective includes great accomplishments, heroic deeds, beauty, and marvel, and collective achievements that make us wonder how we did it, like building the James Webb Telescope that is capturing infra-red-light images from the edges of time. Today, we are reaping benefits and tragedies from an Enlightenment mindset that stretches across a few centuries. Advances in technology and science, increased standards of living for many, as well as provided a path toward climate warming and the growing gap between the very wealthy and people caught in poverty (Phan).

How do we hold the drama of our lives within a large plot, even if we interpret that plot as a moving one, one that needs to be tended and re-interpreted afresh by each generation? Now, however, there is a clock that is ticking. Our collective drama, like a Greek tragedy, has us in the amphitheater, where together we empathize and weep for the protagonists, both a suffering planet and its struggling humanity. Weeping is a good sign. Does it stir the heart? Does this put a particular twist to vocation stories today?

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RESPONSE TO MARK WILHELM:

Adopting the Framework of 'Because' and 'Therefore'

I am grateful to Mark Wilhelm for his valedictory remarks and for his challenge to all of us who care deeply about Lutheran higher education to address issues around the diversity of expressions of our Lutheran roots, as well as our urgent work around diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice.

My personal background is relevant to our efforts at Augsburg to embrace our Lutheran heritage: I am a cradle Lutheran, the eldest child of Lutheran pastor, a Luther College grad, and I wrote a dissertation with Martin Marty—and I am the only person at Augsburg who must be a Lutheran!

When I arrived at Augsburg in 2006 after more than 20 years working in non-sectarian institutions, I realized that my experience as someone who needed to translate my faith into concepts and practices that didn't assume a common faith tradition would be valuable in an institution that too often assumed that everyone understood what it meant to be a Lutheran college. It came more and more to be about "translation."

This was more urgently necessary because Augsburg's student body was going through a remarkable transformation. In the fall of 2006, our student body included about 18% BIPOC students in the entering class. Over the next 16 years, that number has grown to where this fall's entering class will be almost 70% BIPOC.

And given that Augsburg's history was shaped by Northern European pioneers, Lutheran traditions, and a primarily Western liberal arts academic tradition—pretty much as "white" as it comes, we had work to do—and that is the work we have done as a community over these past several years.

Confessing our "white privilege," we set off to seek to understand how the threads of our Lutheran Christian roots could respond to the lived experiences of our diverse student body. We adopted an institutional vocational statement: "We believe we are called to serve our neighbor," capturing the links between faith, learning, and service that are at the heart of our Lutheran tradition (shaped as it was by a university professor named Martin Luther), but which also allows us to speak authentically to the diverse expressions of faith, learning, and service that characterize our diverse students, faculty, and neighbors.

We then adopted a simple framework for translating the tenets of our Lutheran theological and intellectual tradition into institutional programs, policies, and practices. We said that "because" of this particular faith claim, "therefore" this



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institutional response. Because and therefore became our guiding mantra. A few concrete examples:

- *Because* we believe that only God is all-knowing, *therefore* we are called to an epistemological humility that seeks to discern all of the ways in which God is at work in the world. The creation two years ago of our Critical Race and Ethnic Studies program was an effort to say that the liberal arts in the 21st century need to allow students to explore their own lived experiences and traditions (just as I did 45 years ago at Luther College, reading Rolvaag's *Giants in the Earth!*)
- *Because* we believe that we have been saved and redeemed through Jesus Christ, *therefore* we are called to freely serve our neighbors. Our robust anchor institution and community engagement initiatives, prioritized in our strategic plan, allow us to engage in mutuality with our neighbors to build healthier, more just neighborhood and communities.

- *Because* we believe that all of God's diverse creation is good, *therefore* we are called to embrace diversity and otherness, to learn from each other and to build healthy communities. This is the claim that undergirds (among other efforts) our interfaith initiatives, which are premised on the idea that religious pluralism is a force for good in the world. Our "Interfaith at Augsburg: An Institute to Promote Interfaith Learning and Leadership", and the recent appointment of Najeeba Syeed to the El Hibri Chair and Executive Director of the Institute will only serve to amplify our campus efforts to ever broader audiences.

And so on...I hope you see the ways in which we at Augsburg have embraced our Lutheran roots—addressing them through both appreciative inquiry and with a critical lens focused on reconciliation—and translated them into the daily work we do together in this university. I urge all of you to consider your own "because, therefore" statements that help you make sense of particular Lutheran roots and implications for your college or university.

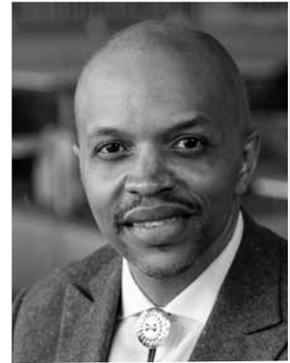
Work Works

Americans stand a chance of hearing about vocation when class-conscious twenty-year-olds commence with life as young adults. Commencement speeches frequently include explicit or implicit references about the worthiness of one or another professional pursuit. Graduates aspire to a class-status that likely delimited their options for a major and, upon beginning college, effectively predetermined their career path. In an economy with strident class-stratification, incoming freshmen are encouraged to “follow the money”. Commencement speeches rarely remind graduates about that pursuit. Invariably, commencement speech themes accent vocation. Professional pursuits are deemed worthy when graduates exercise transformative agency. Graduates are tasked with shouldering the burden of engaging in transformative heroic acts. It’s highly unlikely, however, that a profession, institution or industry will be transformed. In fact, there are no guarantees that either the profession or the person will be transformed. Graduates may experience the journey as worthy and transformative in retrospect. Journeys, to be sure, are replete with risks. Consistent heroic actions are worthy because transformation is possible and, perhaps, preferable. Who wouldn’t prefer to be transformed? Those who are unbothered and apathetic. In increasingly technocratic, career-conscious academic contexts, apathy abounds. Given the kind and quantity of America’s societal problems, the mismatch is confounding. Why such apathy when social pathologies abound? How can the worthiness

of pursuing unscripted journeys be redeemed? When worth emanates from consistent work. Work is worthy. Work translates. Work works.

Educators in humanities who profess to students a few times a week at small liberal arts colleges would likely agree that the number of the unbothered is growing. The number of the unbothered are increasing on both sides of the desk. Professors and students languish. What, of worthiness and work, remains?

Educators can cultivate classroom experiences that devalue heroic ideologies, eschew expressly religious heroes and embrace anti-heroines. By emphasizing just one option, professors alienate self and students. Educational endeavors should be fraught and forgiving. The joys of educational endeavors obtain when the complexity of a religious anti-heroine, like Toni Morrison’s Sethe, surfaces. Such joy is manifest when, in the context of a seminar, sojourners realize that humanist groups like the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists deideologize difference.



“Educational endeavors should be fraught and forgiving.”

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The risk of being employed in quasi-elite academic institutions is acute, not least because apathy abounds. The journey may not justify the risks. Interest groups deploy decadent economic imperatives among what Wendy Brown calls the “ruins of neoliberalism.” Vocation is among the ruins. The ruins help explain apathy as well as the annual calls to render heroic pursuits vocational. In the academy, explanations are necessary but insufficient. Professors and students need more. Perennial commencement speeches, intentional though they may very well be, will not resuscitate vocation. Parishioners from wisdom traditions in prior American eras commend work. When embodied as a form of service to others, work is worthy.

Post-War and post-Civil Rights churches in impoverished communities often displayed admonitions prominently in vestibules that encouraged its members as follows: “Enter to Worship, Depart to Serve” and “God first, others second, me last.” How can such deference address apathy if vocation redounds to God-talk that warrants serving elites, be they students or professionals? Many activists, Afro-pessimists and post-Socratic scholars view such religiously inspired deference as self-abnegation. Colonized Christian God-talk is antiquated. Respectability politics disrespects the impoverished. These critics make valid points. The journeys of impoverished Christians from previous generations was a risk. Merely talking about God and vocation, though a necessity for some, will not suffice. The wisdom of elders commends the kind of work such that an educators walk matches their talk. If an educator’s work is consistent and co-creative, transformative moral agency will commence.

Professors embody such work when their teaching and research consistently exudes vulnerability, extemporaneity and contemporaneity. Professors must resist the urge to model the banking theory of knowledge. Graduate school is over. Impressing intellectual elders is no longer the goal, as if it ever was. Undoubtedly, professors are the smartest in the room. If, by chance, a professor is not the expert, students are blameless. Proving one’s intellectual bona-fides is counter-productive. Assuredly, in some courses, lectures are apropos. Make them interactive.

Over the course of a semester, professors should, both through in-class dialogue and paper feedback, convince students that their ideas and arguments matter. Centering student learning requires vulnerability.

Professors must also exhibit the joys of learning, in class. If proverbial light bulbs do not “go off” in class,

“Centering student learning requires vulnerability.”

during a session, America’s post-literature, algorithmic culture will not aid this process. This applies to professors, too. When this occurs, professors should state as much, in the moment. Learning, moreover, is a process. Students who seem to have more “light bulbs moments” need not be catered to. Attend to deliberate thinkers who might need several weeks to process ideas. Professors should structure classes so that students are encouraged to think “out loud” and explore arguments that lead to unjustifiable, even undesirable, conclusions. Over the course of a semester, professors should talk less. They should feel out-numbered. Such a state of affairs is far more likely to obtain when professors are extemporaneous.

Lastly, professors should be conversant with current events. Examples are most illustrative when students know the person or event being referenced. Professors need not necessarily be culture vultures. Pop culture is transient and, at times, distasteful. That is what makes recent examples so interesting. Positioning a fashionable contemporary cultural event or person against the backdrop of a wisdom, literary or philosophical tradition is generative. Traditions perdure because they are selective. Professors should not predetermine what could be selected. Such determinations are journeys that require the kind of co-creative—student-teacher—transformative work that occurs in the classroom for the purpose of empowering those who do not attend college, especially the impoverished.

Why All This Talk About Vocation?

Vocation is what my university's mission statement was based on and I did not even realize it until I attended the Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education conference. Going into this conference, I was not quite sure what it was about, but the amount of knowledge I gained in the three day conference was mind-blowing. The conference name was Why All This Talk About Vocation and if I'm being honest, I was asking the same question. However, after being surrounded by educated, well-experienced, and deep-thinking individuals I learned that vocation is so much more than just a calling. Vocation is what gives education purpose. Vocation is what makes education not only about learning. Vocation is an intersection of where we are our best selves and where we do our best work. That is why as faculty, staff, and students within a university we must talk about vocation; it goes hand in hand with the material we are either teaching or receiving. Without understanding vocation and the embodiment of it, our education is almost meaningless. I am very grateful that I had the opportunity to attend this conference as a student because it gave me a new perspective on Lutheran institutions and their missions. I gained an understanding of the meaning and use of vocation within the ELCA school's values, mission statements, and definitions of education.

This conference gave me valuable insight into what my college, Midland University, could benefit from. I attended four different workshops while at the conference and they were all so unique in the ideas and materials they shared. The first workshop was about teaching womanist thoughts at Lutheran Institutions. It was awesome to hear

the discussion in the room and how each institution does different activities to acknowledge women's contributions to society. Coming back to my university, I wanted to bring the idea of having a scavenger hunt around campus. At each location, there would be a QR code so students could learn about different women who have made contributions either to our university or community.

I also went to a workshop called Beyond the Playing Field. Midland University has a very large athlete population, so I could relate to the presentation very well. During the session, there was plenty of data that suggested a Player Development Coach would be highly beneficial to hire in order to increase retention rates and help athletes understand what life will look like after college. While Midland does have a student development staff member, it would be advantageous to invest in hiring someone who focuses directly on athletes.

There was a workshop that focused on the resistance behind saying the word vocation in our everyday vocabulary. I was immediately drawn to this workshop because I have rarely been exposed to the word 'vocation' and I wanted to know how to allow space for it to be recognized and responded to in an inclusive manner. However, what I enjoyed the most about this workshop and what I would bring back to my university was the video the presenters



Madyson Ray is a junior from Blair, NE, studying psychology, sociology, and business at Midland University. In her free time, she likes to write, be active outdoors, and spend time with loved ones.

displayed. It went back to the basics and showed numerous interviews with people from around their campus and what vocation meant to them. At Midland we have an introductory course all freshmen are required to take and I believe making a video similar to the one in the presentation would help our students understand vocation from many different perspectives. Learning about vocation early on in higher education would help students understand why Lutheran education is set up the way it is so they can grow an appreciation for it.

Lastly, I learned about vocational programs across campus in the fourth workshop. This workshop caused a big shift in perspective for me because it was aimed at faculty and staff and different teaching techniques. I really enjoyed it, though, because I discovered how to do a vocational reflection. The professor would give a prompt and the students would take time to write, choose what they want to share, and feel comfortable sharing. The impact that reflection had on me in one workshop was amazing. I can't imagine the influence of doing a reflection for a whole semester. Vocational reflections are going to be implemented at Midland this semester. Also, the presenter talked about an elective they have on campus called Vocational Exploration where students can choose to take this cohort and they meet as a group for 2 hours every week. They do retreats, talk to other faculty members, write essays, create vision boards, and have guest speakers. I would bring this to my university as well

because it not only creates a good bond between students and faculty but also gives students the opportunity to learn about their personal vocations.

I was the only student to attend the conference this year and I believe this conference would benefit other students greatly. Not only would we be able to network with each other, but also with staff and faculty from other universities. After hearing the topic for next years conference, I think education students would get a lot out of it. One thing you might want to do before taking a student is have a pre-conference meeting where a professor goes over what the conference will be like, how to pick workshops that would benefit them the most, and some vocabulary that students might not understand. If the conference organizers made some workshops more student focused, it would be more advantageous to the students and the ideas they bring back to their institutions.

Midland University's mission statement is to inspire people to learn and lead in the world with purpose. After attending this year's Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education conference, the puzzle pieces connected for me, and that mission statement made perfect sense. At this conference, I was able to absorb information and conversations about vocations that will benefit me greatly as I continue my education. I'm beyond excited to bring back the ideas that were shared by the amazing speakers and execute them on campus.

LibGuide: Introduction to Womanist Theology

In the spring of 2021, Trinity Lutheran Seminary offered a class called Introduction to Womanist Theology, as the first class of the Womanist Theology Initiative of the Seminaries of the ELCA. The class was taught by Dr. Beverly Wallace, Associate Professor of Congregational and Community Care at Luther Seminary.

The downside of working on a theology degree at the institution where I work full-time is that there is only time for one course at a time. The upside is that with one class at a time, I can focus deeply on that class and look for ways to incorporate the course work directly into my vocational work as Trinity's only librarian. Dr. Wallace's class looked like a perfect opportunity for me to explore a perspective to which I have had limited exposure. As with each of the classes I have taken at Trinity, this class would help me broaden my understanding of resources that can be of the most help to seminary students. The experience would prove to be so much more valuable than I had expected.

As it turned out, most of the class had been introduced to Womanist Theology as a field of study. While many of us had read at least a bit on the subject, Dr. Wallace guided us through a full semester of guests who spoke both broadly and deeply about theology, pastoral care, and other topics. Each author, preacher, or professor shared something different of the strengths of black women in the conversations about feminism, liberation, theology. By bringing their lived experiences to the table and allowing

the rest of us to examine these ongoing conversations through their unique lenses broadened my perspective.

In due course, we reached the final assignment of the class. Dr. Wallace asked us each to create a "space of freedom." When pressed for more details about what was expected, she gently demurred and asked us to think about what that meant to us. She reminded us that a womanist is creative. Now, one thing I know for sure is that I cannot be a womanist. Without the lived experience of being a black woman, which I will never have, I can only amplify womanist voices. As I imagined how I might create this "space of freedom" I envisioned a tool by which I might share these voices with audiences that might not have had opportunities to dive deeply into this kind of study. As it turns out, that is exactly what librarians do.

For my final project I created a LibGuide for Introduction to Womanist Theology. If you aren't familiar with LibGuides then shame on your librarian, but it is a tool for building research guides on the web that allow librarians to assemble many resources into an easily navigable format. These guides can be created for individual classes, subjects, or really anything. I built this LibGuide by



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gathering as many of the resources referenced by Dr. Wallace and the guest speakers she brought to class, and then adding a space to include the class projects of other students. As of this writing, there are a few student projects waiting to be uploaded, but for various reasons

they are not yet available. I hope to continue adding to the guide as future classes from Seminaries of the ELCA's Womanist Theology Initiative complete.

The LibGuide can be found here: <https://libguides.capital.edu/WomanistTheology>

• SAVE THE DATE •

Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education Conference

Augsburg University, Minneapolis, Minnesota | July 10-12, 2023

Topic: *So That Faculty, Administrators, and Staff, Too, May Flourish*

The foundational document of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities has it that we are “called and empowered to serve the neighbor so that all may flourish.” Echoing this central purpose, a new book by 15 educators at NECU institutions is entitled, *So That All May Flourish* (Fortress Press 2023). And yet, we all know—and many experience first-hand—the unprecedented degree of fatigue and burnout among educators these days, which is culminating in a “great resignation.” How do we educators care for ourselves and “neighbor” one another, even as we care for students experiencing their own stresses and anxieties? What Lutheran theological roots and institutional practices empower educators not simply to survive our overlapping crises, but to become fully alive—to flourish—in mind, body and spirit? The 2023 Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education Conference will bring together faculty, staff, and administrators from the NECU community to envision, plan for, and partake in a community where all may flourish.

YOLANDA M. NORTON and BEVERLY WALLACE

Doing the Work One's Soul Must Have

So why all this talk about Vocation? It is to do the work the one's soul must have. It is also a recognition that if we as a community are ever truly going to take seriously the work of racial reconciliation and deconstructing racism and patriarchy, the work can not only be focused on deconstructing systems of power. The work must also center on the flourishing of marginalized groups. This is the understanding of Dr. Kimberly Crenshaw who coined the world "Intersectionality" and is also the work of Womanist Scholars. We recognize in our vocational calling now is the time when Black women scholars and leaders of the

"If we as a community are ever truly going to take seriously the work of racial reconciliation and deconstructing racism and patriarchy, the work can not only be focused on deconstructing systems of power. The work must also center on the flourishing of marginalized groups."

church must come together to create initiatives that contribute to new generations of Black women leaders who can shift the way that people live in the world. This is what the Womanist Experiential Learning Initiative is all about.



The Womanist Experiential Learning Initiative, a collaborative work of Womanist Hebrew Bible Scholar Dr. Yolanda Norton and Pastoral Theologian Beverly Wallace, will provide students with the opportunity to explore a theological perspective engaged by many African American women theologians—one that takes serious and centers Black women's voices and scholarship as a viable source and resource for theological education. A portion of this project, in concert with the work of the Office of Justice for Women in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will allow young women in high school, college,

Yolanda M. Norton, MDiv, is a Visiting Professor of Hebrew Bible and Preaching at Moravian Theological Seminary, and the Executive Director/Founder of the Global Arts and Theology Experience (GATE)—a new nonprofit that creates positive identity formation programming for Black girls and women. She is the creator and curator of the Beyoncé Mass, a womanist Christian worship service that centers the story of God's work in and through Black women in the world. Her other scholarship focuses on foreign women in the Hebrew Bible.

Beverly Wallace, PhD, MDiv, an ordained Lutheran clergywoman, is the Associate Professor of Congregation and Community Care at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. Dr. Wallace is a member of the Steering Committee of the Lutheran Association of Teaching Theologians, the ELCA's Theological Roundtable, and the Conference of International Black Lutherans—the African and African diasporic teaching theologians of the Lutheran church and is also a member of the Society for the Study of Black Religion. The ELCA's Womanist Initiative, a pilot project for the engagement of ELCA seminaries in providing "womanist" course offerings to their students, is the brainchild of Dr. Wallace.

and seminars “to step into their questions and reconsider their assumptions,” engaging in theological exploration viewed through the lens of race, class, and gender.

The Beyoncé Mass—a Christian womanist worship service that uses the music and life of Beyoncé as a tool to cultivate an empowering conversation about Black women—their lives, their bodies, and their voices. This mass introduces individuals to this womanist understanding. It is a space that encourages a practice of Christian faith that sees and acknowledges people where they are and for who they are. The Mass is a space story, Scripture, and song that calls for the liberation of all people by creating welcome, fostering healing, and engaging contemporary conversation and culture as a part of Christian identity and praxis. Additional “host” spaces are needed to share this experience.

The Womanist Experiential Learning Initiative is also working to provide Black female students at the undergraduate level the opportunity to study abroad in countries like Portugal, Brazil, and Ghana, where they can learn about global intersectionality and participate in service-learning opportunities with Black girls in these locations. We know that studying abroad expands the cultural horizons of students, but this intentional work is also intended to help Black girls who attend predominantly white institutions develop a social and learning network that can combat the isolation they often feel. In addition, this study abroad initiative will be tied to the Black Girl Magic Academy—a new program being launched by a new nonprofit—the Global Arts and Theology Experience—in conjunction with a range of church, academic and community partners.

In addition, the Womanist Experiential Learning Initiative, will pilot The Black Girl Magic Academy in three cities in the United States and two outside of North America. This program will focus on Black girls between the ages of 13 and 17 years old. The curriculum will be a year long experience and will allow them not participate in virtual learning opportunities with their peers around the world but also work with Black young adult women in their context to expand their learning beyond what traditional educational systems provide.

Already several seminary students have taken it upon themselves to engage in this women learning in our Lutheran Seminary. One student explored the use

of a womanist pedagogy with women in prison. Another student is looking at how to engage the arts, specifically opera to share the story of a displaced African American community. And another student is learning about how to use a womanist way of knowing for spiritual direction with the LGBTQI+ community. As part of the reflection on her womanist reading, this same student wrote:

It was in bell hooks' book, Sisters of the Yam, that I found language to describe the pain that I had seen within myself. The daunting reality of being a Black queer woman oftentimes feels like too much to bear, and in order to do so day to day, I had to shut down pieces of myself. I could not go through the day bearing all of myself, knowing that I am the very thing that the white cisgender, heteronormative capitalist society that I live in works so hard to diminish. In abandoning these parts of myself, I have become numb and stuck in survival mode. The grief of that is a lot. There have been countless times where I thought that it was not worth surviving, staying in this world. But it was trusted community that brought me back, and kept me here. Every day it has been their words, smiles, or even a touch that has given me enough strength to carry on to the next moment. Sisters of the Yam helped me to understand this part of my story. Through hooks' writings, I was able to see that I am not alone, that my experiences are not odd, but rather a part of a legacy of surviving, and thriving, because of community. I am because we are.

And another 23 year-old student who was newly exposed to Womanism through her experience with the Beyoncé Mass said: “I’m going to get a concentration in Womanist Theology even if that concentration is not offered.”

The impact of this work is tremendous. To expand this work to colleges and universities, congregations and communities with learnings also in a global context, will assist Black women and persons who want to see the legacy of humanity through the lens of Black women will help inform the world. Our hope too is that this work will inspire, equip, connect and support Black women (and other students) divinely motivated to serve as change makers in their communities doing, as Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon often said, “the work—their vocational calling—that one’s soul must have.”

Intersections Survey

Help us understand *Intersections'* past and contribute to shaping its future with this survey.

Preview of questions

We anticipate the survey can be completed in 5 or fewer minutes. To complete the survey online, scan the QR code at the right with your phone camera, or go to bit.ly/3Cys9rF.



You may submit responses to intersectionsnecu@gmail.com if you are unable to complete the survey online.

- 1 *Intersections* is published twice a year. How often do you read it?
- 2 *Intersections* is published online and in a limited run of paper copies. How do you read it?
- 3 *Intersections* is intended to spark conversation about faith, learning, and vocation in Lutheran Higher Education on and across campuses. Is it used in this way on your campus?
- 4 Does *Intersections* connect you to issues in Lutheran Higher Education and/or the common calling of ELCA colleges and universities? (Details welcome at Question 5)
- 5 Please provide details about your connections to *Intersections*, its use on your campus, your hopes for its future, or any other comments about the publication.

OPTIONAL: If you are willing to be contacted for a brief conversation or interaction about *Intersections*, provide your **1) name** and **2) email address or phone number** in your email or survey response.

Intersections

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