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COLLEEN WINDHAM-HUGHES

FROM THE EDITOR

Vocation as Action in the Affirmative



One of my professors in grad school sometimes said to us, “We are always practicing at the borders of our incompetence.” It was meant as an expression of kindness and compassion—a way to affirm the difficulties we would undoubtedly experience while simultaneously affirming the

need to show up and continue to practice there at the borders, i.e., to commit to presence and action in the face of uncertainty and felt incompetence.

Life lived in the framework of vocation or calling often asks us to practice at the borders of our incompetence—trusting our experience, training, convictions, and commitments to each other as neighbors to guide us through various challenges. Every small yes to the callings we experience, every action toward good without security of success, every effort made in the direction of life, is action in the affirmative.

In this issue you will find many kinds of action in the affirmative. Colleagues at Susquehanna University have co-written a thoughtful and helpful piece that connects university history to current commitments. It narrates for us the work that goes into forming a new division that reflects the university’s mission and values. A piece by Mark Ellingsen makes the case that Lutheran reforms have always taken actions in the affirmative. And a piece co-written by a professor and two students at Cal Lutheran

draws upon *Rooted and Open*, among other sources, to make the case that ELCA colleges and universities are uniquely equipped to respond to challenges like AI because of the qualities of service to neighbor, critical thinking, wisdom, humility, and hope.

Two of our colleagues at Augustana, Rock Island, sat down to talk about commitment to diversity as a necessary component of vocation-centered education. In the words of Eric Rowell, Assistant Director of Admissions and Diversity Outreach, “We help our students find something that allows them to feel whole, and to be able to contribute to the good of society.”

Two pieces focus on different kinds of contributions to the good of the society. Student Ken Flores writes of the slow work of reformation and transformation, connecting internal work to the work of institutions in society. Another piece showcases the team cultures of our soccer champions (Cal Lutheran Women’s and St. Olaf Men’s) and the contributions of student-athletes to liberal arts and sciences education.

And Jeremy Myers of the Riverside Innovation Hub at Augsburg University shares the practices they use with congregations in the ongoing work of discerning institutional vocation. Their adaptation of Ignatian Examen, along with the team processes to follow up with actions affirming low-hanging fruit, moonshots, and coffee conversations, will help groups on any campus sort through experiences and refocus shared work.

Here’s to large and small actions that affirm vocation in Lutheran higher education!

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