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# Vocational Re-Formation for a Multi-Religious World

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ELIZABETH A. EATON  
ELCA Presiding Bishop

## Vocational Re-Formation for a Multi-Religious World



What it means to be Lutheran in a multi-religious world is one of the most significant challenges facing our church today. This is not simply an ecclesial question—left to those of us in positions of religious leadership—but a deeply liberal arts one. It is increasingly essential that students of every disci-

pline prepare for vocational lives in a multi-religious world. Whatever the calling, religious literacy and the capacity to engage with religious difference are integral skills—and faithful responses to Christ’s call to love our neighbors.

In June I had the privilege of being present with several ELCA college and university presidents and their delegations at a conference hosted by Augustana College, Rock Island on interfaith understanding. I was deeply encouraged to learn more about the significant work being done in these places. Several of the students present reminded us that they have come of age in this rapidly changing religious landscape, bringing new questions and gifts to the work ahead of us.

While the religious diversity present on these campuses varies significantly from place to place, the challenge of vocational formation for a multi-religious world is ubiquitous. Drawing upon our Lutheran heritage and mission,

might we live into what Prof. Darrell Jodock has called “the third path” between sectarian and non-sectarian schools by developing initiatives for interfaith understanding and engagement that are “both deeply rooted and dialogical”? Is there an opportunity in all of this for the ELCA colleges and universities, together with the church, to make a lasting contribution to the five hundredth observance of the Reformation in 2017?

As presiding bishop, I have lifted up four fundamental expressions of who we are, and who God is calling us to be: we are church, we are Lutheran, we are church together, and we are church for the sake of the world. We are a church that belongs to Christ, with worship at our center. The good news of Jesus Christ liberates us and gives us the freedom and courage to wonder, discover, and boldly participate in what God is up to in the world. We believe that we are freed in Christ to serve and love our neighbor. With our hands, we do God’s work of restoring and reconciling communities throughout the world, reaching out to and working beside other faith communities to promote understanding and build relationships for a better world.

Being Lutheran in a multi-religious world is our identity. What this means—including how we prepare ourselves and our students to live this out—is our challenge, our opportunity. Thanks be to God!

*Elizabeth A. Eaton*

**The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton** was elected as the ELCA’s fourth presiding bishop at the 2013 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, after serving as the elected bishop of the ELCA Northeastern Ohio Synod since 2006. At the June Interfaith Conference, she had a formal exchange with Eboo Patel and interacted with college presidents, students, and other participants.