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KATHERINE A. TUNHEIM

## Practical Approaches for Lutheran Colleges to Engage Civil Society

Good afternoon. It is good to be back at Augsburg College. I had the privilege of serving as an adjunct faculty member in the Business Department during the 2005-06 academic year and enjoyed it immensely. Working with the students here confirmed that I felt called to finish my Ph.D. and try to teach at an ELCA college someday. After many stops and starts, always working full-time during a 25 year business career and raising three busy children, I finally finished my dissertation at the young age of 48 years old. Can you see my wrinkles from the back row? As I tell my students, I am just a late bloomer. That is vocation for you. It's a journey.

Six years later, I am happily stationed at Gustavus Adolphus College, another institution that also takes vocation very seriously. Eric Norelius was a Swedish Pastor who not only founded Gustavus, but also saw another need coming from the community to help children who were less fortunate. He later created Lutheran Social Services, as Samuel Torvend mentioned last night. Eric Norelius is kind of a "leadership rock star" in my book. This fall we will celebrate our Swedish heritage and sesquicentennial at Gustavus. This 150 year celebration hopefully will provide a unique and reflective opportunity for us to discuss Luther's idea of vocation again in our small community of St. Peter, Minnesota.

Speaking of heritage, in Paul Dovre's new book, *The Cross and the Academy*, in the chapter titled, "Lutheran Higher Education: A Heritage Revisited," he draws on the work of Richard Solberg (*Lutheran Higher Education in North America*) in claiming that the Lutheran college has been the most important educational vehicle of the North American Lutheran tradition (Dovre 40-55). Dovre continues saying, "These colleges were established

by intention; located by accident; and sustained by faith, hope, and charity. All over-simplifications run their hazards but, as such devices go, this one is not far off the mark" (40).

President Dovre's two phrases—"established by intention" and "located by accident"—are what I want to focus on here. The question I have been asked to discuss is: Practically speaking, how can our Lutheran colleges think of their vocation in a larger community, the civil sphere? Most of us, especially thanks to the Lilly Endowment, have done an admirable job of focusing on vocation for our students. But what about the vocation of our Lutheran colleges in our respective neighborhoods, towns, or cities? Whether they were located by accident or not, I suggest that not every Lutheran college has the same vocation. If you look at the mission statements of each one, you might not agree with me. In June 2001 at the first Thrivent Fellows Conference led by Steve Titus and Paul Dovre, we reviewed all 28 (at the time) ELCA college mission statements. There are a few distinctions, but not a significant difference. Tom Christenson from Capitol University wrote eloquently in his 2004 book, *The Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education*, that we need to look closely at the mission of our Lutheran institutions (9-16, 25-27). Two years later, I heard Tom speak here at Augsburg at an ELCA Development Conference for Advancement Officers. There he said, "Institutions can and will die if we no longer articulate and live out the mission and vision of these special places. If the purpose is lost, so is the institution."

### From Mission to Vocation

So, is mission of the college the same as vocation? I do not think so. I define mission as reason for being, for existence, purpose.

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Vocation is a calling *from the community*. Vocation is a calling *from people in need*. And whether you can recite the mission of your college verbatim or not, can you truly articulate what is the vocation of your specific institution today? It is likely quite different today than when these institutions were founded.

I want here to share with you four different examples of civic engagement in different institutions of which I have been made aware. I am sure there are hundreds more examples at each place, so be gracious with me. But hopefully they will either serve as a reminder to what you may be doing in your community or serve as a catalyst for something you could get started.

First, let us again start right here with Augsburg College. They are situated in the middle of the Cedar Riverside Neighborhood. It is located in a triangle of sorts between Interstate 94, Interstate 35W and the Mississippi River. The University of Minnesota is across the street. It has been home to immigrant populations for years. It is also known as a very fine place for good music, art, theatre, and education. Augsburg has worked well with the people in this area and has shared their students, faculty, and staff to help revitalize the area. They have also strengthened local networks committed to engagement in the neighborhood. Being in the city, they have a unique vocation that works to serve their neighbors well. But it is very different from my second example.

Second: at Gustavus this past semester, my students chose to help the St. Peter Soccer Club as their group project in my Organizational Behavior course. The president of the club shared that he needed to solve a problem. He could not figure out why there were so few Hispanic and Somali children in their club, when there were significant groups of these kids in the area. Was it solely due to an inability to afford the fee or was there another reason? My students met with him, analyzed local demographic data, interviewed parents of these two groups and suggested some interesting recommendations. They found that the fee was not the main problem. Rather, there were no older assistant coaches or other students of color on these teams to serve as recruiters. My students suggested that the president consider doing that and start a scholarship fund. They even offered to have their fraternities and sororities fundraise for the club. Through this experience, my business students learned a lot about being on a board *and* serving in the community.

A third example: My son, Rob, has been a sophomore football player at St. Olaf for the past two years. His football coach, Jerry Olszewski, suggested that he and his sophomore friends volunteer in the All-Star After-School Program at Northfield Public Schools. Rob went there every Wednesday afternoon. He helped some of the children with their homework, played dodge-ball, touch football, and endless games of tag. He came home over Thanksgiving and said, "I had no idea there were so many lower-income families in Northfield. Mom, they need

more soccer balls, kick-balls and other toys like Legos. Since we have more than enough toys in our basement, I think we should share some of them with these families." Thanks to the St. Olaf football coach, Rob's engagement with the kids of Northfield helped him see his community through a different lens. He grew as a human being.

Fourth, as a Concordia College in Moorhead alum, I will never forget in 2009 when the Red River threatened to flood much of the city, including Concordia's campus. The students were the ones who advocated to cancel classes and live out the college's mission of influencing the affairs of the world by filling hundreds of thousands of sandbags and making dikes. The mayor reported that they literally saved the city. One of my lasting memories of this community in crisis was seeing young Cobber students on television filling sandbags shoulder to shoulder with retirees and young school children—all facets of the community working together to save the town. The retirees have reported that the conversations that occurred between those multi-age groups during those long days of sandbagging were amazing.

### The "Business" of Service

Professor DeAne Lagerquist from St. Olaf was interviewed by one of my female students last year for a paper on women, leadership, and vocation, and she stated, "Instead of *having* a vocation, we need to *hear* a vocation." She likened hearing to "dancing with your neighbor." You have to get up front, close and personal with them. How can our institutions dance in the community even better tomorrow than they already dance today?

In my classroom, my overall goal is to make future business leaders *think* about some troubling questions before they graduate and head out the door to make their first million. Is being a business leader today *only* about making money? Is that your true definition of success? What is your personal mission and vision as a corporate executive? As Sharon Daloz Parks from the Whidby Institute often asked in her Harvard Business School classes, "If you are a CEO, CFO or COO, who will your

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**"How can our institutions dance in the community even better tomorrow than they already dance today?"**

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leadership *hurt* or *harm* as a result of your work?" Names come to mind like Enron, Worldcom, Madhof, Petters, and most recently, Murdoch. These are ripe case studies to read, analyze, discuss, and discern what we can learn from them.

I walked away from 25 years of working in the business world in part because of the absence of ethical decision-making. As Grayce Belvedere Young says, “Money is King,” and unethical practices occurred more times than I care to count. I left the trappings of the money and glitz because of the gift I was given at a Lutheran college to be able to ask troubling questions. Now, hopefully, I am able to influence a new generation of decision makers in the business world. I thank God nearly every morning that I get to work at a place like Gustavus where I can do this.

I know that vocation and civic engagement need to be part of the discussion in every semester I teach. I know that my students learn far more from engaging in the community instead of just sitting and listening to me lecture. And I know that my students will probably be leading the Fortune 100 companies of tomorrow.

If I do not ask the big questions while I am shepherding them in my classroom for a semester or two, who will? The vocation of each our Lutheran colleges is critically important. I agree with DeAne Lagerquist. It means dancing with our neighbors to their own specific tune. So, dance away!

### Works Cited

- Christenson, Tom. *The Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004.
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- Solberg, Richard, W. *Lutheran Higher Education in North America*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985.

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## Artist Statement for *When We Serve*

The longer, original title for the art on the cover is taken from a song by Handt Hanson (c. 2000, Changing Church Forum, Inc.): “Take me, Jesus / Way beyond me, Jesus. / I will love you, Jesus / When I serve the ones you love.” The piece was painted for a silent art auction at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Burnsville, Minnesota, where Handt Hanson is the worship leader.

I’m lucky enough to be a part of a terrific small group. We’re all very different, we disagree about most things, and we love each other anyway. One day we got to talking about stewardship. The leadership in our church reminds us often that every person, in every walk of life, is called to share God’s love and grace. Parent, teacher, business leader, cashier, politician, cook—we all have creative energy to offer.

That night I watched the old holiday classic, “The Little Drummer Boy,” with my children. A poor shepherd boy comes face to face with the baby Jesus. He desperately wants to give the baby something, but has nothing. All he can offer is his talent,

his creative energy—he plays his drum. What a beautiful idea! Our group spent weeks asking people, “What is your drum?” What can you make? What can you do? What can you offer? What creative energy do you have? We received paintings, jewelry, blankets, carvings, CDs, music lessons, a five-course meal, tax preparation services, computer repair, and even a handmade duck call and fishing rod.

All of this was auctioned on New Year’s Eve, and all the money was given directly to the Feed My Starving Children program. We raised enough money to feed an entire village for a year. There is something extremely satisfying about making a difference in the world with art, your own personal drum.

This piece is acrylic, and simply represents this process of daring to jump into community, share your opinions, listen to others, and care about people who seem different or new. It is about daring to let God’s love overflow, and daring to trust that there will always be enough love to go around.

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