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From the Publisher

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From the Publisher



Associations of colleges and universities are commonplace in American higher education. Many of these associations are found in the community of church-related colleges and universities. Before 2016, however, the colleges and universities of the ELCA had never been organized into

an association. They shared in many others, including an association composed of schools from pan-Lutheran church-bodies in the United States and Canada (including those outside the ELCA), known as the Lutheran Educational Conference of North America (LECNA). But until 2016, ELCA colleges and universities never had their own association.

Now they do. The new association, called the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities, was established through a yearlong process in 2015, culminating in the first meeting of the Network's Board of Directors in February 2016. The Network was established as a missional collaboration of the churchwide organization and the twenty-six colleges and universities that are part of the ELCA. This new association will help ELCA schools and the churchwide organization sustain a common identity and shared mission in higher education. (The mission will include maintaining relationships with LECNA, in which ELCA colleges and universities continue to hold membership.)

The Network was created by the churchwide organization and the colleges and universities in response to lost capacity in the churchwide organization to maintain connections and programming among the ELCA's

twenty-six colleges and universities. The Network is not an additional administrative structure that will burden ELCA's mission of higher education with bureaucratic bloat. The new Network replaces former churchwide units devoted to higher education that had to be eliminated as the churchwide organization's annual budget shrank from approximately \$100 million in the 1990s (soon after the creation of the ELCA) to approximately \$50 million today. The Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities is a collaborative solution to address a problem of diminished capacity within the churchwide organization to provide leadership for ELCA higher education.

The Network came into being through the work of the college and university presidents and churchwide leaders over a period of five years. A special word of thanks goes to Elizabeth Eaton, Presiding Bishop of the ELCA; Stephen Bouman, executive director of the Domestic Mission unit; and Michael Maxey, President of Roanoke College and Chairperson of the President's Council, whose agreements in March 2015 about the mechanism of this new collaboration made it possible for the presidents to take the final steps toward creation of the new Network.

As I write this note, I am preparing for the first meeting of the Executive Committee of the Network. The committee's meeting will set in motion, in the words of President Mike Maxey, the pledge of this groundbreaking Network to "develop and sustain a stronger, more viable vision of Lutheran higher education in the ELCA. The links between and among our colleges and universities and the ELCA will make all of us stronger, separately and collectively."

I think Tom Christensen and the other Lutheran higher education leaders who invented *Intersections* twenty years ago would be proud.

Mark Wilhelm is Executive Director of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities. He has served as the publisher of *Intersections* since 2008