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From the Publisher

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ELCA Colleges and Universities

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From the Publisher



When the ELCA's churchwide organization and the institutions of higher education related to the ELCA agreed to establish the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU), the presidents and church leaders did not have in mind the 2017 commemoration of the five-hundredth anniversary

of the Lutheran Reformation. The topic of Lutheran identity in higher education did receive focused attention in the formation of NECU and that attention has continued during our initial two years of operation. But NECU did not take up this work because the five-hundredth anniversary year was pending. Interest among the presidents caused us to focus attention on the topic of Lutheran identity.

A survey of the presidents taken in the years leading up to the establishment of NECU revealed their hope that the new association could help them explain the Lutheran identity of their schools. This topic was the only one that all the presidents agreed was a priority for NECU among an array of activities historically offered by the churchwide organization for ELCA colleges and universities. In a time when all ELCA schools are no longer populated mostly by Lutherans, the presidents wanted assistance in personally understanding and professionally articulating to their diverse constituencies Lutheran identity in higher

education. They knew their schools had been founded by the Lutheran church and remained formally part of it. But what did it mean for schools to be Lutheran in the twenty-first century? Now that most schools were no longer connected to the Lutheran church through personal and cultural ties, why and how were they Lutheran?

A faculty working group spent the last academic year developing a short document that responded to those questions. NECU presidents gathered in June 2017 at the Lutheran Center in Chicago to review a draft of "Rooted and Open: Our Common Institutional Calling." A revised document, edited in light of comments made during the June meeting, will be presented to the January 2018 annual meeting of NECU.

The document describes Lutheran higher education as an institutional commitment that is held in common by NECU institutions but not dependent on the personal religious commitments of those at NECU institutions. The shared commitment is to certain educational practices and outcomes derived from Lutheran intellectual and educational traditions. Those traditions developed in the wake of what we now call the Lutheran Reformation. NECU's work on Lutheran identity may not have arisen because we wanted a project appropriate to the five-hundredth anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, but I cannot think of a better way to commemorate the anniversary of that movement.

Mark Wilhelm is the Executive Director of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities.