

## **Pacific Lutheran University Congregational Relations Review**

A review is a process to assess together the vitality and sustainability of a ministry. The goal of the review team is to identify and name ministry strengths as well as aspects for improvement. The process typically leads to a mutually agreed upon course of action that moves the ministry forward.

Dr. Joanna Royce-Davis (Vice President of Student Life) and Dan Lee (Vice President of Advancement) requested assistance of Pastor Melanie Wallschlaeger of the Southwestern Washington Synod in creating a review process of congregational relations at PLU. As the Director of Congregational Relations position has been dormant for several years, a task force was put together to explore the need, impact and future directions for such a position.

### **Review Team**

Susan Berg, Communications, Northwest Washington Synod, ELCA  
Melannie Cunningham, Director for Multicultural Recruitment PLU  
Pastor Laurie Larson Caesar, Mission of the Atonement, Beaverton, Oregon  
Dan Lee, Vice President of Advancement PLU  
Dr. Joanna Royce-Davis, Vice President of Student Life PLU  
Pastor Jan Ruud, St Mark's by the Narrows, Tacoma  
Pastor Alison Shane, First Lutheran Church, Poulsbo  
Pastor Kent Shane, First Lutheran Church, Poulsbo  
Pastor John Vaswig, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Edgewood  
Pastor Melanie Wallschlaeger, Director for Evangelical Mission, Southwestern Washington Synod, ELCA

The Congregational Relations Review Team identified stakeholders and held focus groups about the role of congregational relations at PLU with the following: ASPLU, Southwestern Washington Synod pastors, Tacoma Ministerial Alliance, faculty, and student leaders. One-to-one conversations were also held with Mark Wilhelm, Director of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities and Bishop Martin Wells, former University Pastor and Interim Director for Church Relations. A sub-group of the Review Team developed an electronic survey that was emailed to Region 1 synods for distribution among congregations about their relationship with PLU. More than 180 participants responded to the electronic survey, which included pastors and lay leaders.

Throughout our inquiries, appreciation was expressed for PLU's emphasis on vocation and Lutheran identity. A few participants recalled when the congregational relations position was known as "Church Relations" and reported to the president. Those with the institutional memory of the time when the role was "Church Relations", felt changes in the role reflected a diminishment of PLU's identity as a church-related institution. For people who had related to PLU through the Director of Congregational Relations position, there was a sense of loss and grief in not having an identifiable "go to" person for congregations. PLU Sunday resources, confirmation certificates, and a regular presence at synod assemblies were the points of contact for most

participants. While participants expressed appreciation for congregational relationships with PLU, most felt congregational relationships with the university could be much more.

Stakeholders expressed interest in having speakers and students available to engage in congregations through speaking engagements, musical performances, and mentorship/internship opportunities for students. In regards to what a congregational relations role could become, stakeholders expressed a range of possibilities, including the development of a “Vice President for Mission” position similar to California Lutheran University’s model, which would oversee Campus Ministry and the Wild Hope Center for Vocation. Other ideas included development of a Center for Congregational Life at PLU, including the creation and sharing of an “exportable” Wild Hope vocational program.

In considering the range of opportunities, the Review Team affirmed the need for a full-time staff person dedicated to developing and maintaining relationships with congregation. The Review Team sought to develop recommendations and affirmations that would enhance the mutually beneficial relationship between congregations and the university.

#### **Affirmations:**

- 1) **Lutheran distinctiveness:** Pacific Lutheran University stakeholders shared passionate interest in and support for the role of congregational relations at PLU. Lutheran identity and tradition was lifted up as a powerful aspect of the university’s distinctiveness. Conversations affirmed the importance of the Lutheran philosophy of higher education. We affirm that orientation to the Lutheran tradition continue to be central for new Board of Regents members.
- 2) **Openness to Diversity:** We affirm PLU for its commitment to growth in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and what that dialogue may bring to partnerships in the future. This commitment takes form in open conversations both within the university community and in the surrounding area, pursuing learning in the midst of differences on many fronts.

#### **Recommendations:**

- 1) **Director for Congregational Outreach and Engagement:** We recommend that PLU develop a position for the purpose of connecting the university with its congregations as a way to deepen relationships with key constituents and extending its mission. We heard longing for a deeper and more active relationship between PLU and local and regional congregations. We recommend the Director for Congregational Outreach and Engagement be a full-time equivalent, served preferably by an ELCA rostered leader (such as a pastor, deaconess or Associate in Ministry) or a person with deep and proven experience of and/or commitment to the Lutheran tradition.
- 2) **Office Location:** We recommend that the role of building congregational relations be moved from the Office of Advancement to the Campus Ministry Office. Stakeholder conversations revealed that a negative perception developed as the role of congregational relations shifted to the Office of Advancement. Constituents generally perceived this move

to be one that inadvertently sent a message that congregational relationships with the university were reduced to fundraising. We recommend that the office of Director for Congregational Outreach and Engagement be housed in the Campus Ministry office for synergy and enhanced collaborative work between Campus Ministry partners including the University Pastor, the Director for Multicultural Outreach and Engagement and partner chaplains.

- 3) **Mutuality:** We heard a longing for greater mutuality between PLU and its constituents. In order to promote mutuality, we recommend that the Director for Congregational Outreach and Engagement develop a “menu” of opportunities that foster relationships between congregations and the University. We recommend that the “menu” provide a balance of opportunities for congregations to come to campus as well as opportunities for PLU partners to go out into the community. Examples of this include:

***Off-campus relationship building:*** Faculty speakers (e.g. a “speakers bench” available to speak on topics that congregations could utilize), Admissions/Financial Aid presentations, and Wild Hope as an exportable program. Can programs that PLU already has be modified (e.g. Explore Retreat exported for junior and senior high school students or the development of a “Vocation of a Student” program developed to help high school students learn about the vocation of a student and choose a school that is right for them).

***On-campus relationship building:*** Career Counseling for Life; Wild Hope Seminars available for helping people explore their occupational path in their 30s and 40s; Powell-Heller Holocaust Conference; Summer Theological Conference.

- 4) **Hospitality to Constituent Congregations and Ministries:** We recommend that the Director for Congregational Outreach and Engagement oversee opportunities to offer hospitality to stakeholder congregations and organizations that promote the relationship. We recommend the development of “preferential event pricing” and a proactive invitation that allows synod ministries the opportunity to meet on campus and lift up PLU as a resource for events, such as synod assemblies and conferences.
- 5) **Accountability:** We recommend that the Director of Congregational Outreach and Engagement report to the university president, with an expectation for strategic collaboration with Campus Ministry and Alumni and Constituent Engagement.
- 6) **Collaboration with Lutheran Studies and Wild Hope:** We recommend intentional partnership and collaboration be nurtured between the Director of Congregational Outreach and Engagement, the Endowed Chair of Lutheran Studies and the Director for Wild Hope. As this position relates to Lutheran tradition and understanding of vocation, we believe strategic collaborations with these two positions will enable the university to develop meaningful partnerships with congregations in the Pacific Northwest.

- 7) **Funding:** We recommend that the Advancement office explore possibilities for funding the Director for Congregational Outreach and Engagement position as an ongoing priority of the university. One possibility may include having the ELCA Region 1 congregations participate in a campaign to endow this position on an ongoing basis.