

Introducing Faculty, Administrators, and Staff to Lutheran Higher Education
NECU and PLU Workshop | June 2021

Model One: Gathering, Educating/Forming, and Sending

All organizations – whether a college, an airplane builder, a food relief agency, or a congregation – possess a primary task or purpose: “the focused activity that they uniquely exist to do” (Skelton, “Purpose and Work,” 1). The primary task of a relief agency is different from a college is different from a congregation or an airplane builder: “Lutheran colleges are neither churches nor social service agencies but centers of higher learning” (Killen, “Lilly Endowment,” 3). Where there is lack of clarity concerning one’s primary task or mission, there will exist confusion as well as a greater chance that competing visions will sap organizational strength, coherence, and allocation of resources and personnel. When an organization’s primary task is clear and there is support among all personnel for the task, organizational strength and a genuine sense of shared commitment are enhanced with vitality and hope.

ELCA schools differ from most state and non-sectarian schools in their promotion of a purpose or mission that is *value-laden*. While ELCA colleges *educate* students in the liberal arts and for careers in particular fields, they also *form* them in values and practices alive in the tradition of Lutheran higher education. Or do they? Consider and compare the statements of one private and one public school with those of two Lutheran schools:

The University of Puget Sound is a highly selective liberal arts college. It is a place where people come together to learn, make lasting connections, plunge into a sea of ideas, and begin to scale the challenges of the world [UPS, a former Methodist college in Tacoma]

The mission of The University of Texas at Austin is to achieve excellence in the interrelated areas of undergraduate education, graduate education, research and public service. The university provides superior and comprehensive educational opportunities at the baccalaureate through doctoral educational levels.

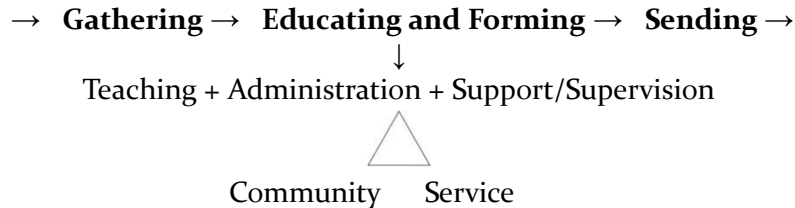
In the reforming spirit of Martin Luther, Luther College affirms the liberating power of faith and learning. As people of all backgrounds, we embrace diversity and challenge one another to learn in community, to discern our callings, and to serve with distinction for the common good.

California Lutheran University is a diverse scholarly community dedicated to excellence in the liberal arts and professional studies. Rooted in the Lutheran tradition of Christian faith, the University encourages critical inquiry into matters of both faith and reason. The mission of the University is to educate leaders for a global society who are strong in character and judgment, confident in their identity and vocation, and committed to service and justice.

From an organizational perspective, one way of describing the primary task of a Lutheran school is **to gather** students, staff, administrators, and faculty into an **educational and formative environment**, in order **to send** these persons into the world, into daily life, with the values and practices of Lutheran higher education. For instance, the two preceding Lutheran mission statements clearly focus on learning and educating as central

to their mission, a focus found in the other two mission statements. Yet they also note that faith, community, vocation or calling, and commitment to service and justice are shared values and practices alive in their schools. Interestingly, the Lutheran statements make no strong distinction between students and faculty or staff: one receives the impression that the mission each school espouses encompasses all its members.

..... *Cultural context*



While faculty teach, administrators administrate, and staff supervise and support, are they not also being gathered into communities where “we challenge one another to learn in community, discern our callings, and serve the common good”? In other words, do Lutheran schools not prize a person’s *social nature* and the cultivation of relationships as well as the individual’s or group’s ability to be *other-directed* in mutual responsibility and service? These are not values universally espoused in American higher education.

The process of gathering people into an educational milieu marked by values and practices of Lutheran higher education never takes place in a vacuum but always within a particular culture at a particular time. For instance, American culture prizes the individual, personal initiative, and upward economic mobility and thus forms students, staff, administrators, and faculty in such values long before they enter a Lutheran school. Will one, then, encounter *tension* between cultural formation in “hyper-individualism” (Bellah, *Habits*, 142-163) and “service to the common good” or “commitment to service and justice”? In other words, are Lutheran schools educational organizations that cast learning or education within a different and distinctive light?

References

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Patricia Killen, “The Lilly Endowment Program for the Theological Exploration of Vocation at Pacific Lutheran University” (unpublished manuscript, 2003), 3

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Model Two: Moving from disinterested observer to maturing practitioner

The curricula in Lutheran schools draw students toward a major in the liberal arts or, where such programs exist, into a professional path (e.g., a bachelor's degree in social work, elementary education, or business). While a good number of students enter a college or university with an interest or major in mind, the great value of a required liberal arts core is the way in which students are exposed to and engage forms of enquiry they might not normally follow. Students once disinterested in a particular discipline discover that it has become their passion through engaging teachers, through exposure to a body of literature, through experiencing a new way of thinking or acting. Such experiences are often described as “revelatory,” as an “epiphany.” Whether initially interested or disinterested, the student is drawn into a deeper engagement with the discipline through more sophisticated forms of study, increasingly specialized courses in the major, growing confidence in speaking or writing with increasing maturity, and conversation with professors, peers, and supervisors. From an unfamiliar introductory course to the presentation of one's capstone research, it is possible to discern a greater engagement in the discipline and, one hopes, the student's ability to think *within* the discipline's language and practice.

Over the past fifty years, the work of anthropologists, historians, psychologists, sociologists, and pastoral theologians attests to a **developmental dynamic** within a person's and a group's life. That is, their research brings to light what can be observed in the student who moves from disinterested observer to maturing participant and attests to this pattern in other dimensions of life: in the movement from novice to elder, from awkward dating to steadfast and life-giving relationship, from conventional faith to dialectical faith, from new employee to engaged university citizen and leader. In light of this dynamic that pervades every organism, this model suggests that there can be different degrees of support for the mission of Lutheran higher education. Here we consider four “types” that might be found on any college campus.

Because no one has taken the time to introduce a new or long-time administrator, staff, or faculty member to the marks and mission of LHE, the **disinterested observer** may know little or nothing about its ethos. At the same time, the disinterested observer might have a vague notion that “this is a Lutheran school” but is focused more on the “job,” whether that is teaching, supervising technology, or administering: for this person, “Lutheran” may be only “white noise” in the background. And this, too: the observer might hold assumptions about “religion” that compel him or her to stay clear of the “religious” dimension of a Lutheran school. If those assumptions are not called into question in the process of welcoming or orienting, they will hold people secure in their distance from the ethos of LHE. With the observer, one may encounter ignorance, ambivalence, or resistance. How might leaders offer another vision of “religion” to the observer and draw on the observer's desire to do a job well?

In contrast to the disinterested observer, the **sympathetic participant** is neither hot nor cold concerning the mission of LHE, what the observer might call the “religious” dimension of the school. For personal or professional reasons, he or she may welcome or ascribe to the sense of community, free inquiry, service, diversity, equity, or concern for sustainability found in Lutheran schools but have no idea *why* such qualities – when drawn together – form a distinctive ethos in the college or university. To quote one staff person of no religious affiliation who has worked at a Midwestern Lutheran school for 20 years, “I like it here. There’s a real sense of care for people and a genuine appreciation for my work as a designer.” Here one might discern that community and respect for one’s native skills are strengths valued in a Lutheran school. Thus, one wonders: Isn’t this participant supporting strong marks of Lutheran higher education? And this, too: Is it possible that a workshop on the vocation of being a teacher, administrator, or staff member might appeal to this person and reveal the “something more” that he or she finds attractive at a Lutheran school?



One also finds people at Lutheran schools who are **active supporters** of the mission of LHE. They may be alumni of Lutheran colleges who experienced an eye-opening and life-affirming education. Other faculty, administrators, and staff, educated in state or independent schools, may become supporters of LHE because Lutheran schools welcome the conversation between faith and learning. In the words of one Southwestern admissions director: “I can actually go to chapel and pray here. I can talk about faith without fear of being viewed as a crazy person.” Active supporters may have no affiliation with Lutheranism, and yet discover, through a conversation, workshop, or seminar, a convergence between their personal and professional commitments and the aspirations of LHE. To quote one PLU professor, “Who knew that an Israeli Jew teaching in the business school would find in Lutheran education a robust intellectual tradition that I can fully support?” Where are active supporters found in one’s school?

Finally, there are active supporters who for a variety of reasons become **maturing practitioners** of LHE. That is, through study, engagement in workshops, retreats, or seminars, taking on some form of leadership, or having sustained conversations with colleagues, they are able to recognize the strengths as well as the weakness of Lutheran education. They may not necessarily use the “in-house” or historical language of Lutheran education and yet, to quote California Lutheran’s mission statement, they are “leaders who are strong in character and judgment, confident in their identity and vocation, and committed to service and justice.” Frequently, these are the persons who have been invited into self-reflection on the ways in which the strengths of LHE shape and suffuse their

professional and personal commitments. Maturing practitioners want to go deeper; they are asking Luther's abiding question: "What does this (LHE) mean?"

This model is more descriptive than anything else. It suggests that every Lutheran school will find disinterested observers, sympathetic participants, active supporters, and maturing practitioners. And let us be clear: no moral judgment is made concerning this mixture; it is simply a "lens" through which one can view different forms of affiliation with LHE. But this model does raise an important question: *Who will sustain the Lutheran vision of higher education?* Will it be a small number of Lutherans, educated in Lutheran schools that alone are conversant in Lutheran language, or will it be a growing number of persons, from diverse backgrounds, who have been invited to recognize the distinctive vision of LHE and to sustain that value-laden vision?

In this model, **leaders are called to make invitations**, invitations that allow a disinterested observer to become a sympathetic participant, invitations that allow an active supporter to become a maturing practitioner. Leaders are called to meet people where they are – discerning what *strength* is present in each situation – and **to invite faculty, administrators, and staff to go deeper into the mission of LHE**. Inevitably, they will meet with resistance, cautious interest, and even readiness. Though they may not consider themselves maturing practitioners in LHE, leaders are nonetheless called **to nurture those who are becoming maturing practitioners** – persons who positively influence the culture of one's school. Will the future of LHE be imperiled without active supporters and maturing practitioners? One might think so.

In the 16th c., the Lutheran reformers suppressed religious orders for theological reasons: they rejected the notion that "religious professionals" lived a holier life "above" others. Luther insisted on baptismal equality: all sharing equally in the Spirit; all capable of voice in the selection of leaders. From a hierarchical structure, there emerged a congregational or proto-democratic one. And yet, the suppression of religious orders meant that care for the emerging schools of the Lutheran reform would become the responsibility of lay educators and clergy. As the 1997 study by Hughes and Adrian suggests, lay persons now constitute the largest portion of faculty, staff, and senior administrators in Lutheran schools. This is a marked change from the 19th and early 20th c. when clergy exercised greater influence and most faculty and staff self-identified as Lutheran. Given the decisions of the 16th c., there is no religious order dedicated to the promotion of LHE. There are, however, lay women and men – *most not Lutheran* – with whom the future of LHE rests today. Will they be invited to become maturing practitioners?

References

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Model Three: The process of welcoming staff, administrators, and faculty

New and long-time members of an organization are being welcomed, oriented, and incorporated into the purpose (mission) and ethos (values and practices) of the organization whether or not leaders tend to these significant practices. Let us be clear: neglect is an oft-chosen form of orientation – albeit a terrible form of orientation – but one that communicates the value a group places on its members and its organization’s purpose. The question to be asked is this: *how intentional and effective is the process of gathering faculty, administrators, and staff into the mission of Lutheran higher education?* It is worth noting that “mission” will look different in each Lutheran school given its founders’ charisms, its regional location, its history of leaning into, moving away from, or redeveloping its founding vision, negotiating change, and the degree to which external cultural pressures influence its purpose and practices. Consider these educational mission statements from two Lutheran schools:

The purpose of Concordia College is to influence the affairs of the world by sending into society thoughtful and informed men and women dedicated to the Christian life.

Roanoke College develops students as whole persons and prepares them for responsible lives of learning, service, and leadership by promoting their intellectual, ethical, spiritual and personal growth.

Do you note difference between the two statements? Here is the point: the nature of an organization’s mission will shape its processes for welcoming, orienting, and incorporating new and long-time members. What, then, is meant by each of these processes?

Gathering: **Welcoming** → **Orienting** → **Incorporating** → Educating and Forming

Welcoming takes place passively and actively. *Passive welcoming* takes place as one encounters the content on a school’s website and in its printed publications, the wording of its job announcements, its physical presence, upkeep, and signage, its reputation in the local community, region, church, and among alumni. For faculty and staff, *active welcoming* begins through the first human contact with the school, in the application, interview, and hiring process, through assistance in re-location, the initial welcome by a president, chief academic officer, campus pastor, department chair, supervisor, and/or colleagues in one’s office or department. Active welcoming also takes place through campus-wide rituals: e.g., a departmental or office dinner, an opening convocation of the academic year, the first chapel service of the year, the first meeting of the faculty assembly.

In this initial stage of welcoming, how is Lutheran higher education presented, passively or actively, in one’s school?

Mindful that new staff and faculty may have *no experience of Lutheran higher education* or *no knowledge of the tradition’s historical “language”* (e.g., faith, community, vocation, or service, to say nothing of “dialectical thinking” or “two kingdoms”), what *initial* messages

are communicated concerning LHE that can be grasped by faculty, administrators, and staff and faculty whose educational backgrounds might range from a GED to multiple graduate degrees?

Orienting occurs as administrators, staff, and faculty are invited into an initial and focused understanding of the school's purpose (education) and distinctive vision (formation in the values of LHE). While the temptation might be present to rely on electronic or print material, does face-to-face human contact not allow for conversation, dialogue, and the possibility of relationship to develop? It's one thing to distribute a printed history of one's school; it's something quite different to invite new faculty or staff to discuss how that history shapes a school's "culture" in the present.

Orienting personnel toward LHE can take place at new staff or faculty orientation sessions, at a reception that includes a short introduction to the mission of the school, through a presidential address at the beginning of the year, a conversation over lunch or dinner, or in a development workshop for faculty, administrators, or staff. Orienting flows from welcoming and does what the word means: it offers an orientation or lure *toward*, an entry point *into* the mission of a Lutheran school. It is the appetizer – not the entrée – that gives a foretaste of what is to come.

If the mission or purpose of a school belongs to the entire school – staff, administrators, faculty, regents or trustees, a synod or ecclesial region, and donors – who holds responsibility for orientation?

If everyone holds responsibility for supporting the mission of a Lutheran school (is this true?), should not the responsibility for promoting a Lutheran vision of higher education be *dispersed* throughout the staff, faculty, administrators, regents, campus clergy, and donors? Of course, that suggestion presumes that responsibility for mission and vision has been shared beyond the "expected" centers of orientation (e.g., clergy, a faith or vocation center, a church relations office, religion department faculty, personnel who self-identify as Lutheran).

Incorporating includes the process of being knit into the school's purpose (education) within the distinctive vision or ethos of LHE as it is lived and understood in a particular school. Different elements of incorporation may include a deeper engagement with the mission of LHE through a retreat, a seminar on vocation, a course on LHE, speaking at a public forum on the school's mission, being asked to speak to regents, trustees, or donors about the mission of LHE at one's school, serving as a mentor to students discerning their vocation, and/or participating in a Vocation of a Lutheran College conference.

The process of incorporation invites personnel to recognize the integral relationship between a school's educational mission and the gifts of LHE. Its fruit is the person who begins to *think* and *act* within the framework of LHE, no longer a casual observer but an active participant who can articulate, in his or her own language, the marks and value of LHE within his or her life and work.

Incorporation means that one has moved *from considering information about* LHE to actively *engaging and internalizing its ethos* for one's teaching, administering, supervising, and mentoring.

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