

Pacific Lutheran University

*“Due to the Pandemic”*

2021 Wild Hope Essay

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As a veteran tour guide for Pacific Lutheran University, I have been extensively educated on Lutheran Higher Education values and PLU's commitment to diversity, justice, sustainability, and vocation. I can list the Seven Pillars of Lutheran Higher Education in my sleep. I can give you five different fun facts about Harstad Hall. I can tell you all about how PLU uplifts care everywhere you look — all while walking backwards, I might add.

At the end of every hour-long tour, I give the same mission statement: "PLU seeks to educate students for lives of thoughtful inquiry, service, leadership, and care; for others, for their communities, and for the earth" (About PLU). Each time I deliver this sentence, I mean it. I emphasize care in my tours because this has been a common theme in my time at PLU. I tell these prospective students that my #WhyPLU is all because of one word: *care*. I am being completely truthful when I say I didn't even have to look at PLU's website to type the mission statement. PLU's mission statement is something that is committed to my memory and something I see every day — inside and outside of the classroom.

Care is a fundamental part of each pillar of Lutheran Higher Education. Care is how we *serve* others in our community. Care is a crucial aspect of *honoring life on earth*, in that we both honor the earth and its peoples. Care is a part of *critical questioning*, and intentionally caring about what you are learning. Care is *liberating study* and providing freedom to professors who are leading future generations. Care is *learning together and* valuing diverse perspectives. Care is *protecting freedom and* making education more accessible and robust in the freedom to inquire. Care is also about discerning *why* you are learning what you are learning, and what your *vocation* means to you.

PLU's Wild Hope Center for Vocation defines *vocation* as "being called into relationship with others to promote human and ecological flourishing" (Wild Hope Center for Vocation). Every tour guide has their own definition of "vocation". I like to say that vocation is where your passions meet the world's greatest needs in a selfless manner. Ask another tour guide and they might give you a completely different interpretation. That is what makes vocation unique. That is the very same unique manner we are called to knowledge and care. We are committed to "strive for justice and peace wherever we find ourselves" and this effort looks extremely unique as times change (Wild Hope Center for Vocation).

I enjoy that last part, "wherever we find ourselves," because life is unapologetically dynamic. As life and society quickly changes, we are called upon to demonstrate care for others, our communities, and the earth we live on. In our unpredictable world, we *cannot* expect care to look the exact same in every place we find ourselves. In the midst of the current COVID-19 pandemic, I see how the meaning of care has transformed. I find myself saying one recurring phrase that you may have used before. That phrase is, "Due to the pandemic I ... (*insert a deadline you missed or perhaps a meeting you are making an excuse not to go to*)." "Due to the pandemic" has become a part of my vocabulary that has actually made me *complacent*.

I have found myself complacent in areas of my life where I should not be. This complacency goes beyond missing an assignment's due date and emailing my professor with this cliché phrase. The complacency I am talking about is in my care for others and has manifested itself in hyperindividualism. Martin Luther believed we should do our best to avoid

hyperindividualism and said, “I will therefore give myself to my neighbor and will do...whatever I see will be needful, advantageous, and wholesome for my neighbor” (Serving Wholeness and Health: Lutheran Studies). For some time, there has been a lack of care that the current climate of social injustice has brought to light. *Due to the pandemic, I have become too self-absorbed and have forgotten the importance of serving my neighbors.* We are being called to service now more than ever before. We need to advocate for the advancement of life, health, and wholeness for all.

As an Asian person and student of color, I have felt called to speak out against injustice among Asian and Pacific Islander communities. With the surge of Asian hate crimes, I have felt anger, sadness, resentment, and fear. I have found that I have been disregarding my own feelings and experiences in order to serve oppressors. I am now recognizing the danger in staying silent. Staying silent costs lives. I feel called to educate myself and speak out against the injustices that many A.A.P.I. individuals have suffered under for too long. I feel an overwhelming desire to share my story and I cannot shake the feeling. I don't want to shake the feeling. I want to *care*.

I have recently been engaging in more conversations with my A.A.P.I. neighbors, including Katie N., a PLU class of 2019 alumna. Katie is an Asian American who graduated from PLU with a Bachelors of Music Education. We spoke about her experience in serving her community outside of PLU's walls. She currently works for a company in Indiana that repairs musical instruments and hopes to eventually become a music teacher. Living across the country has proposed many challenges, especially regarding community and service. Katie notes that “when you move after graduation, you are surrounded by unfamiliar people in an unfamiliar place. Keeping your head above water, let alone serving others, can seem overwhelming”. But

this PLU graduate has not let her change in residence affect how she demonstrates service and vocation — by repairing one broken instrument at a time. PLU’s values of care and service translate beyond Parkland, Washington. Katie is a great example of how Lutes can serve different communities in unique ways, using their passions and talents as tools for change, and using their vocation to serve their communities.

Being Asian and a person of color in a new state may also be daunting since certain communities of our country are not as accepting as others. Katie continues to serve amidst the United States’ current climate of social injustice, the COVID-19 pandemic, and moving to a new community. Her work as a PLU graduate inspires me to serve and seek out justice. As I mentioned before, we must “strive for justice and peace wherever we find ourselves” — whether we find ourselves in Washington, Indiana, or any other part of the world.

Katie is one of the many A.A.P.I. individuals I have spoken to about the Asian American experience, and how we as Lutes can continue to demonstrate care beyond campus. We demonstrate care by listening and provoking thoughtful inquiry. How do we do that? By beginning conversations. We can begin conversations with alumni, family, friends, or total strangers. We can serve others and exemplify care through our own unique vocations. There are many ways we can demonstrate care. These ways change as the world changes around us. Right now we are being called upon to care. We can no longer be complacent. We must advocate for our neighbors. So do not be complacent. Instead, give this phrase a try: “Due to the pandemic, I have *started caring* about \_\_\_\_\_.”

**Word Count: 1,227**

*Works Cited*

“About PLU.” Pacific Lutheran University, [www.plu.edu/about/](http://www.plu.edu/about/).

“Serving Wholeness and Health: Lutheran Studies.” Pacific Lutheran University, [www.plu.edu/  
lutheran-studies/core-elements/serving-wholeness-and-health/](http://www.plu.edu/lutheran-studies/core-elements/serving-wholeness-and-health/).

“Wild Hope Center for Vocation.” Pacific Lutheran University, [www.plu.edu/vocation/](http://www.plu.edu/vocation/).