This social teaching statement was amended and adopted by more than a two-thirds vote (949-35) by the tenth biennial Churchwide Assembly on August 10, 2007, at Chicago, Illinois.

Prologue: Education and Vocation

The calling of Lutherans and of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in education is closely tied to a Lutheran understanding of vocation. While many understand vocation as a job or career or as the call to be a pastor or priest, Lutherans understand vocation as a calling from God that encompasses all of life for all the faithful.

Vocation involves God’s saving call to us in baptism and life lived in joyful response to this call. In Jesus Christ we are loved by a gracious God who frees us to love our neighbor and promote the common good; in gratitude for God’s love, we live out our vocation in our places of responsibility in daily life—home, congregation, work place, neighborhood, nation, and global society.

Education belongs to our baptismal vocation. Our particular calling in education is two-fold: to educate people in the Christian faith for their vocation and to strive with others to ensure that all have access to high-quality education that develops personal gifts and abilities and serves the common good. This calling embraces all people in both Church and society.
· providing seed money to ensure that Lutheran centers and schools have a good foundation in areas of defining purpose, education, faith formation, governance, administration, and finance;
· strengthening the network among Lutheran schools to meet common opportunities and needs; and
· disseminating information on and ensuring equity in public funding for all children as laws require and the United States Constitution permits.

**Lutheran Colleges and Universities**

*A Tradition of Academic Excellence and Service*

“A Christian cobbler makes good shoes, not poor shoes with little crosses on them,” Luther was reported to have said. Likewise, Lutherans, out of commitment to the common good, have insisted that their colleges and universities have a first duty to be excellent schools. This has been and continues to be the case. Following the example of Luther’s and Philip Melanchthon’s leadership at the time of the Reformation, Lutheran colleges and universities have conceived of education in holistic terms and shaped their academic programs in the liberal arts tradition. Today they appear regularly in lists of the best regional and national colleges.

ELCA colleges and universities perform valuable service to Church and society. At their best, they offer an excellent curriculum that aims at educating the whole person. Their emphasis on broad and integrated learning and critical thinking equips students for a whole life. Within this liberal arts context they prepare students for professions in education, health care, science, technology, social work, the arts, business, law, and other specific callings, and they provide many future pastors and other future leaders in this church with a well-rounded education.

Furthermore, ELCA colleges and universities find excellent ways to introduce their students to the essential questions of meaning and purpose. Many prominently feature the Lutheran teaching
on vocation—that the purpose of life is to serve God and the neighbor in one’s callings in everyday life. More specifically, many ELCA colleges and universities also educate students in the faith by offering—and often requiring—courses in Bible, theology, church history, and ethics. They help students engage the intellectual claims of the faith with the claims of other disciplines. They sustain strong programs of service to the neighbor in both local and global settings. They offer opportunities for worship, Bible study, mentoring, and participation in strong music programs that praise God. When they take their heritage seriously, they impart a vision of the world in which Christian faith plays the central integrating role. Graduates testify and a comprehensive national survey confirms that Lutheran colleges and universities have a positive and lasting impact on students in matters related to academic quality, faith, ethics, civic engagement, and church affiliation and leadership.

The Changing Context

In the history of higher education in the United States, many church-founded institutions of higher learning have disengaged from their sponsoring churches—some totally, some partially. Nearly all church-related colleges have experienced some measure of disengagement from both the institutional church and from the religious heritage that once influenced nearly every facet of the college’s life. ELCA colleges and universities represent a broad range on the spectrum of engagement. Most have maintained a significant connection with their Lutheran heritage, and many are giving renewed attention to their Christian identity in a world of many faiths and cultures.

ELCA colleges and universities persist in their mission as church-related colleges in the midst of a sharply changing environment that brings both opportunity and challenge. The major opportunity is that they will continue to be excellent...
schools that bring the Lutheran voice to bear in an increasingly global, ecumenical, diverse, and competitive educational scene. This church’s colleges and universities can continue to embody in a vastly new environment a persuasive vision of Christian higher education that is embedded in the Lutheran tradition. Especially encouraging are the vigorous global outreach programs on many campuses, the affirmation of Lutheran distinctiveness in a changing and sometimes hostile culture, and the growing cultural and ethnic diversity in many settings. Among the challenges are that our colleges and universities might lose their connection with the Christian heritage completely, that they may lose their academic vitality due to inadequate resources, that their costs might exceed the financial resources of most Lutherans, or that they may not achieve the diversity they seek.

**Life in Relationship**

A strong and vibrant relationship between this church and its institutions of higher learning assumes mutual commitments. In shaping the future of that relationship, this church may ask whether or not its colleges and universities are authentically and recognizably Christian in the Lutheran tradition, urging them to manifest that identity. Conversely, colleges and universities that are faithful to their Christian character may ask whether or not this church vigorously supports them: Will congregations encourage students to consider an ELCA college or university? Will pastors and bishops promote them? Will ELCA high school graduates attend our colleges and universities? In these matters the ELCA will need to manifest its commitment to its colleges and universities.

Due to shrinking resources and competing priorities, there has been a forty-year decline in churchwide and synodical financial support for colleges and universities. The ELCA is grateful that Lutheran colleges and universities have developed alternative sources of financial support, and many individual Lutherans are generous and faithful benefactors. It has provided advocacy and support, maintained a strong network among college leaders, provided leadership development opportunities for
faculty and staff, nurtured the conversation between faith and learning, and provided valuable research to assist the colleges and universities in their mission. Fortress Press, the academic arm of this church’s publishing ministry, continues to publish texts in biblical studies, theology, ethics, and pastoral care that are used widely in ELCA colleges and universities as well as in this church’s seminaries.

In the future as in the past, the survival and flourishing of ELCA colleges and universities will depend on a delicate ecology of school, church, and family. Where the colleges and universities live out their calling as significant ventures in Lutheran education, congregations and families demonstrate interest and confidence in those institutions. Without the congregations and families that give important support to Lutheran ventures in education, the colleges and universities may re-define themselves and their missions for people who will support them. The ecology that once made Lutheran colleges, congregations, and families a viable interdependent organism must be shaped in ways that respond to these new realities and opportunities.

The ELCA, therefore, urges its colleges and universities and this church in all its expressions to maintain their connections where they are strong, strengthen them where they are weak, and rebuild them where they are lacking. It calls for mutually beneficial relationships built on trust, commitment, and collaboration.

**Expectations of ELCA Colleges and Universities**

In such a relationship the ELCA expects that its colleges and universities will:
- reaffirm their commitment to maintain a living connection with the Christian faith;
- offer excellent, broad education in service to Church and society in a setting of academic freedom;
- educate in the faith with courses in Bible, Lutheran theology, church history, and ethics;
serve as incubators for the discovery of knowledge, preserve it in scholarly collections, and communicate it through scholarly publications;

nurture an ongoing dialogue between the claims of the Christian faith and the claims of the many academic disciplines as well as explore issues at the crossroads of life;

feature prominently the Lutheran teaching on vocation;

embody important elements—worship, music and the arts, service, personal moral standards, international education—as part of the ongoing Lutheran ethos;

maintain programs that serve as a liaison between the college or university and the various expressions of this church;

make adequate provision to meet the needs of students with disabilities; and

continue to attempt to make it financially possible for qualified students—especially Lutheran students—who desire to attend a Lutheran college or university to do so.

**Expectations of this Church**

To make the relationship a mutual one, this church also expects that:

- the presiding bishop and synodical bishops will voice persistently and persuasively their commitment to our colleges and universities;
- the churchwide organization will demonstrate persistently and persuasively its commitment to this church’s colleges and universities;
- the churchwide organization will continue its consultative and informative roles with ELCA colleges and universities and foster contact and collaboration among them;
- synods will support colleges and universities on their territory in intentional and visible ways;
- colleges and universities, seminaries, synods, schools, and other ELCA institutions and ministries will initiate and welcome partnerships with one another;
- congregations will support colleges in helping them recruit students and in aiding students financially who attend ELCA colleges and universities;
· ELCA youth and their parents will give careful consideration to Lutheran colleges and universities; and
· advocacy ministries will call on lawmakers to find means of public support for students to attend private and religious colleges and universities and urge lawmakers in those states that make grants to students going to private colleges to maintain them at the highest level possible.
This church individually and corporately should give its schools, colleges, and universities its full loyalty and support so that they faithfully and competently exercise their calling in education.

Supporting Lifelong Learning

Education is a lifelong process and takes a variety of forms, involving non-formal learning experiences as well as each person’s own more formal discipline and study. This ongoing learning may occur in museums, art galleries, planetariums, aquariums, theaters, concert halls, zoos, botanical gardens, nature preserves, book clubs, travel programs, and lecture series. We of the ELCA value and support these non-formal institutions and activities. We also affirm the more formal role of public universities, colleges, and other educational institutions in providing a broad range of extension and continuing education programs that serve an increasingly diverse adult population. We welcome the opportunities for learning provided by new forms of electronic communication.

Just as many congregations offer quality educational experiences for people of all ages to continue to grow in their faith, our Lutheran colleges and universities, seminaries, lifelong learning partners, and outdoor ministries also offer opportunities for lifelong learning in knowledge of the faith as well as in knowledge of the world. The ELCA commends Lutheran colleges and universities for expanding their academic programs to serve the needs of non-traditional students for both graduate and undergraduate studies. We also commend our seminaries and other study centers of this church for responding to the learning needs of both lay and rostered leaders in congregations as well as to the desire of adults of all ages for personal growth in faith and knowledge through lifelong learning.