



Our Calling in Education by Kaari M. Reiersen

WHAT DOES GOD HAVE TO DO WITH EDUCATION?

- ☞ The Lutheran Legacy
- ☞ The God Who Calls Us
- ☞ Our Calling in Education Today

WHAT FAITH WILL OUR CHILDREN HAVE?

- ☞ Faith Formation from Generation to Generation
- ☞ Lifelong Learning
- ☞ “Let the little children come to me”
- ☞ A Mutual Environment of Living the Faith
- ☞ Equipping Faithful and Discerning Students
- ☞ Guidelines for the Ministry of Faith Formation

WILL ALL CHILDREN AND YOUTH HAVE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION?

- ☞ Schools for All
- ☞ The Commitment to Public Schools
- ☞ Expectations for Public Schools
- ☞ Expectations of this Church
- ☞ Equitable Access to High-quality Education for All
- ☞ Evaluating Educational Reforms
- ☞ Moving Toward Equitable Access
- ☞ Counsel to Parents

WILL OUR CHURCH HAVE SCHOOLS & COLLEGES?

WILL OUR SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES HAVE A CHURCH?

- ☞ The Commitment to Lutheran Educational Institutions
- ☞ Lutheran Schools and Centers
- ☞ Lutheran Colleges and Universities
- ☞ Supporting Lifelong Learning

WILL PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION SERVE THE COMMON GOOD?

- ☞ Expectations for Public Universities and Colleges
- ☞ The Commitment to Public Higher Education
- ☞ This Church’s Presence and Campus Ministry
- ☞ Will Students Have Access to Higher Education
- ☞ Living Our Calling

The statement can be downloaded for free from www.elca.org/social statements in English or Spanish. A complimentary printed copy can be requested by calling 800-638-3522; multiple copies can be ordered there for a small fee as well (ITEM001504).

Lutherans have a long and storied history in the field of education, from Martin Luther advocating for the education of females to the extensive network of church-related colleges and universities connected to the ELCA. It is not

surprising that the ELCA should have written a social statement on education—it is only surprising that it was not among the first. *Our Calling in Education* was adopted by more than a two-thirds vote at the 2007 churchwide assembly.

The statement begins with a prologue entitled “Education and Vocation,” in which the concept of *vocation* is introduced—it is at the center of this social statement. Our baptismal vocation urges us to find a place in the world to serve God

Editor's note: This is the last in a series of 10 ELCA social statements that Lutheran Woman Today has highlighted over the past year. The social statements are social teaching and policy documents, adopted since 1991 by a churchwide assembly in accordance with ELCA policies and procedures. Social statements require a two-thirds majority vote.

through particular callings. Our places or callings in the world are as teachers, farmers, bankers, factory workers, and parents, and we serve God by doing the best for others in carrying out these non-church roles we live in.

According to the statement, the Christian role in education is “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.”

The prologue identifies contemporary issues in education like faith formation, equitable access, public education, and support for ELCA institutions that include colleges and ministries related to education (for example, campus).

The statement defines education broadly, as referring to “learning, teaching, and knowing as a dimension of human life.” We are created to learn to know God. As Lutherans, from our heritage we understand that education equips us for our God-given callings in the world. The statement stresses that Lutherans in North America have

historically given great attention to education.

THREE MOVEMENTS

Our Calling in Education contains a creedal statement about vocation and education as a dimension of life that takes shape in three movements. The first section refers to God the creator. We see that creation is ongoing, and that education, which supports human dignity, is part of creation. Creation is, at the same time fallen, and education is necessary for civic righteousness, to preserve the good of creation.

The second section, centered on Jesus Christ, reminds us that we are educated to serve the neighbor, not as a matter of personal salvation or for our own personal advancement. It also reminds us that we follow a savior who was a teacher.

The last section deals with how God calls us through the Holy Spirit—calls the church to education for the vocation given in baptism. We are dependent upon the Holy Spirit to form us and produce the fruit of the spirit. This section also calls us to balance church and secular education.

After this explication of what God has to do with education, the

rest of the statement is structured by four questions that explore basic challenges for the church. Each section is headed by one of these questions and then provides the ELCA’s best insights about how to live out commitment to education for people today.

The statement challenges congregations to consider themselves allies of the public schools.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

The statement raises the critical question, “What Faith Will our Children Have?” and then devotes itself to concerns about the faith formation of children. It affirms that faith formation through education is lifelong and intergenerational. Children themselves—both sinful and moral even as children—are a gift in need of caring guidance

that nurtures them in faith, not just knowledge about the world.

In the tasks of forming children, parents need support from the congregation. The statement also speaks of the church's power and responsibility to equip faithful and discerning youth and young adult students. This section concludes by offering guidelines for the ministry of faith formation.

The need for access to high-quality education for all is a serious concern for this church and this society, and the third section addresses this question. The subsection "schools for all" provides a list of purposes for schools and articulates the ELCA's commitment to the concept of public schools and the work they do.

Among the expectations of public schools would be that schools teach civil righteousness to their students, and that schools teach *about* religion as part of the search for knowledge. Schools should also teach the best current knowledge in science, history, economics, and so forth. The statement challenges congregations to consider themselves allies of the public schools.

The commitment to public schools brings with it a concern that all people should have equitable access to a high quality education as a consequence of their equal worth and dignity. This has not been accomplished, and the statement

recommends some standards to evaluate educational reform in the subsection "Evaluating Educational Reforms." It also sets forth goal such as countering the negative effects of poverty and discrimination, equity in funding, school choice, accountability, and improving educational quality, that need to be addressed if society is to provide true equitable access. The statement offers broad direction on each of these goals while not specifying the particular means to achieve them.

Moving from elementary to higher education, the next section discusses the relations between the ELCA and its schools and colleges. It lists expectations of the ELCA and of the schools, as well as expectations of ELCA colleges and universities.

FOR THE GOOD OF ALL

The last question the statement considers is whether public higher education will serve the common good. Just as primary and secondary education, public universities and colleges are expected to serve the common good. The commitment to public higher education includes honoring community and technical colleges and fostering free inquiry, that is, not seeking to restrict knowledge.

Studying people and cultures formerly ignored and commending the humanities, arts, and social

sciences are also mentioned in this section.

The matter of campus ministries at public colleges and universities receives considerable attention in a section of its own. Campus ministries live in the tension of addressing controversy but are also places of welcome. They are expected to be primarily places that preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. The lack of financial support from the ELCA is noted in this section.

In this last section, the question of access is raised again, but with respect to higher education. The ever-increasing costs of education limit access and deter completion of degrees for many students. The statement urges the church towards advocacy to support funding for higher education, especially for minority and low-income students.

Returning to the central idea of vocation, the statement's conclusion leaves each of us with a challenge: "May we faithfully and boldly be a teaching and learning church, educating in the faith for vocation and striving with others so that all people have equitable access to a high quality education." 🌸

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