

Shared Identify and Shared Work: A Proposal to Restructure the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities

Overview

It is proposed that the colleges and universities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America align themselves in a restructured Network to advance their shared identity and mission as schools standing in the five hundred year intellectual tradition of the global Lutheran community. The proposal recommends (a) that the churchwide organization and the colleges and universities partner to create the Network; (b) that the Network operate through the churchwide organization, with churchwide staff serving as staff of the Network; and (c) that the Network will continue to sponsor LECNA, in collaboration with the schools of the Concordia University System and other institutions claiming a Lutheran identity and mission. An assessment of the restructured Network under this plan will occur no later than five years after the inception of the restructured Network.

Background

Historically the national structures of the Lutheran churches in the United States sustained relationships among Lutheran institutions of higher education and promoted their shared identity and mission. During the decade of the 2000s, this function became increasingly difficult for the churchwide organization of the ELCA to sustain owing to reductions in financial capacity (the budget of the churchwide organization shrank from approximately \$80,000,000 in 2000 to approximately \$45,000,000 in 2010) and a concomitant reduction in staffing for higher education (dropping from nearly 4 FTE in 2000 to $\frac{3}{4}$ FTE in 2010). Conversations during the annual meetings of college and university presidents have focused on this problem since 2010, and in 2013 the presidents agreed to move toward restructuring their network. At the meeting in February 2014, the presidents accepted a recommendation from President Jack Ohle of Gustavus Adolphus College that an effort would be made to develop a proposal for a restructured network by summer 2014.

The Proposal

We are colleges and universities of the ELCA. Our common calling is to be excellent schools that educate students for lives of meaning and purpose in the world. Our academic missions and institutional identities are grounded in specific geographical, ethnic, cultural and academic contexts, but have in common a Lutheran heritage that has shaped those missions and identities in distinctive and relevant ways. Though we maintain various governance relationships with the ELCA, and though many involved in the leadership and governance of the colleges and universities of the ELCA are not Lutherans or members of ELCA congregations, we believe that our educational commitments are vital and vibrant expressions of the ELCA. The Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities embodies our shared identity and mission.

I. Organizational Plan

a. Purposes of the Network

- Maintaining dialogue among members institutions about our shared identity and mission as the ELCA in higher education;
- Articulating the vision of higher education in the Lutheran intellectual tradition;
- Sustaining relationships among our institutions and institutions with a shared identity and mission, between our institutions and other expressions of the ELCA, and between our Network and other institutions and associations of non-profit higher education;

- Developing institutional leadership in the Network (a) by gathering personnel regularly for dialogue on our common future and to share best practices; (b) through programs for executive, administrative and faculty development; and, (c) through a Network operated consulting service;
- Providing other programs and services.

b. Structure and Staffing

The restructured Network will have a full time Executive Director and a full time office administrator. It will operate through the churchwide organization of the ELCA, with existing churchwide staff and with financing from both the churchwide organization and the colleges and universities. The Network shall be governed by the presidents of the colleges and universities who will constitute the Network's Board of Directors. The Board shall meet annually. Oversight of the Network shall be delegated to the Board's Officers and Executive Committee. All these matter shall be described in the Network's constitution.

c. Budget

Funding for the Network will come from the churchwide organization and the member institutions. The Network shall request that the LECNA Board of Directors amend its dues structure in light of this proposal and its implications for LECNA.

d. Network Evaluation

Members agree to maintain this organizational plan for the Network for three-to-five years after it begins operations. Before the end of the period, the Executive Committee will assess the organizational plan. A recommendation for any changes to the plan will be presented to an annual meeting of the presidents for action.

II. Network Activities

a. A Hybrid Network

Organizations tend to conduct their activities in either a highly centralized or highly distributed manner. This organization will function as a Network that is a hybrid of the two organizational types, with some activities managed centrally by Network staff and some managed by staff of member institutions.

b. Participation in Network Activities

Participation in Network activities will be at the discretion of each member institution. No member shall be required to participate in a centrally administered activity of the Network, and no member shall be required to participate in or accept responsibility for a distributed activity of the Network.

c. Implementation and Coordination of Network Activity

- Initial activity of the Network to fulfill the purposes set forth above in section I(a) will include received practices of recent years. These practices will be reviewed concurrently by the Executive Committee to determine what practices should be continued or ceased.
- Changes in Network activities will be approved by the Executive Committee upon recommendation of the President or Executive Director of the Network.
- The Executive Director will coordinate activity distributed to a Network member or members for implementation and management.