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The Importance of Connection

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The Importance of Connection

I once had the opportunity to serve under a great administrator at my institution that valued and encouraged me to speak up when moved. I definitely felt moved to write this personal insight at the end of the 2023 VOLHE Conference.

The “So that We, Too, May Flourish” Conference, was a refreshing and necessary event for my own vocational flourishing. This opportunity to allow those that support the NECU’s common calling of “Called and empowered to serve the neighbor so that all may flourish” is one of the first opportunities for me to interact with others outside my institution, since the COVID-19 pandemic, and everything that came with it. It allowed me the opportunity to sit among many that value the desire to dismantle systems of oppression that are so entrenched in our society, and even among some of our dear Lutheran institutions. Yes! We do need to be “real” with each other and recognize that those systems are present, even in our own well-meaning institutions. An example of this came up while listening to how some of the attendees shared their own views and definitions about some of our students. No need to get defensive, if we are truly committed to assisting our students, and ourselves, in serving our neighbors so we may flourish with them. This being my second time attending this conference, allowed me the opportunity to recharge my soul and create new connections with other well-meaning folks across our great institutions.

The topics covered during the conference were inspiring and provided hope for a weary DEI advocate. The thought-provoking plenary sessions reminded me that the

desire to speak up for others, students and those working with them, is important. I will say that the discernment about burnout, reminded me that this very important topic is probably one that many of our institutions may not be willing to look into. This may be because the concept of asking staff and faculty to do more without looking into what other duties can be stopped, is a tough one. The conversations I had with several attendees demonstrated that this may be an important discussion to have on each campus to minimize burnout and support what we really want to achieve—flourishment for all.

There were other great sessions such as the Talking Circle on Indigenous Issues presented by the Luther College in Regina, Canada, and the Racial Healing Circle presented by Dr. Monica Smith. These sessions allowed participants to dive deep into issues of racial and diversity identity and how they continue to affect us. I felt that these discussions and the burnout issue hit a cord with many attendees. At the end of this gathering, the question is, whether we want to take on the challenges to create significant change or just leave it all on Augsburg’s beautiful campus? What are we really willing to do to enhance true flourishing?

One last thought, authentic connections to others are necessary for all of us to continue to do the hard work that



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we are doing. It was refreshing to see two of our NECU's Presidents be present to hear the importance of the topics discussed. Again, the reality is that dismantling systems of oppression and engaging in caring, tough conversations is

serious hard work but having gatherings such as this, allow for us to build valuable connections to recharge the soul for this long journey.

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Spring 2024 "Vocation as Action in the Affirmative"

Focus: Affirmative Action and Lutheran Higher Education

The legacy and continuing practice of Lutheran reforms related to education include expanding access, opportunity, and inclusion across all populations in society. In the Spring 2024 issue we are especially interested in including Lutheran theological, educational, and sociological perspectives related to "Affirmative Action."

In its recent decisions—*SFFA v. Harvard* and *SFFA v. UNC*—the Supreme Court overturned an established equal protection law and effectively eliminated the use of affirmative action in college admissions. The court's decision disregards prior precedent, as well as the societal realities of race discrimination and inequality. How are colleges and universities in the Network of Lutheran Higher Education (NECU) called to grapple with the concrete implications of these SCOTUS decisions?

We invite people working in different disciplinary perspectives and departments to contribute short

pieces of 500 words or extended essays of 1500-2500 words on topics related to affirmative action. If you would like to be in conversation about an idea that is brewing, please be in touch with Rev. Lamont Anthony Wells, Executive Director of NECU or the editor of *Intersections*, Colleen Windham-Hughes: windhamh@callutheran.edu

Possible content:

- A brief insight from your research, teaching, or advocacy
- Your perspective based on your campus/position/location
- Review/update/commentary on the 2007 ELCA Social Statement on Our Calling in Education
- Student perspectives on any of the above—art, posters, essays, blogs