

## GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS COLLEGE: STATEMENT OF CHURCH RELATEDNESS

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By Darrell Jodock

Gustavus affirms its identity as a church-related college. This relationship puts it in partnership with the Lutheran Church (ELCA), though not under its direct control. The relationship is one of mutual benefit.

The living Lutheran tradition provides a foundation for the College's educational vision. Guided by that vision and by the ideals of the liberal arts, the College's goal is to seek wisdom and to educate community-oriented leaders to serve society. To this end, Gustavus strives for academic excellence. Because genuine service must be guided by a profound understanding of people and by accurate information about the world, the underlying tradition supports intellectual achievement, creativity, and discovery in the arts, the sciences, and the humanities. It understands genuine service to involve a courageous commitment to justice, love, wholeness, and human dignity, a commitment that must often be carried out in the face of countervailing societal pressures.

At the same time as the Lutheran tradition supports a commitment to academic excellence, it also suggests caution regarding the misuse and limitations of knowledge. This caution grows out of its recognition that the purpose of knowledge is to enhance wisdom, and the purpose of wisdom is to serve humans effectively and well. Unyielding ideologies, whether secular or religious, claim to know more than is warranted, and ultimately harm humans rather than assist them.

The College embraces the tradition's sense of wonder—a wonder that nourishes curiosity as well as caution; a wonder that inspires music, art, and literature; a wonder that inspires lives of gratitude and service.

In addition, it affirms that tradition's understanding of human beings, regarding them, though flawed and subject to the pressures of societal evil, to be intended for freedom and responsibility. This freedom, as Martin Luther described it, is both a freedom from enslavement to false ideas and distorted priorities and a freedom for full, humane, courageously ethical living. Here the College's educational vision incorporates the insights of the liberal arts — that is, of those studies that foster human freedom — alongside those of the Lutheran tradition. For the latter, the chief ethical responsibility is to serve the community and the neighbor, and to this service every person is called. As an expression of genuine freedom, such service grows out of gratitude for the gifts of life. Moreover, the way to this genuine freedom is not through a diminishment of communal ties, ecological responsibility, and religious awareness but through a deeper, reconceived involvement. Genuine freedom thus acknowledges multiple levels of connectedness.

The Lutheran tradition provides a foundation for inclusiveness. It is global in scope. It sees God active in the entire world, behind the scenes, working through human agency to foster human dignity, justice, and wholeness. It honors contributions from anyone anywhere to the well being of others. The breadth of this theological outlook invites the College to understand its educational purpose equally broadly, while at the same time without any contradiction, acknowledging that its educational vision is formed and shaped by the insights of the Christian faith. The College, quite appropriately, seeks to create and sustain an environment in which people of many different

backgrounds can together pursue wisdom and learning, with each member of the academic community benefiting from the insights brought by others.

Gustavus is thus both a rooted and an inclusive community, rooted in an educational vision shaped by the Lutheran tradition, and inclusive in seeking ways to serve society as a whole and welcoming all who share that educational vision. To say that such rootedness and inclusiveness are compatible does not imply that their implications are easily decided. The College is a community of deliberation. One topic for ongoing discussion is how best to serve contemporary society. Though faith and reason are not incompatible, their exact relationship is a matter of exploration. The Lutheran tradition endorses the importance of ongoing examination, discussion, and debate and supports freedom of inquiry as essential to constructive deliberation.

This understanding of the relationship between rootedness and inclusivity distinguishes the College from other types of institutions. Unlike a secular institution, Gustavus maintains an ongoing dialogue with its own religious tradition. It takes the insights and goals of that tradition seriously. In ways appropriate to an academic institution, it explores them and holds them up for consideration. Unlike a sectarian institution, it does not expect internal conformity to any one religious outlook, nor does it see itself as primarily training members of and for a particular faith community. It educates leaders to serve the world, including those who choose to serve the world through the church.

Though the church and the College are intertwined and the church is present in the College's midst, the College and the church are distinguishable. A church is a community of believers, called together by the good news regarding Jesus Christ. Gustavus offers opportunities for worship, provides pastoral care through its chaplains and others, fosters lives of service, and invites its faculty and staff to mentor students into a mature faith as well as into academic disciplines, but the College is not itself a church. Gustavus is an educational community that is built around the Lutheran Church's understanding of the purpose of education, its vision of a transformed world, and its expectations regarding the convergence of faith, reason, and service.

As a church-related college, Gustavus is called to serve the world. It does so by seeking the truth and speaking truthfully, by educating students and nurturing them as whole persons, by raising up courageously compassionate communal leaders, by modeling constructive deliberation, by cooperating creatively with community partners, and by standing for justice. As a church-related college, Gustavus also seeks to assist the community of faith, not only by educating its future leaders but also by inspiring in its members a lively vision of a transformed world and by helping to equip them to care for that world more effectively.

Gustavus affirms its connection to the Lutheran Church and its rootedness in the Lutheran tradition, because these relationships are essential to its identity and because they deepen and strengthen its educational mission as a residential, liberal arts college.



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