

Here I Study!

What it means to attend a
Lutheran college or university



Written by: Dennis Sepper
Illustrated by: Carl Petersen

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Martin Luther
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So, you're thinking about choosing a Lutheran college or university to call home for the next four years. Well, let me introduce myself. I am Martin Luther, the guy Lutherans are named after. Now don't confuse me with the civil rights leader who lived in the 1960s - that was Martin Luther King Jr. I lived some 500 years ago in the eastern part of Germany. Along with being a professor of religion at Wittenberg University, I served as a pastor on the campus and in the city of Wittenberg.

The reformation of the Catholic Church I started began in 1517 as a debate on the campus of Wittenberg University. Partly because of that academic beginning, Lutherans have always had a deep commitment to education at all levels, including colleges and universities.

I am glad you are thinking about being a part of this Lutheran tradition of higher education, but before you begin, here are a few things you might want to know about Lutherans and how we approach education.

God Created ... God said, “It is Good.”

Lutherans take life and the world seriously because God created the world and all life. Lutherans celebrate life and rejoice in the world because God declares it to be “good.” What that means is that all creation is open to our study and exploration. All disciplines - geology, biology, philosophy, languages, nursing, anthropology, physical education, business, religion (my personal favorite), and all others - are to be freely studied on their own terms. For example, the natural sciences tell us more about the intricacies of the world than the Bible and the social sciences inform our understanding of what it means to be a human person.

We may not all agree on theories, evidence and conclusions, but as we enter the discussion, we enter into a search for truth that is exciting and intellectually stimulating. You will be challenged in what you believe about the world and human life, you will learn how to think critically while respecting others' opinions, and you will learn how to present your values, opinions, beliefs and ideas clearly. All the while you will grow as a beloved child of God!

Lord I Believe, Help My Unbelief!

Lutherans believe that faith is large enough to embrace doubt and questions. This means that doubt is not something to be feared or something that makes our belief less sincere nor are questions to be avoided. They're normal and valuable tools to challenge us, often enriching our faith and leading us to spiritual growth. Oh my, there were many times when I doubted God and ques-





tioned what people said about God even though I was a professor of religion and a pastor.

On our journey through life with God, sometimes we are very sure and secure, but at other times things are called into question. We wrestle with the big questions of life like: Who is God? Why is life so fragile? Why do people have to suffer? What am I doing here? Is there a purpose to life and to my life?

Lutherans are not afraid to ask the tough questions and wrestle with faith and doubt because we believe that God is there in the midst of those questions and struggles. As creatures of God, we are never going to be perfect in thought, word or deed. We remain faithful, not through our perfection in daily life, but through our trust in God's presence and in God's care - even at those times when we doubt.

My Ways Are Not Your Ways, My Thoughts Are Not Your Thoughts

Sometimes people say that Lutherans are very humble people. I'm not so sure that's always true. However, Lutherans do have an acute awareness that God is God, the sovereign creator, and that we are God's creatures. Because of that, Lutherans believe there is a danger in making absolute claims to truth in academic studies and in religion.

Lutherans believe that God does reveal truth about God, the world and life. We believe that humans can understand that truth. However, when Lutherans proclaim the truth, they are always aware that we do so with a limited mind. As I said, we are not God and, therefore, we are not perfect or all-knowing. There is always the chance we could be wrong, and, therefore, the opinions of others are important because

they might lead us to an even greater truth. God and the world are greater than us and will always remain a mystery. Life is ambiguous and full of paradoxes. Things change; new evidence is found. The world is not static. God is not static (thank goodness!), and we need to be open to new ideas and new revelations.

God Has Given Gifts to All to Build Up the Community

I've already mentioned that Lutherans value education (in fact, I was the first person to advocate for a public school system where every child would have a chance to learn). But to be more specific, Lutherans value a broad education. We call it a liberal arts education today, but it simply means that, even though we might specialize in one academic subject, say computer science, our love of God's creation causes us to desire knowledge in all areas of study and human endeavor. So we encourage people to read history and poetry, to sing or play a musical instrument, to study the Bible using many tools and explore the ideas of religious scholars, to consider the thoughts of the great philosophers and the great scientists, to be involved in campus and community clubs and organizations as members and leaders, to study on campus and to study internationally, to study business or nursing, to be involved in athletics, to study the great literature of the world - anything that will help them understand and appreciate creation and human life more fully.

We honor God by exploring God's creation and the work of God's creatures, all the while appreciating and learning to respect the gifts of others.

You Did Not Choose Me, I Chose You

Lutherans believe in a thing called "vocation" (which comes from a Latin word that means "to call"). The technical name doesn't matter much, but the idea does. We believe that God calls us into certain roles, relationships and occupations in order for us to serve God and to serve other people. We

believe that right now God is calling you to be a student.

As a student at a Lutheran college or university you will not only go to class, study and receive grades! You will also explore how your academic studies intersect with your beliefs, your faith and your values. No one will tell you what to believe or how to believe, but many people will assist you on this journey of faith and learning.

As this dialogue between faith and reason, between faith and learning, takes place, you will be challenged to develop a world view and a lifestyle that includes thoughtful inquiry, service and care for the earth and for your neighbor. It's exciting, isn't it? God calls you by name to be the best student you can be, for by doing so you honor and serve God.

As a part of your "vocation" as a student, you will have opportunities to serve others through community service, religious activities, as a leader in one of the many clubs and organizations on campus or as a member of student government. In fact, God may call you to serve in ways you may not even know yet. That is part of the excitement of a life's journey spent with God and life at a Lutheran college or university. There is never a dull moment. That is not to say life is always easy, it's not. However, the journey is worth the struggle. I'm glad that God is calling you to be a student at a Lutheran college or university!

Rejoice Always! Again, I Say Rejoice!

Lutherans are a people who embrace life with a great deal of joy because we have faith; we trust that God is faithful to us. We don't fear the world



because we know that the world cannot overcome us. We rejoice in human culture while at times being very critical of certain aspects of culture that are oppressive or exploitative or dehumanizing.

We don't fear ideas, even the controversial ones, because we trust that in our struggle to understand ideas and face them critically with faith, reason, the Bible and the Christian tradition, God will lead us to a measure of truth. And so we rejoice as we discuss and debate a number of issues.

We don't fear those who are not like us because we know that others have a perspective we might need to hear. We embrace diversity with great joy. On our campuses we have professors, staff and students of every race, many nationalities, different Christian traditions, different faiths, and no faith. We do not see this as a weakness but as a great strength for it is in the interchange of differing perspectives and ideas that most often truth is found. At a Lutheran college or university, you will find a great variety of people

from many cultures and from all walks of life. We embrace this diversity as a gift from God to be treasured.



Arising out of our diversity comes a strong community, a community in which we come together because we know that we need other people and they need us. Part

of the rhythm of life at a Lutheran college or university is our care and concern for one another. Oh, we may passionately debate ideas until 2 in the morning and compete against each other in intramural sports, but we never stop caring about one another, looking for ways to support one another, praying for one another and working side-by-side to serve the greater community and advocating for justice and mercy in our world.



Finally, Lutherans like to have fun. We laugh a lot because laughter is a gift of God. This world and our very lives are joyfully given to us by God as precious gifts that are to be celebrated with joy and thanksgiving. Our joy honors God, and it is with a joyful heart that we serve God, looking for any opportunity to assist a neighbor in need.

If that's the kind of atmosphere you are looking for in your higher education experience, then you will make the right choice by coming to a Lutheran college or university.

And by the way, while you're at the Lutheran college or university, you can learn more about me! I am quite a charming fellow once you get to know me.

God's blessing on you and on your vocation as a college student. Embrace your college education and experience with seriousness and joy. Hang on to your hat and fasten your seat belt. It will be the time of your life.

enjoy!

For more information:

About the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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