



Network of
ELCA Colleges
and Universities

THE VOCATION OF LUTHERAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The Thirty-First Annual Conference
Convened by the Network of Colleges and Universities,
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

**“Beyond Walls, For the Common Good: Lutheran
Higher Education and Civic Responsibility”**

Augsburg University, Minneapolis, Minnesota
July 13-15, 2026

Monday, July 13, 2026

4:00 - 4:30pm **Welcome, Conference Overview, and Greetings**
Rev. Lamont Wells, NECU Executive Director
(*Hoversten Chapel, Foss Center*)

PLENARY SESSION #1

4:30 - 5:30pm **Beyond Walls, For the Common Good**
Dr. Stephanie Herseth-Sandlin, President, Augustana University
(*Hoversten Chapel, Foss Center*)

5:30 - 5:40 pm **Break**
(*Hoversten Chapel, Foss Center*)

5:40 - 5:50 pm **NECU Website Walkthrough**
(*Hoversten Chapel, Foss Center*)

5:50 - 6:30 pm **Affinity Group Meet & Greet**
(*Hoversten Chapel, Foss Center*)

6:30 - 7:45 pm **Opening Dinner and Reception**
(*Hoversten Chapel, Foss Center*)

Tuesday, July 14, 2026

7:30 - 8:45 am **Breakfast**
(*Central Commons in Christensen Center*)

8:45 - 9:00 am **Sacred Pause**
Rev. Babette Chatman, University Pastor, Augsburg University
(*Hoversten Chapel, Foss Center*)

PLENARY SESSION #2

9:00 - 9:30 am **Theme Development**
Rev. Lamont Wells, NECU Executive Director
(*Hoversten Chapel, Foss Center*)

9:30 - 10:45 am **The Unsettling Possibilities of a Good Held in Common: Engaging the ELCA Social Statement *Faith and Civic Life* (2025) on Campuses Today**
Dr. Anthony Bateza, Associate Professor & Department Chair, St. Olaf College
(*Hoversten Chapel, Foss Center*)

10:45 - 11:00 am **Break**

11:00 – 12:00 pm **Panel - Common Ground: Weaving Networks of Faith, Learning & Neighborhood Thriving**
Facilitator: Gretchen Roeck, Program Development at the Riverside Innovation Hub
(*Hoversten Chapel, Foss Center*)

12:00 – 12:45 pm **Lunch** (*Central Commons in Christensen Center*)

CONCURRENT SESSION AND WORKSHOPS

(*Breakout spaces as assigned in Hagfors Center. Full description of each session at the end of the itinerary.*)

1:00 - 2:00 pm **Concurrent Sessions #1**

2:00 - 2:15 pm **Break**

2:15 - 3:15 pm **Concurrent Sessions #2**

PLENARY SESSION #3

3:30 – 4:15 pm **Resilience in Higher Education**
Dr. Kyle Farmbry, Professor, George Washington University
(*Hoversten Chapel*)

4:15 – 4:30 pm **Cohort Updates**
Leaders from the Network
(*Hoversten Chapel*)

4:30 pm **Reception**
(*Foss Atrium*)

Dinner and Evening on Your Own in Minneapolis

Wednesday, July 15, 2026

7:30 - 8:30 am **Checkout**
(*Anderson Residence Hall, Lobby*)

7:30 - 8:45 am **Breakfast**
(*Central Commons*)

8:45 – 9:00 am **Sacred Pause**
Rev. Babette Chatman, University Pastor, Augsburg University
(*Hoversten Chapel, Foss Center*)

PLENARY SESSION #4

9:00 - 10:45 am **Peace Growing: How Lutheran Higher Education Leaders Can Resist Tyranny, Transform Democracy, and Contribute to the World's Flourishing**
Dr. Jon Pahl, Author & Professor, United Lutheran Seminary
(*Hoversten Chapel, Foss Center*)

10:45 - 11:00 am **Break**

PLENARY SESSION #5

11:00 - 11:15 am	Conference Wrap-Up Jeremy Myers, Augsburg University & Marit Trelstad, Pacific Lutheran University (<i>Hoversten Chapel, Foss Center</i>)
11:15– 12:15 pm	Strength in Numbers: Access, Finances and Coalition - Institutional Planning (<i>Hoversten Chapel, Foss Center</i>)
12:15 - 1:00 pm	Lunch (To-go boxes available in <i>Hoversten Chapel Concourse</i>)
1:00pm	Departure

CONCURRENT SESSIONS: OFFERINGS

Concurrent Session 1:

1. An Empire of Sacrifice: Religious Violence in America's Past and Present, and How to End It, Dr. Jon Pahl, Hoversten Chapel
2. Finding Common Ground: Cultivating Thriving Neighborhood Networks, Jenean Gilmer and Brenna Zeimet, Hagfors 103
3. Sustaining Campus as a Civic Community, William O'Brochta, Emma Bohmann, and Andie Lozano-Lomeli, Hagfors 106
4. Build Bridges, Not Walls: International Education that Fosters the Local & Global Common Good, Joseph Connelly and Dr. Ann Lutterman-Aguilar, Hagfors 151

Concurrent Session 2:

1. The Unsettling Possibilities of a Good Held in Common: Engaging the ELCA Social Statement *Faith and Civic Life* (2025) on Campuses Today, Dr. Anthony Bateza, Hoversten Chapel
2. Finding Common Ground: Cultivating Thriving Neighborhood Networks, Jenean Gilmer and Brenna Zeimet, Hagfors 103
3. Sustaining Campus as a Civic Community, William O'Brochta, Emma Bohmann, and Andie Lozano-Lomeli, Hagfors 106
4. Build Bridges, Not Walls: International Education that Fosters the Local & Global Common Good, Joseph Connelly and Dr. Ann Lutterman-Aguilar, Hagfors 151

CONCURRENT SESSIONS: DESCRIPTIONS

An Empire of Sacrifice: Religious Violence in America's Past and Present, and How to End It -
(Concurrent session 1) - Hoversten Chapel

Jon Pahl, Professor & Author | United Lutheran Seminary

Despite recent efforts to sanitize the history of the United States, the history of the nation reveals recurrent (and intersecting) episodes of brutal violence, from genocide of native Americans, through slavery, gendered violence and war. Today, U.S. policy features ongoing structural systems that cause profound suffering--an *Empire of Sacrifice*, as the title of Jon Pahl's book puts it. Changing these structures requires studying the episodes of violence to understand their causes, and then learning from peacemakers how to transform them. Drawing from his book and from his current research on "Peacegrowing," Jon Pahl will invite participants into an interactive workshop dedicated to truth-telling about the United States, and dedicated to hope for "the better angels of our nature" to prevail.

Finding Common Ground: Cultivating Thriving Neighborhood Networks - (Concurrent Sessions 1 & 2) - Hagfors 103

Jenean Gilmer, Public Historian, Educator and Community Organizer

Brenna Zeiment, Program Manager | Riverside Innovation hub

How does a university deepen their commitment to thriving in their local community? Learn how to engage with neighbors with everyday practices that shift imaginations around community relationships and lead to new ways of being community together. Move from community service to mutual aid, from mindsets of scarcity to abundance, from grind culture to collective resilience.

Sustaining Campus as a Civic Community- (Concurrent sessions 1 & 2) - Hagfors 106

William O'Brochta, Emma Bohmann, and Andie Lozano-Lomeli, Texas Lutheran University

This session features faculty and students who are involved in working to cultivate civic engagement on campus. Participants will discuss how on-campus civic engagement provides an accessible way to introduce civic issues that students can bring into their local communities. We will pay special attention to how a clear focus on Lutheran values can invite all students into an on-campus civic community in a way that is lasting and sustainable. Students will describe the importance of co-creation in on-campus civic engagement work, and participants will be invited to engage in collaborative civic engagement discussions across campuses.

Build Bridges, Not Walls: International Education that Fosters the Local & Global Common Good- (Concurrent sessions 1 & 2) - Hagfors 151

Joseph Connelly, Institutional Relations Manager and Program Facilitator | Augsburg University – Center for Global Education and Experience

Ann Luttermann-Aguilar, Augsburg CGEE Mexico Site Director and Global Faculty | Augsburg University – Center for Global Education and Experience

We will engage the participants in conversation regarding the ways in which immersive, justice-oriented international education can help foster civic engagement that foment both the local and global common good by broadening and deepening students' understanding of who our "neighbors" are. We will share examples from both semester-long and short-term faculty-led programs sponsored by Augsburg University's Center for Global Education and Experience (CGEE), which have heightened students' sense of responsibility for civic issues and provide hope that change is possible by meeting directly with people of faith and other leaders around the globe who are building bridges of understanding and inclusion instead of walls that exclude and oppress.

We will highlight ways in which students have not only learned more about their global neighbors and their civic responsibilities through study abroad but also engaged in education and advocacy efforts upon return home. For example, students who studied in Mexico have published articles in hometown papers and podcasts on radio stations that advocate for the rights of undocumented immigrants in their communities, while students who have studied in southern Africa have joined efforts to combat racism in their home communities.

We will discuss opportunities for faculty and staff from other universities to partner with CGEE, answer questions, and conclude with small group conversations about your own ideas about and experiences with international education that foster the local and global common good.

The Unsettling Possibilities of a Good Held in Common: Engaging the ELCA Social Statement *Faith and Civic Life* (2025) on Campuses Today - (Concurrent session 2) - Hoversten Chapel

Anthony Bateza, Associate Professor & Department Chair | St. Olaf College

This session is a follow-up to his keynote on the understanding and pedagogical frameworks to teach and to integrate into Lutheran Higher Education the tenets of the ELCA Social Statement on Faith and Civic Life. It is a deeper dive into the social statement with attention to details about formation, values, and the character of higher education.

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Plenary Presenter and Moderator Biographies

ANTHONY BATEZA is a specialist in Martin Luther, moral theology, and Christian ethics. Luther's political theology is his primary area of research, focusing on the reformer's understanding of human agency and his relationship with the virtue tradition and Augustinian thought. He is also personally and professionally invested in questions of race, identity, and social justice. He has written on Black liberation theology and connections between Lutheran teaching and confronting racism in the United States.

Dr. Bateza teaches a variety of courses in the religion department that connect theological and historical questions with contemporary challenges. He has taught in the Enduring Conversations program and currently serves as the program director of the Race and Ethnic Studies program (RACE) and chair of the Race, Ethnic, Gender, and Sexuality Studies department (REGSS).

Outside of the classroom, Dr. Bateza is involved in a number of important projects at St. Olaf that center the college's strategic efforts to center character and leadership. With the support of an [Academic Leadership Fellowship](#) from the Associated Colleges of the Midwest, he serves as the Special Assistant to the Provost and is helping to develop an Academy for Leadership and Character.

He is also the principal investigator on the college's "Character in Community" project, a three-year effort designed to foster the disposition and capacity of St. Olaf students to engage in intentional character development, oriented to discern and pursue the common good, by working in community to identify, assess, and apply learning from exemplars. This project is supported through the Educating Character Initiative, a part of Wake Forest University [Program for Leadership and Character](#), funded by the Lilly Endowment Inc., which aims to support a wide community of more than 400 institutions to educate character within colleges and universities.

Dr. Bateza has earned degrees from Iowa State University (B.S, 2002), the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (M.Div., 2006), and Princeton Theological Seminary (Ph.D., 2017). He is an ordained pastor in the Lutheran Church (ELCA) and frequently speaks in congregational settings and at church events.

Dr. Bateza lives in Northfield with his wife, Cynthia, their two children, Austen and Magdalene, and their loveable dog Charlie. In his free time, he enjoys cycling, board games, comic books, and cooking.

REV. BABETTE CHATMAN is an Augsburg University graduate and serves as one of our University Pastors. Prior to joining the campus ministry team full time in 2019, Pastor Babette served as a community collaborative partner with Campus Ministry and was the Associate Pastor of [Redeemer Lutheran Church](#) in Minneapolis. She also co-chaired the Mission Table on the Minneapolis Area Synod Council.

Babette offered a distinctive presence and service at Redeemer Center for Life. Under her direction, Redeemer Center's housing program developed into a highly effective and well-regarded model for resident empowerment and community building. Babette anchored Redeemer Center's Housing and Transition Program (HAT), mentoring young adults towards healthy, confident adulthood through training in life skills, empowerment, and relationship-building with residents and organizations on a daily basis.

GRETCHEN ROECK is the Program Development Specialist for the Riverside Innovation Hub at Augsburg University. The Hub exists to accompany, equip and activate people in loving their neighbors better - relationally, interdependently, and collaboratively, towards the mending of the world. Gretchen joins the team after serving as the Program Director for The Confluence at Augsburg University, a place-based and vocational exploration program for high school students. Gretchen is an ordained Episcopal priest who has served faith communities in the Twin Cities metro, particularly working with children, youth, families and young adults. She is passionate about walking alongside others in their spiritual and vocational journeys. She is committed to building and sustaining safe, inclusive and welcoming communities that lead towards health and wholeness for individuals and their broader communities. Creating safe, supportive and loving spaces extends to Gretchen's personal life -- she is the mother of two fun and creative boys. Together they share a home in Minneapolis with their friendly but anxious dog and sweet cat.

JEREMY MYERS is the Bernhard M. Christensen professor of religion and vocation and the executive director of the Christensen Center for Vocation. He has been a member of the Religion and Philosophy faculty since 2006. Over the years his research, writing, and teaching interests have included the religious experiences of youth and young adults, the involvement of faith-based organizations with the common good, and the various ways individuals feel inspired, equipped, and empowered to help their neighbors, communities, and worlds thrive. A few of his favorite things: dark roast coffee (no cream), the river, the woods, his kids, a sunset, the smell after it rains, and questions that have no easy answers.

JON PAHL is a historian, author, teacher, preacher, researcher, business-planner, community activist and musician. He has taught at Valparaiso, Temple, and Princeton Universities, and since 2000 at the Lutheran Seminary.

As an author, Dr. Pahl's most recent book is the first critical biography in English of the controversial Turkish Muslim preacher Fethullah Gülen, entitled [**Fethullah Gülen: A Life of Hizmet--Why a Muslim Scholar in Pennsylvania Matters to the World.**](#) It has been translated into over a dozen languages. He has also published six other books, including [**Empire of Sacrifice: The Religious Origins of American Violence**](#), [**Shopping Malls and Other Sacred Spaces**](#), and [**Youth Ministry in Modern America: 1930-the Present.**](#)

Dr. Pahl has been intimately involved in several successful start-ups, including the [**Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth**](#), the [**ULS Master of Arts in Public Leadership program**](#), and most recently [**The Brain Center of Green Bay**](#). The latter, a nonprofit dedicated to brain health and to assisting people dealing with neurodegenerative diseases, is one of the fruits of his three-year tenure (ended June 1, 2021) as Minister of Faith Formation and Community Engagement at Union Congregational United Church of Christ in Green Bay.

Dr. Pahl's current research continues to focus on religions, violence, and peace-growing, along with research on trees in the history of Christianity. That latter project studies the arboreal theology of early Christians, and the consequences of the modern failure to recognize the spiritual qualities of living trees.

Dr. Pahl is a widely-sought public speaker and preacher. He has spoken with audiences from Accra, Ghana to Anaheim, California, including at Cambridge, Oxford, Princeton, Stanford, Yale, and many other colleges, universities, churches, bookstores, mosques, libraries and other public settings all over the globe. He enjoys preaching and teaching at local congregations.

As an avid amateur saxophonist, Jon has written several dozen liturgies for congregations incorporating jazz standards. He and his brothers, Andy and David, have an eclectic cover band, Brösbee, which plays for good causes.

Jon Pahl lives on Pigeon Lake in Clintonville, Wisconsin, where he is Chair of the Board of Commissioners of the [**Pigeon Lake Protection and Rehabilitation District**](#). Jon has been married to Lisa for 43 years; they have three grown children—Justin, Nathan, and Rheanne. Jon and Lisa also care for a dog (Otis) and a cat (Layla), along with African cichlid fish and a three-acre woods dotted with birch, maples, and 38 oak trees that Jon has dubbed his “Forest of the Ancestors.” Jon and Lisa enjoy spending time with their extended family, gardening, and enjoying all Wisconsin sports.

KYLE FARMBRY is currently serving as a Visiting Research Professor in the [**Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration at The George Washington University**](#) (GW), where he conducts research on community economic development and the current challenges facing the higher education sector. At GW, he has been actively involved in developing the [**Equitable Aging**](#) project, which explores current challenges related to economic, health, and other disparities across groups in the nation's rapidly aging population. In addition to his work at GW, Farmbry is also serving as a Non-Residential Fellow at the Cornell University Center for Global Democracy. He is a former president of Guilford College, and a former dean of the Graduate School at Rutgers University-Newark. He has also served on the faculty of Rutgers University-Newark, the University of Texas at San Antonio, San Diego State University, and Grand Valley State University.

Dr. Farmbry has served as a Fulbright Fellow in South Africa (2009) and Malta (2016) and an American Council on Education Fellow at South Africa's University of Pretoria (2018). His research and programmatic work have been supported by the Open Society Foundations, the South African Department of Higher Education and Training, the United States Fulbright Commission, the United States Embassy in South Africa, and the IBM

Center for the Business of Government. He recently completed a report for the TIAA Institute entitled [Mission Critical: Presidents' Perspectives on How Universities Serve Society in Turbulent Times](#).

In February of 2009, Dr. Farmbry's book, [Administration and the Other: Explorations of Diversity and Marginalization in the Political Administrative State](#), was published by Rowman and Littlefield. In August 2012, his book [Crisis, Disaster, and Risk: Institutional Response and Emergence](#) was published by M.E. Sharpe. His book [The War on Poverty: A Retrospective](#) was published by Rowman and Littlefield in July 2014. His book [Migration and Xenophobia: A Three-Country Exploration](#), examining issues of migration and xenophobia in the United States, Europe, and Southern Africa, was published by Rowman and Littlefield in May 2019. He is currently working on a book exploring evolutionary trends in higher education, which will be released in 2027.

Dr. Farmbry has served on the Board of Trustees of The George Washington University. In early November 2021, he was inducted as a Fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration. In October 2023, he was elected to serve as a Trustee of the College Board.

Dr. Farmbry received his BA, MPA, and Ph.D. degrees from The George Washington University. He completed his J.D. degree at the Rutgers University School of Law.

LAMONT ANTHONY WELLS (he, him, his) is the Executive Director, Network of Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Colleges and Universities (NECU). NECU is an association of 27 colleges and universities of the ELCA. He also serves as Strategic Advisor for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for Wartburg Theological Seminary, and is currently National President of the African Descent Lutheran Association (ADLA). Previously, he served as Program Director for Campus Ministry in the ELCA (LuMin). LuMin is a network of inclusive faith-based and service communities on and near campuses at over 240 colleges and universities across the USA. In his career, he has led programs and communities of multiple denominations in New York, Pennsylvania, and Georgia, including having served as the Lutheran Campus Pastor for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the Atlanta University Center (AUC).

MARIT TRELSTAD is Professor of Constructive and Lutheran Theology at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington. Her scholarly work combines feminist, process and Lutheran theologies and has focused on Christology, theological anthropology, the doctrine of God, and science and religion (including economics, geoengineering and ecology). As a contributor and editor, she published *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today* (Fortress, 2006) and contributed to *Transformative Lutheran Theologies* (Fortress, 2010) and *Lutherrenaissance: Past and Present* (Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015) along with several other journals and books.

STEPHANIE HERSETH SANDLIN serves as the 24th president of Augustana University in Sioux Falls, South Dakota — the first woman to lead the university since it was established in 1860.

As a result of her leadership, the university developed its transformational **Viking Bold: The Journey to 2030** strategic plan — supported by the largest and most comprehensive campaign in Augustana's history. Key accomplishments in the Viking Bold journey to date include new and innovative academic programs, record enrollment, the addition of Division I men's ice hockey, the construction of Midco Arena, and new and renovated student housing.

Stephanie graduated *summa cum laude* from Georgetown University, and *cum laude* from the Georgetown University Law Center. Called to public service, she was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2004, serving four terms. She was the first woman elected to the U.S. House from South Dakota and the youngest woman serving in Congress during that time.

Following her time in public office, Stephanie became a partner in a Washington, D.C., law firm and later joined Raven Industries in Sioux Falls, as the company's first general counsel and vice president of corporate development.

Stephanie has had the honor of serving on numerous local, regional and national boards, including as president of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities from 2023 to 2024, and currently as chair of the Audit & Compliance Committee for the Sanford Health Board of Trustees. She was inducted into the South Dakota Hall of Fame in 2017, and, in August 2020, was named to USA Today Network's select list of "Women of the Century," in recognition of her significant contributions to the state of South Dakota and the country. Stephanie is married to former Texas Congressman Max Sandlin. She and Max live in Sioux Falls with their teenage son, Zachary. They also have four older children and 10 grandchildren.

2026 VLHE Conference Leadership

NECU Planning Team

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Janice Dames, Augsburg University
Darcia Cole, Augsburg University
Colleen Windham-Hughes, California Lutheran University
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Augsburg University Catering
Paul Pribbenow, Augsburg University
Grace Marcus, NECU

Land Acknowledgement

Augsburg's spirit is propelled by a heartbeat that started long before us. That heartbeat was present before our founding, when the land where Augsburg University today stands was stewarded by the Dakota people. The Dakota are the original inhabitants of this area, and they are still here today. We honor their wisdom about this place, their recognition that we are all part of the same creation. We share their sense of obligation to the larger community, including to future generations.

