

## 2020 Report to ELCA Synod Assemblies

*Speak freely with an open heart: common ground at a church-related liberal arts college*

In our Augustana College community, we share a great goal: learn and grow so that we may improve the future. We also know that even as we live out our mission by preparing for rewarding lives of leadership and service, our future is right now. We engage it with all we have: intellects, beliefs, creativity and concern for others.

During a year in which we will elect the next president of our United States, we can expect complexity and conflict. But as an institution of higher education, we don't shy from complexity and conflict. Problem-solving, critical thinking, finding connections and common ground—this is the work of an academic community. We welcome it, and we aim to be good at it.

Because we are a college rooted in a Lutheran expression of the Christian faith, we also realize our great gifts of ecumenism and unification. We are equally committed to open minds and open hearts.

In 2020 at Augustana College, we remember who we are and where we came from. We recognize how our Lutheran identity advances liberal arts education and “the responsible use of human freedom,” a quote from **Augustana's Five Faith Commitments**:

1. **Interfaith engagement.** Augustana celebrates God's regard for the worth of all persons.
2. **Social justice.** Augustana encourages the development of a campus community that seeks justice, loves kindness, and acts with love and humility.
3. **Spiritual exploration.** Augustana provides a context in which every student might ask meaningful questions about life, morality and spiritual practice.
4. **Reasoned examination.** Augustana encourages our campus community to wrestle with ways that faith and reason challenge and enrich each other.
5. **Vocational discernment.** Augustana affirms that work and career—indeed, all human effort—are aspects of an understanding of vocation, a concept the Lutheran tradition in higher education helps illuminate.

At Augustana, we are proud of the many ways we fulfill our Five Faith Commitments, from peaceful social justice forums to hosting national interfaith understanding events. We also do the hard work that comes with seeking to improve.

Throughout 2020 and beyond, our campus community will continue to provide a context for complex moral questions. As we engage each other and our broader communities throughout the coming year—through conversations, debates, classroom dialogue, visual representations, public address and various forms of response—we will go further if we remember who we are and where we came from.

The foundational character of our college is one that promotes free speech, but not at all costs. With free speech comes the great responsibility of caring for each other. As a liberal arts college, complexity can become our common ground; as a college built upon the Lutheran tradition of ecumenism, shared concern for each other can be our common goal.



Steven C. Bahls, President