

2021 Report to ELCA Synod Assemblies

“Though it seems that those days were long ago, before this virus, nevertheless this church will continue to thrive.” These were the words of Bishop Elizabeth Eaton in her video message to the ELCA Synod Assembly last spring.

I am glad to report that as we head into 2021, we are thriving at Augustana College. We have met the difficulties of this past year with a characteristic balance of nimbleness and faith.

As is true for other colleges and universities, to face the challenges we have made notable changes. One of these is a delay to my retirement, initially planned for this year. So that we may continue to successfully respond to the drastic inconsistencies presented by the pandemic, I plan to continue leading the college, aided by our steadfast board and administration, until the summer of 2022. In this way I will gladly extend my tenure to a full 19 years at Augustana College.

I have experienced such wonderful growth at Augustana, from new academic and athletic programs, to innovative buildings that support students in all aspects of their lives, to the successful outcomes of several strategic plans and campaigns. I’ve witnessed the college’s adoption of its Five Faith Commitments in 2004, and the life of those commitments since. I am especially gratified to see such strength of growth in our first two commitments: *Interfaith Engagement* and *Social Justice*.

My friend, former Augustana chaplain Richard Priggie, did manage to retire this past summer. I know that the Five Faith Commitments and what they say about Augustana’s identity as a church-related college continue to make him proud.

In January, Augustana welcomed the arrival of The Rev. Melinda Pupillo. Pastor Pupillo has more than 20 years of experience in the ministry, most recently as the village pastor at Holden Village in Washington—a place well loved by members of the Augustana community for retreat, reflection and study away. Pastor Pupillo is committed to social justice and an inclusive form of ministry that reaches across lines of difference.

I look forward to partnering with Pastor Pupillo throughout this next year. Her creative, collaborative and holistic approach will make her an inspiring mentor to Augustana students as they explore issues of faith, commit to justice, and answer their calling in a world that requires the fullness of their brilliance.



Steven C. Bahls, President