Valparaiso University is an independent Lutheran University. Although it shares a strong Lutheran heritage with many other Lutheran colleges and universities, its status as an “independent” university is unique and requires a brief explanation for those who are new to the community. VU was purchased in 1925 by an independent group of Lutheran clergy and laity who were especially committed to creating Lutheran higher education for lay people. For many years the university has been associated with congregations and members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), and it continues to receive generous financial support from many members of the LCMS. However, it is neither controlled nor supported financially by the national office of the LCMS. The University also has strong ties to members of other Lutheran churches, especially the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Because of these ties to the LCMS and the ELCA, the University has formal and informal relationships with two large systems of other Lutheran colleges and universities: 1) the ten colleges and universities of the LCMS Concordia University System, all named “Concordia,” which include Concordia University Wisconsin, Concordia University (Seward, Nebraska), and Concordia University (Irvine, California); and 2) the twenty-eight colleges of the ELCA,
which include Gustavus Adolphus College, Wittenberg University, and St. Olaf College. (See Appendix D for a complete list of institutions.) Although all of these institutions are Lutheran, each of them, like Valparaiso University, has its own unique history, programs, character, and sense of community.

Because all of these institutions are rooted in Lutheran theology and practice and have had to reflect on the nature of their mission in the light of new challenges and situations, they have addressed the questions: What is the distinctive identity of a Lutheran college or university? What is the authentic mission of Lutheran higher education? As you will discover in this volume and in the broader literature on Lutheran higher education, scholars have articulated an understanding of this mission in a number of ways. Some prefer to speak of it in terms of central elements of Martin Luther's theology, such as his notion of the "two kingdoms," his doctrine of justification, his view of vocation, or his emphasis on paradox. Richard Baepler's article in this volume touches on many of these themes. Gail Elfrig also address some of these themes and underscores the importance of the arts to the mission of Lutheran higher education. Others, such as James Neuchterlein, have described this mission using the metaphor of "Athens and Jerusalem." David Morgan describes this mission not only in terms of Lutheran theology but also material practices of daily and ceremonial life. Gil Meilaender addresses the pitfalls of trying to fashion a purely "Lutheran" understanding of what Christian higher education ought to be, yet begins to explore the distinctive ways Lutheran colleges and universities could contribute to institutional pluralism in higher education.

I have studied or taught at five Lutheran institutions and have participated in a lively ecumenical and national consultation (sponsored by Rhodes College) on the future of church-related higher education in general, and I have found five aspects of the mission and identity of the strongest Lutheran colleges and universities to be particularly appealing and rooted in Lutheran theology and practice. First, Lutheran colleges and universities emphasize a strong liberal arts program, academic excellence, and academic freedom. They do not understand religious affiliation and academic excellence to be mutually exclusive; and they do not believe that faith suppresses free intellectual inquiry. Thus, Lutheran colleges and universities, even those that offer several professional programs, such as VU, tend to claim that a liberal arts curriculum is the foundation of every academic program. This emphasis on a strong liberal arts program has roots in ideas about education proposed by Martin Luther and his colleague, Phillip Melanchthon. At a time when education was viewed as unnecessary for most children and educational opportunities were limited, Luther and Melanchthon stressed the significance of education and the liberal arts. They recommended a liberal arts program that reflected the humanist reforms of the day, and they proposed several reforms that influenced German schools and universities at that time, including public education for all children. Luther believed that well-educated citizens would serve both the church and society and were "a city's best and greatest welfare, safety, and strength." His emphasis on education is also related to his view of the Christian life and faith. He supported public education because it allows people to interpret the Bible and helps them gain the skills and knowledge necessary for them to use their gifts and talents to serve others.

Luther and Melanchthon were also committed to the freedom to pursue truth. Their defense of academic freedom is rooted in Luther's notion of the two kingdoms, which articulates two ways in which God rules or governs God's creation. One way that God governs and preserves the world is through social institutions guided primarily by human reason and experience (rather than revelation). Thus, although Luther certainly recognized the limitations of reason, he highly valued the pursuit of truth through reason and human intellectual gifts. As one interpreter of Luther states, "If the world is God's creation, then there is surely no inhibition to the pursuit of inquiry, for any truth discovered is yet another truth about what God has done. In this sense, open inquiry is both privilege and mandate." Informed by this notion of the two kingdoms, Lutheran colleges and universities have tended to value excellent scholarship by Christians and non-Christians alike. They seek to hire outstanding scholars and teachers from diverse backgrounds and religious convictions who have a critical appreciation of the Lutheran tradition and, as VU's letter of appointment to faculty states, are "sympathetic with the Christian intellectual tradition."

Second, one of the great strengths and treasures of Lutheran colleges, and church-related colleges in general, is that although students and faculty come from different religious and even secular backgrounds, they share the common assumption that religious and ethical questions are part of the larger academic conversation and pursuit of truth. Religion and ethics are seen as valuable areas of serious academic inquiry. Faculty and students are invited to reflect seriously on a number of ethical and religious ideas and questions not only in required religion courses but also in a number of other ways, such as through courses outside the theology department, chapel programs, special speakers and events, service projects, contact with professors outside
of class, and public debates. Certainly, any excellent, secular liberal arts college includes a strong religion department and emphasizes the moral development of students. However, because our culture tends to view religion as something private or subjective, there is always a danger at secular institutions of viewing religious issues as something either “above” or “beneath” intellectual discussion, and therefore marginal to the life of the academic community. There are many vehicles and opportunities, however, at church-related colleges for keeping ethical and religious questions and ideas central to the intellectual life of the institution. Church related colleges also help students to learn about the Christian tradition and the beliefs and practices of other religions. This is an especially important benefit of these institutions because students today tend to know very little about religious traditions, including their own.

Third, Lutheran institutions of higher education emphasize the notion of “vocation” and claim that one of the central tasks of Lutheran higher education is to help students discover and develop their gifts and talents so that they can use them in service to others. The emphasis on vocation and service to others is tied to Luther’s view of “justification by faith” and the “priesthood of all believers,” two of the central principles of his theology and of the Reformation. Luther believed that one is saved or justified by faith alone (not by works) and yet faith frees and empowers one to love and serve others and to seek justice. As Luther himself says, “faith is truly active through love (Galatians 5:6), that is, it finds expression in works of the freest service, cheerfully and lovingly done, with which a man willingly serves another without hope of reward; and for himself, he is satisfied with the fullness and wealth of his faith.” All believers are called, therefore, to serve others and to seek justice through their own unique gifts and talents. Furthermore, Luther believed that one could honorably fulfill this calling in a wide variety of socially productive vocations. He rejected the idea, common in his time, that certain vocations were religiously superior or more spiritual than others and that people who took up the vocations of the priesthood or monasticism and who accepted vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience obtained a higher righteousness than those who had vocations that immersed them in the affairs of the world. Rather, he insisted that all who have faith are unified in Christ and are therefore equal members of the priesthood of all believers. Thus, the Christian life and its practice of love of the neighbor can be lived out in diverse ways. One main goal of education, therefore, is to help students discover their unique gifts and to provide them with the skills and knowledge that enable them to use those gifts in service to others in a variety of “vocations” in the world. The emphasis on vocation has implications for the kind of programming that is offered at Lutheran institutions and for the ways professors understand their relationships to students and even their own calling, as the essays by Morgan, Meilaender, and Schwehn suggest.

Fourth, Lutheran institutions of higher education also tend to emphasize the arts. In recent years Lutheran colleges and universities, including VU, have given new attention and prominence to theater, visual arts, and other fine arts. Historically, though, music has been especially prominent in the Lutheran tradition. Several Lutheran colleges and universities have excellent music programs, support a number of choirs, bands, and orchestras, and offer numerous opportunities for faculty and students to share their musical gifts with the community. The appreciation of music in Lutheran institutions goes back to Luther’s own emphasis on the importance of music and the arts and to the long and rich musical tradition in the Lutheran church. Luther was himself a musician and wrote many hymns. For him, music was not simply an ornament for worship services but rather a vital element of human existence and a powerful vehicle for spreading the gospel. He praised the value of music in these words:

Next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise. She is a mistress and governess of those human emotions—to pass over the animals—which as masters govern [human beings] for more often overwhelm them. No greater commendation than this can be found—at least not by us. For whether you wish to comfort the sad, to terrify the happy, to encourage the despairing, to humble the proud, to calm the passionate, or to appease those full of hate—and who could number all these masters of the human heart, namely, the emotions, inclinations, and affections that impel [human beings] to evil or good?—what more effective means than music could you find?

Fifth, the best Lutheran colleges and universities also support a strong chapel program and create a setting in which students, staff, and faculty can grow spiritually. VU, like many other Lutheran colleges and universities, offers daily chapel services and several worship services on Sunday and special occasions in the church year, e.g., Christmas vespers. The central role of worship on these campuses is rooted in Luther’s emphasis on the gospel. He believed that faith comes from hearing the Word of God and through the power of the Holy Spirit. University convocations and other ceremonies are, on a Lutheran campus, especially important times for the community to demonstrate, through both verbal and ritual means, its dedication to the common purpose of Christian higher education. VU, like other Lutheran campuses, welcomes students from diverse denominations and religious traditions.
Questions regarding mission, identity, and institutional practices are also part of a growing national intellectual discussion about church-related colleges and higher education in general. Several recent books, articles, and conferences are addressing issues, such as the following:

- the status of higher education in the United States today;
- the role of colleges and universities in the moral development of their students;
- the secularization of the academy;
- contemporary theories of knowing;
- models of pedagogy;
- institutional pluralism in higher education;
- the significance of diversity among students and faculty;
- the role of religion in the academy and in public life;
- liberal arts and professional degree programs;
- the challenges of postmodernism to higher education;
- the dangers to the academy of the "corporate model" of higher education.

Mark Schwehn’s essay in this volume and his book, *Exiles from Eden* (Oxford, 1993), provide an introduction to aspects of this contemporary debate. He and Arlin Meyer, directors of the Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts, have also built up a small library in Linwood House (on campus) for use by members of the community with many of the most important books in the national discussion, and they often invite speakers to campus to address these and other related issues.

There are many opportunities for members of the Valparaiso University community to explore issues regarding church-related higher education on a local and national level. Valparaiso University itself provides many occasions for reflection on these issues through the following:

- formal and informal discussion groups on campus;
- *The Cresset* (the University’s journal of literature, arts, and public affairs);
- events and lectures at Christ College;
- local events sponsored by the Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts.

There are also several opportunities for discussing these and other related issues with members of the faculty and staff of other Lutheran institutions, such as through:
The Lutheran Reader

- the Association of Lutheran College Faculties (sponsors a conference for faculty from all Lutheran colleges and universities; held annually in the fall at different Lutheran campuses);
- the ELCA “Vocation of a Lutheran College” Conference (for representatives from all ELCA colleges and universities as well as VU; held annually in the summer at various ELCA campuses);
- Intersections (a journal that addresses issues of faith and learning; published by the Division for Higher Education and Schools of the ELCA);
- the Lutheran Academy of Scholars (a two-week research seminar that brings together twelve scholars who either teach at Lutheran institutions or are Lutherans teaching at non-Lutheran institutions).

Two national networks also host ecumenical programs for a wide variety of church-related colleges and universities:
- The Rhodes Consultation of the Future of the Church-Related College, housed at Rhodes College and directed by Stephen Haynes, has funded a number of campus discussions on church-related higher education and sponsored national conferences. (For a full description of its programs, see its web site at www.life.rhodes.edu/lilly.)
- The Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts (LFP), based here at VU, sponsors a wide range of national and regional conferences, fellowships, mentoring projects, and other activities that are designed to strengthen and renew church-related higher education in the United States. (For a full description of the many facets of the LFP, see its web site at www.lillyfellows.org or visit the LFP headquarters at Linwood House just down the hill behind Mueller Hall.)

Through these and other vehicles Lutheran colleges and universities, including VU, are able to carry on a meaningful and significant conversation about Lutheran higher education. In my experience, the most insightful conversations about Lutheran higher education have taken place among colleagues from diverse academic and religious backgrounds. A diverse group of colleagues is best able to see both the strengths of an institution and the areas in which it needs to improve. At Gustavus Adolphus College, for example, Florence Amamoto, a Japanese-American Buddhist, has become a highly valued and articulate spokesperson for the strengths of Lutheran higher education. Here at VU, David Morgan brought together in 1998-99 members of the faculty from a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds, and they generated a rich discussion about the character and future of the university. Such conversations about the mission and character of an institution are important because they allow colleagues to get to know one another better; provide the occasion for more serious reflection on one’s own sense of calling; foster a deeper sense of community; and help all members of the community to contribute in a more vital way to the life of the institution. It is my hope that all members of the VU community, old and new, will contribute to such conversations through the means mentioned above and will use their particular gifts to help make VU an even stronger university.

NOTES

1. The LCMS, founded by German immigrants in 1847, has about 5.6 million members. The ELCA, with about 5.2 million members, was formed in 1988 as the culmination of a long series of “mergers” among previously separate Lutheran bodies of German, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, and other backgrounds. In addition, a split in the LCMS in 1974 led some former members of that church to form a separate group, which also joined in forming the ELCA in 1988.
7. Related opportunities for Lutheran theologians include: 1) the ELCA “Convocation of Teaching Theologians” (which brings together approximately 70 theologians and bishops to address a particular theme; held every two years); and 2) “Lutheran Women in Theological Studies” (which hosts an annual meeting prior to the American Academy of Religion).