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## Personal Statement on the Power of Faith & its Impact on Higher Education

Faith-affiliated institutions' missions usually encapsulate 1.) the unique identities and callings of each individual student, 2.) the need to empower and equip students to transform and protect the world and its people, 3.) ensuring students can do so through faith-centered, academically-sound, and highly-accountable curricula inside and outside of the classroom, and 4.) values that usually include faithfulness, excellence, community, stewardship, selflessness, holisticness, care, balancing change and tradition, justice, peace, and respect. Such missions truly resonate with me. Such beliefs punctuate the power of faith's impact on student learning, development, and success in higher education; faith and education are not in conflict. They coexist in a beautiful symphony as gifts from God, an omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, eternal Being.

As a practicing, faithful Christian in the Lutheran tradition, my belief system makes me whole and gives my life purpose, encouraging me to shine **a light in the darkness so that the darkness may never overcome it** (*John 1:5*), to see the **value and potential in every person** (*Philippians 2:3-4*), and to **give endless grace** just as I have received it (*Ephesians 2:7*). I was incredibly active in the church that made me: St. Paul's Highfield Lutheran Church of Vandergrift, PA, where I served as an acolyte, worship assistant, and classroom assistant before attending to my undergraduate education. At Saint Vincent College, America's first Benedictine, Catholic higher education institution, I further explored the depth and breadth of my faith and my education: I served as a campus programmer, an orientation leader, a residence life staff member, and a campus life assistant. Then, upon my move to Indiana, PA, I found my home at Hope Lutheran Church, where I quickly became immersed in the mission work of the church, serving as an assisting minister, council member, and council president. My **faith** remains incredibly important to me in my personal, Christ-centered life.

As a professional student affairs educator, I wholly believe in the value of the **co-curriculum**, uniting learning and living, and I know its value is supported by forty years of data saying that students learn just as much outside of the classroom as they do inside of it, a value supported by the Jesuit value of **Cura Personalis**, the care and education of the whole individual, and the Benedictine value of **Conversatio**, the deep transformation of the whole person through Christ-centeredness, love of others, virtue, observance, and selflessness. As a professional student affairs educator, I also value **affordability**, noting that our current generation of college students are experiencing higher levels of food and housing insecurity, lower levels of financial support from banking institutions, family units, and local governments, and ever-increasing debt stressors. Opportunities for leadership, service, and engagement experiences in the context of a **well-rounded, high-quality curriculum, exuding excellence**, in the context of faith to fully inform and develop core knowledge and critical thinking skills remains incredibly important to me in my professional, student-centered life.

I cannot parse my faith from my professional philosophy of student affairs, in that I am **both Christ-centered and human-centered**. These are not two divergent viewpoints; rather, these terms tell the same story from two perspectives, as Christ had but one commandment before giving the ultimate gift to all humanity: to love one another as God so loves us (*Mark 12:31*). This love creates in me a zeal and passion for **student-centeredness**, always centering the unique individual informing my actions:

- creating **supports** for success, tearing down **barriers** that oppress, and **challenging** when most appropriate (*Romans 12:1-2*).
- utilizing **servant leadership** with others, based on my experiences with Benedictine educational values, encouraging leaders to put the needs of their community and their team first, stressing trust, openness, and listening (*Mark 9:35*).
- **diversity, inclusion, and equity work**, noting that enduring education itself alludes to global perspectives and our Christian traditions, which stress the Gospel's foundations for ongoing fights for widespread equality (*Luke 14:13-14; Matthew 23:8*).
- **community-building** on college and university campuses, noting rudimentary needs of belonging and being cared for as well as advanced needs of support in academic and professional endeavors, built upon faith and belief traditions, stressing Christianity as a community of support and communal care (*Hebrews 13:1-2*).
- **assessment, evaluation, and research**, as a framework for daily student affairs practice, contributing to improvement while supporting our ongoing mission of inquiry, uncovering the ways we can best serve our community, and committing to the highest standards of excellence steeped in contemplative labor and understanding (*2 Timothy 2:7*).
- **restorative justice** as a framework for institutional student conduct policies, which stresses the importance of healing, accountability, and reintroduction in the community, rooted in systems of grace and forgiveness (*Galatians 6:1-2*).
- **accountability and exemplary stewardship** of fees and resources, entrusted to employees, as an outgrowth of my leadership experiences, rooted in my Christian understanding that God entrusts the care of the world to all of us (*Titus 1:7*).

I commit to diligently supporting any institutional mission through my own values, professional and otherwise, and my daily work, supporting students' lifelong learning, development, and success, so as to uncover their calling and to help them change the world.