

PACIFIC LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY

2025 REPORT TO THE SYNODS OF REGION 1, EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA



A MESSAGE FROM

ALLAN BELTON, 14TH PRESIDENT OF PLU

Greetings to the Northwest Washington Synod, from Pacific Lutheran University!

The 2024-25 academic year has been an especially demanding one at PLU - marked by the conclusion of our five-year strategic plan and our seven-year accreditation cycle. These aligned conclusions have created an opportunity to reflect, and to measure the significant changes that have occurred over the past seven years. Likewise, higher-education is navigating a period of unprecedented transformation. The past seven years have brought a perfect storm of challenges, from the seismic shift to online learning brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and its ensuing financial and mental health repercussions, to a growing affordability crisis fueled by rising costs and declining enrollment.

This period has also witnessed increased demands for career relevance and skills-based education, alongside the rapid integration of technology and AI into all facets of university life. All the while, institutions must continue to grapple with heightened political polarization and both a renewed and challenged focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Successfully navigating this complex landscape requires clarity of purpose, adaptability, innovation, and a deep commitment to student success in the face of evolving needs and expectations.

PLU has not only navigated the challenges facing higher education, but has emerged as a stronger and more innovative institution. We are proud of our resilience and we give thanks for the strength of our Lutheran community – a communion of saints aligned in common purpose, both rooted and open, working to serve the needs of our neighbors, communities, and creation.

As we articulate a renewed vision for PLU's next five years, we believe it is more important than ever to uplift our mission and provide a welcoming and supportive place for all students. Our commitments in this regard are threefold – to provide access to a quality education for all who seek it (to the best of our ability), to make sure that those we serve feel welcomed and valued, and to successfully equip our graduates for lives of meaning and purpose. The increasing variety of students in our community has also meant an increased opportunity for PLU to intentionally and conscientiously lean into our Lutheran values and our mission. We can't fully educate students to care for other people, their communities, and the Earth, without doing the same as an institution.

I know that many of your congregations trust PLU to welcome, educate, and care for your students. With that in mind, I'm proud to share a few ways we are growing student success resources:

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- **Counseling & Coaching (TimelyCare):** TimelyCare supplements our in-person support with 24/7 online/phone access to mental health and medical care, free for students. We're expanding this to include success coaching for academics, finances, and career readiness.
- **Student Support via Texting (EdSights):** EdSights, our text messaging tool, proactively checks in with students, answers questions, and facilitates staff connections. This accessible communication method supports students and helps us identify those needing extra assistance.
- **PLUS 100:** This required first-year course eases students' transition to college, fostering belonging and introducing essential skills and resources. It also builds early peer connections.
- **Peer Tutoring (Knack):** Our expanded peer learning community uses Knack, an online tool for students to seek or provide peer tutoring.

Ensuring that students have clear pathways to postgraduate success — whether that may be continuing education, an entry to a career or another vocational calling — is increasingly important to families as they choose a college home. PLU's faculty and staff are working diligently to align strong programs with student interests and community needs, such as launching a new Music Therapy program, as well as providing experiential learning opportunities in and out of the classroom, such as student/faculty research and internships with local employers. We aim to give each student a variety of opportunities that will help them chart their course and have the skills they need to thrive.

Though our primary focus is students, we also value our role in providing opportunities for our broader community to engage, learn and have a place where they feel welcomed. You may be interested in these upcoming Vocational Vistas virtual events that are exploring the vocation of PLU as institution (more information about these and many other events can be found at calendar.plu.edu):

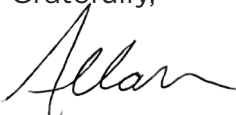
- **Navigating PLU through a Changing Tide** | April 17, 2025
Provost Joanna Gregson discusses leading PLU amidst challenges in higher education.
- **Exposing the Untold Story of PLU** | May 15, 2025
Samuel Torvend explores the forces influencing PLU's mission.
- **The Changing Spiritual Lives of University Students** | June 17, 2025
University Pastor Jen Rude examines PLU students' questions about meaning and purpose.

I hope this update demonstrates PLU's progress and inspires engagement. If you would like more information or are interested in connecting with the University about other ways we might strengthen the connections between your congregation and PLU, please email University Relations at universityrel@plu.edu or reach out to one of the rostered leaders on our Board of Regents (plu.edu/president/regents/).

Thank you for your support and partnership. I'll leave you with a quote from Cady Wood '26, an intern in the Washington State Speaker of the House's office:

"The power that comes from getting through uncertainty together is incredible. This internship proves to me every day that hope and dedication drive meaningful change."

Gratefully,



Allan Belton
President