



## Report to the ELCA Synod Assemblies - March 2023

Founded in 1874, the mission of St. Olaf College is to challenge students to excel in the liberal arts, examine faith and values, and explore meaningful vocation in an inclusive, globally engaged community nourished by Lutheran tradition. With an enrollment of just over 3000 full-time undergraduates, St. Olaf continues to attract a broad pool of talented students, currently representing 49 states, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, and 99 countries. Our Fall 2022 incoming first-year students had an average high school grade point of 3.72 and a median ACT composite score of 30. In addition, 20% are first-generation college students, 22% identify as domestic students of color, 10% are international students, and 20% are income-eligible for Pell grants.

More than half of our students indicate that they are affiliated with a Christian denomination, with 18% self-identifying as Lutheran and another 6% as members of a denomination in full communion with the ELCA. Among our Class of 2022 graduates, 93% had participated in an internship, mentored research experience, practicum, or other vocation-related opportunity, and 43% had studied off-campus (a drop-off from previous years due to the restrictions imposed by COVID). Among the Class of 2022 graduates for whom we have data about post-college activities (88% of the class), 98% were working, pursuing further education, or engaged in full-time military or other service program within the first six months of graduation.

St. Olaf continues to offer daily Chapel services and Sunday worship with Holy Communion during the academic year, led by the college pastors and featuring members and friends of the St. Olaf community as speakers and musicians. All services at Boe Chapel are [streamed live](#) and then [archived](#) for on-demand viewing on the St. Olaf website. The College Ministry team also includes an Associate Chaplain for Jewish Life and an Associate Chaplain for Muslim Life (currently an open position, with a search anticipated next fall), who offer opportunities for worship, religious education, pastoral care, and interfaith engagement, not only for students who identify with these faith traditions but also for students of any identity.

The college continues its weekly [Sing For Joy®](#) radio program, broadcast on more than 150 stations in the U.S., the U.K., and throughout Africa, and streamed both live and on demand. Built around the Revised Common Lectionary for the church year, *Sing For Joy®* integrates the best in sacred choral music with thoughtful commentary, now provided by its new host, Rev. Alexandra Jacob '16. The [St. Olaf Conference on Worship, Theology, and the Arts](#) returned in July 2022, with "Scatter the Imagination of Our Hearts" as its theme, and featuring theologian Willie James Jennings (Yale University Divinity School) and Professor of Homiletics and Liturgics Eunjoo Mary Kim (Iliff School of Theology) as guest keynoters.

The [Lutheran Center for Faith, Values, and Community](#) is now in its fourth year of programming to advance a compelling vision for Lutheranism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, foster inter-faith engagement, nurture vocational discernment, and provide national and global thought leadership. Center Director Dr. Deanna Thompson, together with Dr. Anton Armstrong, Tosdal Professor of Music and Conductor of the St. Olaf Choir, and Rev. Dr. Anthony Bateza, Associate Professor of Religion, each contributed chapters to [So That All May Flourish: The Aims of Lutheran Higher Education](#), published in January 2023 by Fortress Press. Rev. Dr. Charlene Cox, the Lutheran Center's Program Director for Congregational Thriving, continues to lead the Center's five-year [Nourishing Vocation Project](#), supported by a grant from the Thriving Congregations initiative of Lilly Endowment Inc. The Nourishing Vocation Project engages congregations in a process of vocational discernment guided by three primary questions – *Who are we called to be? What are we called to do? Why are we here?* Working in community with other congregations, participants engage Biblical texts and spiritual practices for vocational discernment; participate in the St. Olaf Conference on Worship, Theology, and the Arts; and are provided with resources for congregational use in worship, Christian

education, and leadership development, to support spiritual nourishment and a deeper understanding of God's call upon their life and work together. At present, a total of 15 congregations, spanning four denominations and seven states, are participating in Cohorts 1 and 2, and the entire Northern Illinois Synod of the ELCA, with more than 140 congregations, launched their participation as Cohort 3 during Lent. A number of the Nourishing Vocation resources are available at no cost on the [project website](#), including [Sing Vocare](#), a playlist of musical selections to accompany the [Vocare Spiritual Practice](#).

With additional support from Lilly Endowment Inc., in June 2023 the Center will launch a second initiative to enrich the life and work of congregations within and beyond the ELCA. The new Nourishing Vocation with Children project is aimed at deepening the full participation of children in congregational worship and prayer through the arts. We will accompany congregations and congregational leaders in a process of vocational discernment focused on the centering of children in worship and congregational prayer; equip congregations and their leaders with ideas, resources, and hands-on experiences integrating child-attentive music, theater, movement, poetry, and visual arts into worship and prayer practices they can use in their own congregations; and support them in reflecting on the impact of their new practices on children's capacity to know, love, and serve God. Lilly Endowment made the five-year grant in support of this project through its Nurturing Children Through Worship and Prayer Initiative.

In May 2023, I will conclude my seventeen-year appointment as President of St. Olaf. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve my alma mater. Following my retirement, the College will welcome [Dr. Susan Rundell Singer](#) as its twelfth president. A national leader in the improvement of undergraduate teaching and learning, Dr. Singer currently serves as vice president for academic affairs and provost at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida. Please join me in extending a warm welcome to her, along with your prayers for the flourishing of her leadership and of the students, faculty, staff, and alumni she will serve.

David R. Anderson '74, *President*