

# PACIFIC LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY

## 2026 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!*

As we reflect on the 2025-26 academic year, we find ourselves at a powerful intersection of tradition and transformation. Last year, we marked the conclusion of our previous strategic plan and celebrated a successful seven-year accreditation cycle. Today, we are leaning into our new 2025-2030 Strategic Plan, a roadmap that reaffirms our Lutheran roots while boldly innovating to meet the needs of a changing world.

The landscape of higher education remains complex. We continue to navigate the ripples of a shifting economy and a digital age that demands both technical skill and deep moral inquiry. Yet, in this “perfect storm,” PLU has not just remained afloat; we are leading. We are proud to share that PLU was recently honored with the **2025 NWCCU Beacon Award for Excellence in Student Achievement**, recognizing our “Community of Care” as a national model for student success and retention.

Our mission remains clear: to educate for lives of thoughtful inquiry, service, leadership, and care. As we move forward, we are focusing on three pillars of innovation that I believe will resonate with your congregations:

#### **1. Expanding the “Wellbeing Ecology”**

We have moved beyond traditional support services to create what we call a “Wellbeing Ecology”—an interdependent system of care for the whole person.

- **The Hub at Hong Hall:** We have relocated our Wellbeing Services and Resources (WSR) to a centralized hub in Hong Hall. Last year, 85% of our first-year students utilized these services, which integrate mental health, medical care, and success coaching.
- **Sage the Squirrel:** Our student-support text tool (EdSights) has been personalized as “Sage,” providing real-time check-ins. This tool has been especially effective in connecting with our students of color and first-generation Lutes, ensuring no one falls through the cracks.
- **Knack Peer Tutoring:** Our expanded peer-learning community now provides coverage for every single course at PLU, fostering a culture where Lutes help Lutes.

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## 2. Academic Innovation for Community Need

We are intentionally aligning our curriculum with the vocations the world needs most:

- **Music Therapy:** In Fall 2025, we officially launched Washington State's first and only accredited Bachelor's degree in Music Therapy. Led by Director Megumi Azekawa, this program bridges art and science to train healers for hospitals, schools, and veterans' centers.
- **Partnership for Health Innovation:** Our collaboration to bring a new medical center in Parkland is well underway. This center will serve as a training ground for our nursing and pre-health students while addressing local healthcare disparities.
- **Expansion of our Accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing Program:** Building on the success of our Lynnwood campus, we are moving forward with a second ABSN program in Auburn.
- **Master of Cybersecurity:** As the need for cybersecurity professionals continues to rise, we are excited to announce this unique hybrid program perfect for recent grads and working professionals alike.
- **Master of Education (M.Ed.):** We are preparing to welcome the first cohort of our new, flexible M.Ed. program in Summer 2026, designed specifically for working educators in our region.

## 3. Protecting the Promise of Access

Affordability is a moral imperative. This year, we celebrated the 10th anniversary of the **253 PLU Bound Scholarship**, which has now served over 1,000 local students. However, we also face new challenges. During the 2025 legislative session, funding for the Washington College Bound Scholarship was jeopardized. Our community has responded with incredible strength; our students even held a "Lobby Day" in Olympia in early 2026 to advocate for the restoration of these vital funds. We remain unwavering: a PLU education must be accessible to every student with the talent and drive to pursue it.

I know that your congregations are places of discernment and hope. We see that same spirit in our students. I invite you to engage with us through our upcoming events or by visiting our campus. If you would like to explore how we can better support students, please reach out to University Relations at [universityrel@plu.edu](mailto:universityrel@plu.edu).

Thank you for your prayers, your partnership, and your commitment to this shared mission.

Gratefully,



Allan Belton  
President