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Dear Friends of Bethany Lutheran College,

One year ago, the Bethany Board of Regents directed the College administration to present them a sustainable financial plan for Bethany with annually balanced operating budgets for each of the next five years. This directive was also supported by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) Board of Trustees and the 2023 ELS Convention delegates who resolved "that the Board of Regents take the actions necessary to ensure the continuing solvency of our college."

The College administration and the Board of Regents studied both our challenges and our opportunities, and ways that they can be addressed. The study involved an examination of enrollment trends and financial analysis of each of our programs, input from all campus departments, and consideration of what's essential to Bethany.

Throughout this process, the Regents thoughtfully considered what it means for Bethany to maintain its Confessional Lutheran liberal arts approach. After reviewing the faculty's definition of the Liberal Arts found in the Employee Handbook, the Regents remain committed to their historical definition that encourages the following key tenets: Scriptural illumination that enables growth in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; access to foundational knowledge, useful in Christian lives, vocations, and personal development; focus on fundamental questions as rational, social, cultural and ethical individuals; and providing a broad perspective between what is learned and lived. These liberal arts tenets thrive in every one of Bethany's disciplines of study: in our general education requirements, which remain intact, as well as in all of our majors and minors.

The five-year proposal adopted by the Board includes annually balanced budgets that employ a multi-dimensional set of strategies. Those strategies include new messaging to set us apart as a Christ-centered college; targeted investments in areas that show potential for additional enrollment growth; new ideas that promote revenue generation; requests for increased support from the ELS, foundations, and our supporters; and strategic budget adjustments. Because the Regents focused on all other strategies first, adopted budget adjustments will have an impact on only a small number of students in their majors. Furthermore, while duties will change for some, none of the adjustments impact the full-time employment of Bethany faculty and staff. We're confident the combined use of these multiple strategies will help Bethany advance its mission, move toward financial sustainability in the coming years, and prove to be another blessing from our gracious God.

Sadly, beginning in the Fall 2024 semester, due to low enrollment and cost considerations within these programs, Bethany will discontinue the following: American Studies major and minor, History major and minor, Social Studies major and minor, Theatre major and minor, and the Philosophy and Global and Cross-Cultural Studies minors. At the time of the Board's decision in November 2023, the total number of freshmen, sophomores, and juniors affected numbered five majoring and seven minoring in Theatre and three majoring and four minoring in History. A teach-out plan will be provided so that all current students may graduate from these programs. History and Theatre courses will continue to be taught in our general education offerings to meet core discipline graduation requirements for all students. It's also important to note the full annual calendar of Bethany Theatre productions will continue to be offered and the College will retain our two full-time and one part-time individuals in the Theatre Department. The Regents also moved to invest in an additional full-time faculty member to teach in the Math-Science division and to help promote those majors.

In addition, due to low course enrollments, the Regents resolved to discontinue the teaching of Latin and Norwegian, and due to cost considerations reallocated the credit allotment for coaching of the Bethany Speech and Debate Team to the Communication major. The College will continue to support a Speech and Debate Team as a student run organization.

Beginning in the 2024-25 academic year, band and choir tours will operate on a four-year annual rotation of national, regional, and local congregational and school touring. This approach will provide Bethany the opportunity to sing and play in local churches and schools within a two-hour radius of the campus on a regular basis.

Finally, the men's and women's golf program and the men's and women's tennis program are currently without head coaches. The Regents chose to rehire for those positions with the expectation that these coaches will increase roster sizes through new, unduplicated enrollment.

Despite these difficult adjustments, Bethany remains a Christian college first and foremost. We give thanks to God that the school has never wavered from its Christ-centered mission rooted in the Bible as understood through the Lutheran Confessions. Since the College's founding nearly 100 years ago, our academic programs continue to be taught through the lens of a Christian worldview and within a liberal arts approach. Our purpose remains two-fold: to engage students with Jesus, and to equip them for productive and fulfilling vocations in their families, churches, workplaces, and communities.

Our gracious God is blessing this treasured College with record enrollment, a successful graduate program in Christian clinical mental health counseling, an enhanced reputation as evidenced by our excellent retention and completion rates, and recent high rankings in national publications. But this success and growth comes at a time when the higher education landscape is very challenging. In the Midwest, the number of prospective college students has declined. The demographic makeup of the younger generation has also changed, and today more students come from non-traditional college backgrounds. At the same time, many have questioned the value of a college education when they see good jobs may be available that do not require a four-year degree. Combined, these factors have led to declining enrollments at many schools and accompanying financial challenges. To remain affordable to all students, nearly all colleges greatly discount the cost of their education. For many, including Bethany, this has resulted in an accumulation of year-over-year deficit spending that has depleted financial reserves. In specific, while enrollment has grown, we've not brought in enough revenue to sustainably operate the many wonderful programs we offer our students.

For Christian, private colleges like Bethany, there are additional challenges. The State of Minnesota, beginning next fall, is set to provide free tuition at public colleges for students from lower- and middle-income households, further limiting our capacity to provide enough financial aid to many who will benefit from a Bethany education. In addition, recent State legislation may threaten our ability to carry out our Christ-centered mission, specifically our Scripture-based foundation within our Education major – Bethany's second largest program. In short, as society moves away from the Christian worldview we value, repercussions could follow that further threaten our mission.

I ask for your prayers on behalf of those who have been impacted by these decisions, and I also ask for your ongoing prayers on behalf of Bethany and those who govern and administer the college, and specific prayers for all constituents for wisdom, strength, and healing. At Bethany, we strive to be good stewards of the resources with which we've been entrusted. I'm confident you agree with me that we want to continue to operate a sustainable and strong Bethany experience for young people in our society so that they may be engaged with the "One Thing Needful" – their Savior from sin, Jesus Christ. I trust that just as Bethany has remained a viable school throughout its history, He will see us through these current challenges. We have His assurance in Scripture, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8: 38-39).

In Service to Christ and His Church,



Gene R. Pfeifer, Ph.D.
President, Bethany Lutheran College