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January 2004 Report to the Synod Assembly
President Christopher M. Thomforde, President
St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minn.

At St. Olaf College, we especially value the unique relationship we have with the Southeastern Minnesota Synod. As the ELCA college in your synod territory, we appreciate the support we receive through congregations and individuals who pray for us, contribute financially to the college, and send us your sons and daughters to be educated at St. Olaf.

We are called to a great and very important mission at St. Olaf College. I'm still learning about the mission of the college, but I know enough about it to remind you of its fundamental importance. We are called to be a liberal arts college. We want our students to be able to think clearly. We want faculty members who are scholars, teachers, and performers of the very first rank. We want to be able to ask questions about any topic, and have the ability to bring forth answers that are cogent and constructive, serving the common good.

We are a college of the Church, rooted in the Christian gospel. We do our work at the intersection in life where reason and faith meet. We neither want to be thoughtless pietists, nor do we want to be men and women of reason who are so sharp, so angular, that no one would dare embrace us or our ideas. As a college of the Church we ask ourselves this question, "What is it that God Almighty expects of us as we try to live together, study together, and move together through treacherous waters of our times toward the future?"

We also provide an education with a global perspective. At a time in history when large nation states and multinational coalitions seem to be disintegrating into tiny, frightful, mean spirited, violent communities, God has called us to have the courage to stand up and go into the world across the street and across the oceans to embrace the whole world and not to be afraid of men and women who are different or "other." To move beyond tolerating others, as important as that may be, to respecting others and learning from men and women of other places, other times, other cultures, other languages, other experiences of God's grace.

We completed the most successful fund drive in the history of this school, and in the history of any Lutheran college. This is a tremendous accomplishment for all of us, given economic circumstances that continue to be uncertain and depressed.

Many have worked hard on a new Strategic Plan for St. Olaf. The plan is on the college's web site at www.stolaf.edu/president/strategicplan. This document will help us keep our attention focused on the mission of the college. St. Olaf College will be the best liberal arts college of the Church, which is all of God's people. Informed by its life in the Lutheran church and by conversation with a wide range of religious traditions, the college will be a national center for committed, thoughtful exploration and celebration of the intersection of the Sacred with the life of the world. Reflecting the rich diversity of all God's people, the college community will welcome men and women from a wide variety of backgrounds. The college will continue its commitment of exemplary programs in responsible global citizenship. We will nurture and challenge students so that they have a dynamic sense of vocation, recognizing and shaping their substantial gifts of leading successful lives of worth and service. In all of these ways, and in other ways as well, St. Olaf College will be an example of what it means to be a great Church-related residential liberal arts college.

Finally, through our office of Church Relations, it is our hope that we can continue to serve the Church and its members in new and significant ways. Following a reassessment of the vision for that office, we have identified several areas of outreach to the wider church: through relationships with congregations, especially multicultural or ethnic-specific congregations; through our annual Conference on Worship, Theology and the Arts, July 19 - 23, 2004; through hospitality to a variety of church groups who visit our campus; and through encouragement and support of our students investigating calls to vocations in the church.

Thank you for your partnership in support of St. Olaf College, the colleges of the ELCA, and most importantly our students.

