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From the Editor

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From the Editor | ROBERT D. HAAK

TOM CHRISTENSON BEGAN his introduction to the last issue by asking what adjective should be used to describe that issue. That also seems like an appropriate question to begin my introduction to this Spring 2006 issue. Some of you who pay particular attention to the arrival of *Intersections* in your mailbox will answer that the most fitting adjective will be “late.” There is truth in this description. As is often the case, when I inherited the editing duties for this journal from Tom Christenson, I misjudged the complexity of the task (and maybe also my own resources!). I hope that those of you who have been patiently waiting will find that the result was worth the wait.

My own preferred adjective would be “new” (we will have to wait to decide whether “and improved” should be added to the phrase). The journal has a new look and feel. We hope that the changes will enhance its readability and “eye appeal.” We are coming to you from a new place—Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. I would like to thank Augustana for its commitment to and support of this project. I hope that you will find some of the ideas in this issue new as well.

As is announced on the cover page, the theme of this issue is “Lutherans and Human Sexuality.” I have to admit that growing up it never would have occurred to me that these two concepts belonged together. I imagine there are some readers out there who still feel this way. But, as Lutherans, it seems that we ought to have something valuable to say about such an important topic. The need to continue (or begin?) discussions was made clear by the controversies swirling around the votes taken at the Churchwide Assembly in Orlando last summer. While it is clear that some members of the ELCA hope the Orlando resolutions will be the last words on such topics, the continuing work of the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality and the report they will issue mean that the conversations are just beginning. This is especially true as we begin to talk about the much broader issues of human sexuality.

The question that I asked in putting together this issue was “what might ELCA colleges be able to contribute to the conver-

sations about human sexuality?” Each of the articles in this issue gives a part of an answer to this question. Yeager calls on the colleges to educate in a way that will create the sort of community that can have these sorts of conversations and still remain a community. Colleges might well be models of this discourse. Benne ends with a similar thought but doubts that Lutheran colleges will be able to be the sort of place where this will happen. He concludes with a challenge to the colleges and universities to gather and to put into action the sort of conversations that they claim are at the heart of their identity.

In between these two calls for conversation we find the conversation modeled by Williams and Bussie. Williams proposes a model for how Lutherans might use the biblical text to inform the conversations that take place. She terms this a “critical traditionalist hermeneutic.” Bussie proposes that the Lutheran confessions and Lutheran theology also can provide resources for this conversation.

While much of the conversation to this point has centered on the understanding of same sex relationships, Nack reminds us that the range of questions dealing with sexuality (Lutheran and non-Lutheran) is much broader than this question. Pastors and parishioners and college faculty and others are all faced with a wide range of ethical and social issues surrounding the understanding of human sexuality. One of the questions that I asked when beginning to think about these issues was what the data told us about the sexual activities and understandings of Lutheran college students today. My experience as a college teacher over the last twenty years seemed to indicate to me that sexuality was an issue that was fairly high on the list of “interesting topics” for my students. When checking into what we know about “sex and the Lutheran college student,” I was a bit shocked to find out that we really don’t know much about the topic. Our college students are surveyed on a wide range of subjects, but (maybe not too surprisingly) their sexual attitudes have not been an area of exploration. It may be that collecting some relevant data to inform the discussion is something that

the Lutheran colleges and universities could well contribute to the conversation.

In order to begin to fill the void, I asked the folks who conducted the National Study of Youth and Religion (<http://www.youthandreligion.org>) if they had data specifically on sexuality and Lutheran students. The answer came back that no one had ever asked the question before. That in itself is an interesting fact. I asked them to determine if there was enough data in their set to be able to say anything significant specifically about Lutheran youth. They found the following facts in their survey.¹

- Nearly 43% of Lutheran teens do not necessarily believe that people should wait for marriage to have sex. (About the same percentage as for the total sample of teens sampled.)
- 68% of the ELCA teens would consider living with a partner to whom they were not married.
- Nearly 24% of Lutheran teens have engaged in oral sex. (Slightly higher than the total sample. Over 8% of the Lutherans had engaged in oral sex before age 15.)
- Over 16% of Lutheran teens have had sexual intercourse.
- Almost 80% of the Lutheran teens who had intercourse used protection.
- Over 90% of those Lutheran teens who had intercourse were not under the influence of alcohol or drugs during their first experience.
- More than 18% of Lutheran teens never attend church.
- More than 57% of Lutheran teens attend church more than a few times a year.
- Of this last group, 25% of the ELCA teens report that the church has done nothing to help them with their sexuality.

This might be the beginning of a conversation that seems to be very important to Lutheran teens—and probably to all of us. If 25% of these teens feel that the church has nothing helpful to say to them in this conversation, it seems that there is considerable room for improvement. Many questions remain. Would a larger data base result in significantly different results? What other questions could we ask with a larger sample? What are the important questions that need to be asked?

With Yeager and Benne, I would like to see what ELCA colleges and universities could add to the conversation about important issues facing the church and our communities. These conversations are also important for our own understanding of our role as “Lutheran colleges,” not colleges isolated from the communities in which they exist.

I would like to thank Arne Selbyg, Director for Colleges and Universities and the Vocation and Education program unit for the chance to make a contribution to the ongoing conversations about the nature of Lutheran colleges. I would also like to thank Tom Christenson for all the assistance he has given in making the transition to this “new” journal a smooth one. I would ask each of you who read and value *Intersections* to consider submitting your thoughts for perusal by your colleagues. Please send any submissions (preferably in electronic MLA format) to me at avr bh@augustana.edu. I look forward to the continuation of this work!

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Endnotes

1. These results were reported to me on 4/5/2006 based on the analysis of Kyle Longest who works for the National Study of Youth and Religion. “Lutheran teens” for the purposes of this study are defined as teens whose parents identified themselves as Lutheran. They are not necessarily teens who attend Lutheran colleges and universities. The total number of “Lutheran teens” was 135. The number of “ELCA Lutheran teens” was 50. This is a relatively small number within the total survey. While it might be hoped that a larger sample could be examined, this is the best that I could find at this point. Have any of the faculty at any of our colleges asked these sorts of questions of their students?