

Intersections

Volume 2016
Number 44 *Full Issue, Number 44, Fall 2016*

Article 1

2016

Full Issue, Number 44, Fall 2016

The Congregational and Synodical Mission Unit, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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FALL 2016

Intersections

Faith, Learning, and the Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education



IN THIS ISSUE

Preparing Global Leaders for a
Religiously Diverse Society

Intersections is a publication by and largely for the academic communities of the twenty-six colleges and universities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Each issue reflects on the **intersection** of faith, learning, and teaching within Lutheran higher education. It is published by the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities, and has its home at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois, the institutional sponsor of the publication. **Intersections** extends and enhances discussions fostered by the annual Vocation of the Lutheran College Conference, together lifting up the vocation of Lutheran colleges and universities. It aims to raise the level of awareness among faculty, staff, and administration about the Lutheran heritage and church-relatedness of their institutions, especially as these **intersect** with contemporary challenges, opportunities, and initiatives.

About the Cover

The cover features Danya Tazyeen, Augustana College (Rock Island, Illinois) class of 2016, as a first year student at Augustana. (Photo courtesy of Rock Island's Dispatch/Argus newspaper.) Danya was attending an interfaith prayer service following the fatal shooting at a Sikh temple near Milwaukee in August 2012. Danya recently reflected on her participation in intercultural and interfaith initiatives at Augustana in the following terms:

"When deciding to attend Augustana, the fact that it is a Lutheran college, requiring a course in Christianity, did not deter me. In fact, I found it exciting to analyze and gain a better understanding of a faith—other than my own Islamic one—which has had such great influence on the evolution of Western civilization. Through the years, however, I saw that many other students from Augustana's majority demographic (middle-class, Caucasian students

from Christian families), chose to stick close to what was familiar and shied away from the growing number of diverse cultural and religious courses and activities offered. Those who avoided that which was outside their 'norm' seemed to only deepen their fear of it, while those who allowed themselves to be exposed to others emerged from the experience with a stronger understanding of not only another's beliefs, but of their own as well. Interfaith and intercultural interactions did not leave them, as some fear, with an ultimate uncertainty on whether their beliefs are wrong. Rather, my friends and I, who actively pursued interfaith, experienced the strengthening of our own convictions, while fostering the capacity for an generous, 'Christ-like,' compassion to come together and defend each other when faced with hate, and to oppose injustice wherever we see it."

Intersections

Number 44 Fall 2016

Mark Wilhelm Publisher
Jason A. Mahn Editor
Hannah Griggs Transcriptions
Angie Williams Secretary
Leanne Paetz Graphic Designer

PUBLISHED BY

The Network of ELCA Colleges
and Universities

INTERSECTIONS ONLINE

[http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/
intersections/](http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections/)

PUBLISHED AT

Augustana College
639 38th Street
Rock Island, Illinois USA 61204-2296

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From the Publisher and Editor



We write this just a few weeks after a long and difficult presidential election. The task ahead of listening, generating empathy, and working across many different lines of difference remains what it has always been—important and difficult work. It is the work of conservatives, liberals, radicals, and other people of good will. It is the work of Muslims, Jews, Christians, seekers, skeptics, and “nones.” Certainly, as the United States becomes a nation of many faiths and cultures, educated persons need to understand the diversity and importance of religion in America and around

the globe. As future leaders in church and society, persons educated at ELCA colleges and universities will also need to continue to reject religious stereotypes and intolerance that often leads to violence. The Lutheran tradition of higher education compels and challenges schools related to the ELCA to take up this work.

In early June of 2016, faculty, administrators, staff, and students from ELCA colleges and universities met at Augsburg College to participate in the Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference under the theme: “Preparing Global Leaders for a Religiously Diverse Society.” No doubt colleagues on your campus are currently building upon the rich presentations and conversations from this summer. Campus delegations shared present initiatives for interfaith engagement—and ones that were on their “wish list.” The final list spans 7 pages, but here is a small sample: alternative spring break trips, “Faith Zone” training,

chapel service interfaith series, “Better Together” student leaders, living-learning communities devoted to talking through and living with difference, multi-faith prayer rooms, and so on.

The Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU) is deeply committed to supporting and expanding this work. NECU’s Executive Committee (composed of 7 presidents plus the executive director) has endorsed interfaith work as a priority within Lutheran higher education. Reflecting this commitment, NECU has developed an active, collaborative relationship with the Interfaith Youth Core. Many NECU schools have also been active participants and winners of awards in the annual President’s Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge. NECU was welcomed to leadership discussions at the White House and Georgetown University. Finally, the Rev. Mark Hanson, former presiding bishop of the ELCA and current director of the Christensen Center at Augsburg College, will chair a new steering committee to support, share, and advance interfaith initiatives.

The work of interfaith understanding and collaboration at ELCA colleges and universities is undergirded by the ELCA’s churchwide commitments to inter-religious understanding. NECU colleges and universities collaborated with the ELCA office of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations to produce a book on inter-religious relations, *Engaging Others, Knowing Ourselves: A Lutheran Calling in a Multi-Religious World*, published by Lutheran University Press (2016).

Most of the essays of this volume were first delivered at the Vocation conference last summer, and they all were written before election results were in. If they seem especially timely now (we think they do), that is because the work of preparing global leaders for a religiously diverse society has been and will be at the heart of the mission of Lutheran colleges and universities.

Mark Wilhelm (publisher) is Executive Director of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities. **Jason Mahn** (editor) is associate professor and chair of religion at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois.

BISHOP ELIZABETH EATON

Laboratories for Living in a Diverse World

It is remarkable that twenty-two of the twenty-six ELCA colleges and universities have gathered here to explore together what it means to prepare global leaders for a religiously diverse world. This is an indication of the importance of this topic for higher education, and for the church.

I would contend that it is the proper work of Lutheran higher education to be laboratories for people to engage in what it means to be living in a world—not to mention a country and a city like Minneapolis—that is religiously diverse. It is simply no longer an option for people to pretend that there aren't other traditions surrounding them. There is probably no mono-cultural (mono-ethnic, mono-racial, or mono-religious) community remaining in the United States.

The question is this: How can we in the church and in Lutheran higher education honor and celebrate this diversity without boiling everything down into the mush that sometimes passes as inter-religious relations? How can we stay true to our own traditions, but appreciate and truly understand and encounter the religious traditions of others?

Beyond Christian Privilege

The Lutheran tradition has a lot to offer, and it begins with recognizing the diversity *within* the Lutheran tradition. There are a lot of young people on our college and

seminary campuses who are involved with a movement called "Decolonize Lutheranism" ("Welcome"). These faithful Christians are challenging cultural norms that have been used to define what it means to be Lutheran. Folks in the Decolonize Lutheranism movement and many others are

saying that cultural markers actually have little to nothing to do with the Lutheran tradition. Indeed, many in this room have been instrumental in pushing or pulling us into



"Christianity in the current culture is not in the same position that it used to have, particularly after WWII, when it was in a privileged place."

a deeper and more authentic way of understanding and engaging the Lutheran tradition, and from that place of greater diversity, into a deeper and more authentic way of understanding and engaging in inter-religious relations.

The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton was elected as the ELCA's fourth presiding bishop at the 2013 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, after serving as the elected bishop of the ELCA Northeastern Ohio Synod since 2006. At the 2016 Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference, she gave a version of this address as well as moderated a conversation between four religiously diverse students at ELCA colleges and universities.

Christianity in the current culture is not in the same position that it used to have, particularly after WWII, when it was in a privileged place. Christians have sharply defined the history and identity of this country. Some of us remember firsthand what this means. I grew up when stores were closed on Sundays. Wednesday night was church night, so you didn't dare have a soccer game or practice then. This Christian culture has radically shifted, of course. According to a recent PEW survey of 35,000 Americans, among people 30 and under, 30 percent now have no religious affiliation whatsoever ("U.S. Public"). Moreover, if we take a look at the whole world, we can see that the center of gravity of a Christian culture—the Christian movement—is no longer in Europe or North America. It's in the global South. The same is true for the center of gravity of Lutherans. There are now more Lutherans in Indonesia than there are in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. There are far more Lutherans in Ethiopia and Tanzania than there are in the United States.

This shift in where the church is growing also brings a host of new practices to us, as Lutheran Christians living in the United States. But here again we need to divorce ourselves from saying that cuisine and culture define Lutheranism; we need to look at the ways that our theology and understandings of God are being lived out by brothers and sisters around the world.

Along with our predecessor churches, the ELCA has been deeply engaged in the modern ecumenical movement, which has been going full speed ahead for the last 50 years. We just recently developed a joint text in cooperation with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops called "Declaration On The Way" (Bishops' Committee). Bishop Mark Hanson was the ELCA co-chair of that committee. In reviewing 50 years of Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, the task force discovered 32 places where Lutherans and Catholics agree with each other in the areas of church, ministry, and the Eucharist. This is deeply significant as we approach the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation.

In addition to ecumenical relations, certainly global migration is shaping and reshaping our culture—despite some troubling political rhetoric. For example, the ELCA, together with Missouri Synod Lutherans and others, are committed to helping refugees make a way of life here.

When Lutherans help immigrants and refugees resettle in this country, it's not with any thought that somehow we're going to fit these people into some kind of generic Christian model—which would have more to do with dominant American culture anyway. We respect the traditions of people who come here and we can learn from them. That's precisely part of what is reshaping our culture right now.

"Many try to define who 'real' Americans are, and this often entails turning against people who are not Christian."

Pluralization is happening everywhere—in urban areas, of course, but also in suburbs and small towns and communities. Because of this pluralization, the church does not have the privileged position it once had. Some people who are used to Christian privilege of the past are now frightened by the speed and the reality of change. One of the unfortunate consequences is that we can see a rise in fear of and hatred toward others. We see this in the rise of Islamophobia in our country. As I walk around the neighborhood surrounding Augsburg College, I am so pleased to see signs in people's yards wishing others a blessed Ramadan. But that's not the case everywhere. Many try to define who "real" Americans are, and this often entails turning against people who are not Christian.

The Church in and for a Diverse World

Given this massive shift of Christianity within American culture, the arrival of people from so many vibrant religious traditions other than Christianity, and the decline of the cultural importance of church, how should churches such as the ELCA respond? Lutheran churches and colleges/universities believe that our role is one of convening and bridge-building. It is important for us to be seen neither as those who shun the other, nor as those who retreat into some sort of guarded religious identity. We are called to build bridges.

In 2011 the ELCA invited Dr. Sayyid Syeed, national director of the Islamic Society of North America's Office of Interfaith and Community Alliances, to address the our churchwide assembly. This was the first time that a Muslim had addressed the assembly. He and Bishop Hanson had done a lot of work together. When Dr. Syeed spoke, it was the tenth anniversary of 9/11 and he talked about what we needed to do to bring down the mountains of hatred and hostility that had grown up between our traditions. He pleaded that it was our two traditions—Islam and Christianity—who should be leading the way to find common ground. He received a standing ovation.

Later, Dr. Sayeed invited me to address his annual convention, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) convention. Kathryn Lohre, the ELCA Executive for Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations, and I attended and it was simply amazing. If you took out the prayer rugs and changed some of the vendors, it would look exactly like a churchwide assembly. In fact, I was looking through their workshops and among them was a title something to the effect of: "Getting Young Muslims back to the Masjid." I said that when Muslims work that one out, they should let us know! The ISNA is very intentional about having Shia and Sunni together at the conferences; they use that as a model for the rest of the Muslim world of worshipping together, working together, and fellowshiping together. At this convention, they also had boy scouts—all Muslim kids who also happen to be kids of color—come and pledge allegiance and sing the national anthem. I got tears in my eyes when the little guy in charge of the color guard declared that he "proudly posts the colors of the United States of America."

Sadly, back in Chicago at the churchwide offices, our call center was at the same time overburdened with people accusing me of agreeing to be a keynote speaker for a fundraiser for Hamas. How dare we be engaged in working with these Muslims? It is not always easy to engage people who are afraid and angry. But we do try to talk with these people; when they can listen, we tell them that it is not a new thing for the ELCA to be engaged with the Muslim communities or to do inter-religious work. In the 1990s, the ELCA made a statement that repudiated and asked for forgiveness for Luther's anti-Jewish writings ("Declaration"). For about 12 years

now, we have also said we should be in dialogue with the Muslim community as well. This was not something new that we've done. When we gather with our Jewish colleagues or our Muslim colleagues, we get together on issues of gun violence, women's rights, or domestic hunger. One of the basics for us in our Christian identity is that we believe that we have been set free in Christ to love and serve the neighbor. We enter into inter-religious relations out of that love for the neighbor, but with clarity about who we are and what we believe. How can you have a conversation with somebody else—how can you really *encounter* someone else—if you don't know who you are? At its best, inter-religious dialogue is also a deeper encounter with ourselves.

"One of the basics for us in our Christian identity is that we believe that we have been set free in Christ to love and serve the neighbor. We enter into inter-religious relations out of that love for the neighbor, but with clarity about who we are and what we believe."

Prospects for Partnership

Lutheran higher education has pointed out the importance and necessity of engaging people in inter-religious dialogue because that's where the world is. I want you to know that the ELCA is following what you're doing, and hoping to learn from you. But we also believe that the church has something to share with you, and that together we can do even more.

In the interest of deepening our partnership as we seek to prepare global leaders for a religiously-diverse world, I offer three questions:

First of all, can you find community partners and partners in the church? Augsburg College's partnership with Trinity Cedar Riverside is an excellent example of a community partnership. Could your synod or the local congregation be a resource as well? Could Lutheran

“How might your college or university provide opportunities for ecumenical and inter-religious formation for students of all disciplines and years of study?”

colleges and universities become resources for our synods and our congregations, in turn? We need to work together on this.

Secondly, how might your college or university provide opportunities for ecumenical and inter-religious formation for students of all disciplines and years of study? Engaging religious difference is *not* just for religion majors. In fact, it probably should be geared more towards people who are not religion majors. They might not otherwise learn to negotiate religious difference, and yet they are sure to be working next to someone from another religious tradition. We know that, when people leave our universities and colleges, they're going to go into an inter-religious, pluralistic world. So how are we forming people so that they are able to be good citizens and good neighbors to someone who is not from their own religious tradition? We need to form people so that they can be not only ambassadors of their own religious traditions, but also bridge-builders and peacemakers within our communities. Are there opportunities for developing, sharing, and lifting up existing inter-religious resources of the ELCA and of colleges and universities in curricular and co-curricular endeavors? What are the best practices? We can learn from each other here, too.

Finally, how do we see our institutions as platforms—as firm ground—for work that has been going on for a hundred or more years, but also as launch pads for new endeavors and new collaborations? We are called to educate Christians, Jews, Muslims, agnostics, and others to be faithful to their own identities and to collaborate with one another, knowing one another as brothers and sisters, becoming global citizens. That is new work and—in other ways—work as old as the gospel itself.

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MARTHA E. STORTZ

Why Interfaith Work is Not a Luxury: Lutherans as Neighboring Neighbors

Augsburg College's campus is under construction. To the west contractors dig the foundation for a new Center for Science, Business, and Religion. There's all the equipment that marks a construction site: chain link fences, streets blocked off, sidewalks re-routed, and signs that state the obvious: "Construction Zone: Hard Hats Required."

What's obvious in the new science center may not be so obvious in interfaith work. It too is a construction zone. The work is messy and ongoing, and on-site crew needs to have patience, resilience, and focus. Hard hats are less helpful here than warm hearts, ready hands, and sturdy spirits.

Let's roll up our sleeves and get to work.

What sign marks this construction site? Beware of pronouns. They are the equipment of language, but they warrant careful use. Quite simply, you don't dig a foundation with a spade. You don't hang a picture with jackhammer. Any task needs the appropriate tool. Diversity training encourages pronoun awareness. This is a concern on all of our campuses for people who identify as transgender. Not everyone is comfortable with *he/she* or *him/her* or *his/hers*. Other alternatives are more appropriate: *ze*, *hir*, *hirs*. Interfaith work encourages pronoun awareness of a difference sort: It cautions use of what I want to call a "Presumptive We," the assumption of a community that not everyone feels a part of. In addition, it cautions use of an "Othering You," one that designates an outside group, one

that may not have realized a border was even there.

I remember the comment by Audre Lorde to Adrienne Rich, both poets, essayists, and activists, the first African American and the second Caucasian American: "Your white women's feminism doesn't include me!" (Lorde 36-39).

When I read this, I heard the echo of Sojourner Truth's words to the (largely Caucasian) Women's Convention in 1851: "And ain't I a feminist?"



Why Interfaith is Not a Luxury

For Lutheran institutions, interfaith work is not a luxury.¹ It's more than an add-on, a new program, a certificate, or new major.

Let me state two reasons for this claim at the outset.

The first reason interfaith work is not a luxury is embedded in the tradition itself. The Lutheran movement is always in the process of reforming (*semper reformanda*). Lutherans may pretend this applies to everything or everyone else, but more deeply it applies to this expression of Christianity itself. Lutheranism is a movement that

Martha E. Stortz is the Bernhard M. Christensen Professor of Religion and Vocation at Augsburg College, Minneapolis, Minnesota. She is author of *A World According to God: Practices for Putting Faith at the Center of Your Life* (Jossey-Bass, 2004), *Blessed to Follow: The Beatitudes as a Compass for Discipleship* (Augsburg Fortress, 2010) and most recently, *Called to Follow: Journeys in John's Gospel* (forthcoming). She writes on ethics, spirituality, and pilgrimage.

acknowledges that, when truth comes as a person (incarnation), not as a set of sacred texts or a Book of Confessions, the important thing is to “Follow That Person.” *And people move around.* Sacred texts and Confessions point to this person and can track where that person last showed up, but should not displace that person and cannot predict where and how that person will show up again. After all, as one of my late great former colleagues put it: “What was born in the manger at Bethlehem was a baby, not a book.” So: the first reason why, for Lutherans, interfaith work is not a luxury is that very spirit of reform itself.

The Lutheran tribe in particular remains chastened by the obvious biblical fact that those who considered themselves on the innermost circle of this person simultaneously were the ones who remained most clueless about him. Too often, the disciples seemed not understand who Jesus was at all.

Who did? People of other faith traditions—and no faith tradition at all. People who were “other” to that crowd of disciples around Jesus. People who were the “you” to the inner circle of “we” disciples. These “others” include:

- A Samaritan woman at the well, who knows she has met “the Messiah” (John 4:29)
- A Roman centurion, who declares Jesus to be “God’s son,” something the disciples have missed (Mark 15:39)
- A Syro-Phoenician woman, who knows Jesus can heal her daughter (Mark 7:24-30, Matt 15:21-28)
- Even “demons,” spirits from the spirit world, who suddenly saw what they were up against—and were terrified (cf., Mark 1:24).

The “outsiders” understood Jesus better than the “insiders.”

A second reason why interfaith work is not a luxury is a deeply embedded *epistemological humility*, which is a fancy word for humility when it comes to knowing things with any degree of absolute certainty. In fact, Lutherans are quite certain they don’t have all the answers. That makes—or ought to make—them humble, open to, and dependent upon the knowledge of those outside the tribe. All of this conspires to engender a kind of *epistemological humility*.

There’s a tendency among Lutherans to talk about “militant modesty,” but mere modesty qualifies as “humility-lite,” and it comes packaged with insincere self-deprecation or “cheap apology.” “Cheap apology” is as inauthentic as “cheap grace.”

“Lutherans are quite certain they don’t have all the answers. That makes—or ought to make—them humble, open to, and dependent upon the knowledge of those outside the tribe.”

Real humility is the deep awareness that the truth I see is not the only truth there is. Others may have a different angle of vision on the truth. Epistemological humility does not mean I see nothing. Rather, it acknowledges that I cannot see everything. It affirms that I see something; it encourages me to speak the truth of what I see, so that everyone looking may have a better view.

Tariq Ramadan, Muslim scholar and philosopher, uses the luminous metaphor of “windows” to talk about *points of view*:

We all observe the world through our own windows. A window is a viewpoint over a horizon, a framework, a piece of glass that is always tinted to some extent, and it has its orientation and its limitations: all this, together, imparts its color and qualities to the surrounding landscape. We have to begin humbly, by admitting that we have nothing more than *points of view*, in the literal sense, and that they shape our ideas, our perceptions and our imagination. Coming to terms with the relativity of our gaze does not imply that we have to doubt everything and can be sure of nothing. It might mean quite the opposite, and the outcome might be a non-arrogant confidence, and a healthy, energetic and creative curiosity about the infinite number of windows from which we all observe the same world. (Ramadan x)

Epistemological humility demands a double awareness, an appreciation for the vantage one has, but a lively

curiosity about what someone else might see from their window. After all, everyone looks out onto the same landscape or ocean, as Ramadan extends the metaphor.

It's like theater-in-the-round, where the audience is seated in a circle around a round stage. The players play the play, but they act throughout to different parts of the audience. From where you're sitting, a spectator can't always see the players' faces. Sometimes she watches their backs, as they act to those across from her. But she can always see the faces of the people sitting on the other side of the stage, and she "watches" the action of the play as it registers on their faces. She depends on their reactions to catch a fuller sense of the play. That's another analogy for epistemological humility.

And so the second reason why interfaith work is not a luxury for Lutherans is this deeply ingrained epistemological humility. Lutherans know they have some, but not all of the answers. They depend on others for a fuller picture.

For Lutherans, interfaith work is *not* a luxury. It is part of the mission and identity of each one of our institutions. Each institution will live it out in very different ways, because each institution serves different contexts and each institution bears distinctive gifts. But all of the institutions in this ecology of Lutheran higher education share a commitment to see the other as neighbor, to *be* neighbor to the other, and to live in our various contexts as if they were neighborhoods or a "commons."

My task in the remainder of this essay is to write about the neighbor in a way that makes it strange to those in this room who find it familiar, to make it familiar to those in this room who find it strange, and to underscore for all of "us" that this focus on "neighbor" is one of the very distinctive gifts or "charisms" of being an institution of Lutheran higher education (Stortz).

After all, whatever our religious, philosophical, or humanistic affiliation and whatever days we mark—Ramadan, Passover, Easter, or the solstices—we are all seated at different windows in this landscape of Lutheran higher education. Here is what needs to happen:

1. Because interfaith work is not a luxury, I want to speak of Lutheran institutions as faith-based and interfaith-dependent.
2. I want to explore what this thing called "neighbor" more experientially, emphasizing in particular that "neighbor" is a countercultural way to regard oneself and the other in a world that has a lot of ways to do that, some paternalistic, others downright sinister.
3. Finally, I want to probe what it means for interfaith institutions to engage as neighbors for the common good of the neighborhood, offering a four-fold matrix for action that consists of theological reflection, spiritual engagement, everyday experience, and social action.

Faith-Based and Interfaith-Dependent

In one of his signature theological insights, Darrell Jodock characterized Lutheran colleges and universities as institutions of a "third path." They carve a path between *sectarian* institutions on one hand and *secular* institutions on the other (Jodock 1-2).

Sectarian institutions study religion as an intellectual project, but more importantly promote the faith and practice of a particular faith. Think of Zaytuna College in Berkeley, California, which is the first Muslim liberal arts college in the United States. Think of Wheaton College in Illinois, which presents itself as a "Christ-centered" college. Think of Hebrew Union College, with campuses around the country, whose mission an "academic, spiritual, and professional development center for Reformed Judaism." Sectarian institutions are interested in the studying about religion, generally, but more important, *promoting* the faith and practice of that particular religion.

Secular institutions study about religion as intellectual project, essential to meaning-making, but cannot discuss why religion matters, because that gets into divisive issues of faith and practice. Think of the University of Minnesota, which has a mission statement that boldly invites students to "Dare to discover!" The institution can't really talk about who's doing the daring, why it matters—or for whom or by whom students are dared to discover anything. Secular institutions study about religion, but *bracket* its practice as a faith.

There's a place for both of these kinds of institutions, sectarian and secular; it just isn't the landscape of Lutheran

higher education. As Darrell Jodock points out, Lutheran colleges and universities occupy a middle ground or point to a “third path,” because these institutions are *faith-based*, not *faith-promoting*, as the sectarian institutions are. They are *faith-based*, not *faith-denying* or *faith-bracketing*, as secular institutions must be. Because *faith-based* institutions ground themselves in a rich, thick faith tradition, they can both honor the critical study of religion and respect its practice as a faith.

“Lutheran institutions dare to be both faith-based and interfaith-dependent. They engage in the critical study of religion, while respecting its practice as a faith. They simultaneously understand that they need the presence and insights of people from other faith and non-faith traditions.”

Here’s where I want to extend Jodock’s understanding of Lutheran institutions as faith-based. Because interfaith work is not a luxury, Lutheran institutions dare to be both faith-based and interfaith-dependent. They engage in the critical study of religion, while respecting its practice as a faith. They simultaneously understand that they need the presence and insights of people from other faith and non-faith traditions. Only then can they have a fuller, bigger picture of how the world works.

Here are several illustrations:

Our interfaith team at Augsburg is in conversation with colleagues at Bethel University here in the Twin Cities, which is a sectarian institution founded by Swedish Baptist immigrants. Students and faculty sign a statement pledging to become better Christians. Bethel’s admissions officers were approached by parents in the growing Muslim community here: “We’d love to send our children to your school. We love your values, your no-alcohol campus, and your mission. But we want our kids to become better Muslims, not better Christians.” At Bethel University, there’s no compromise on the commitment to makes its students better Christians.

Bethel is a sturdily faith-promoting institution, and the faith it promotes is Christianity.

These Muslim parents send their girls to St. Kate’s, an all-female, faith-based institution in St. Paul, which, as a faith-based institution, encourages rigorous study of religion, while respecting its practice as a faith. Or to Augsburg, which, as a faith-based and interfaith-dependent institution, does all of the above and needs practitioners of other faiths and non-faiths to be the institution it is called to be. As an institution in Lutheran higher education, Augsburg’s vocation as a faith-based institution is always in the process of reform and is graced with a keen epistemological humility makes it not only faith-based but interfaith-dependent.

A second example demonstrates how the calling to be faith-based and interfaith-dependent impacts the entire campus community, not just students. Florence Amamoto, professor of English at Gustavus Adolphus College, wrote: “I know from experience that being Buddhist at a Lutheran College has not only taught me more about Lutheranism but has deepened my knowledge of and my faith in my own religion.”² Amamoto didn’t have to bracket her Buddhism to be at a Lutheran college. Because she was at an interfaith-dependent institution, both its content and its practice were valued—and not only valued, but needed.

At these faith-based and interfaith-dependent institutions, students, faculty, and staff are encouraged to articulate what they believe and are encouraged to practice in whatever ways appropriate.

“Students, faculty, and staff can be part of the mission, without sharing the identity of the tradition that drives it.”

In summary, in the landscape of higher education, there are sectarian or faith-promoting institutions, secular or faith-bracketing institutions, and “third path” or faith-based institutions. I would argue that Lutheran higher education offers a fourth alternative, because that ecology is both faith-based and interfaith-dependent.

These faith-based and interfaith-dependent institutions live at a busy intersection of *mission*, *identity*, and *privilege*. A rich, thick faith tradition shapes a *mission* that attracts faculty, students, and staff of various religious and non-religious (and philosophical) traditions. They don't require that everyone share the institution's founding religious *identity*, so long as people can support the *mission* that *identity* drives. That means that students, faculty, and staff can be part of the mission, without sharing the identity of the tradition that drives it. The distinction between mission and identity supports a vibrant diversity these faith-based and interfaith-dependent institutions need (VanZanten 1-11).

To be truthful, however, this distinction between mission and identity sounds a lot neater in the abstract than in the lived reality. Many of these Lutheran colleges and universities once had a much more sectarian or faith-promoting ethos. For example, Augsburg College was founded as a seminary, in the Haugean Pietist tradition. Its mission was to train pastors for the urban peasants who immigrated to Minneapolis to work in lumberyards and grain mills along the Mississippi. A shared background and immigrant experience, a shared language and culture, created commonality. That commonality, accentuated in a strange land, confers a certain *privilege* on those who spoke that language and shared that culture, background, and experience.

As the college diversified, that *privilege* got challenged. And loss of *privilege* registers as loss of *identity*. There's a lot of talk around this institution, driven by fear and a deep sense of loss: "We're losing our Lutheran identity." And the response is not always as compassionate as it might be: "No, you're losing your Lutheran privilege."³ Loss of privilege needs to be acknowledged.

People who were part of that common language, background, and culture suddenly feel as if they are, not strangers in a strange land, to borrow Robert Heinlein's title, but strangers in a land that has become strange, but was once as familiar as the back of their hands. They become again immigrants in what used to be their own backyard. Loss of privilege is a real loss and needs to be mourned.

But loss of privilege should not be confused with loss of identity. More importantly, it is an opportunity to learn new languages and re-articulate identity in nothing more—and

nothing less—than a common space. That common space is the neighborhood. Only the combined efforts of the neighbors in the neighborhood can make it work.

"Loss of privilege should not be confused with loss of identity."

I stumbled upon a vivid example of this in my prior calling as professor at a Lutheran seminary that was part of the Graduate Theological Union, an ecumenical and increasingly interfaith consortium in Berkeley, California. I had a doctoral student from the Center for Jewish Studies enroll in my introductory course in Christian history. She "outed" herself the first day. We all did. In the class were Lutherans, Methodists, Episcopalians, Jesuits, Unitarians of various stripes, seekers, people hanging onto a faith tradition with their fingernails, and people who'd already let go—and found a place to land. In other words, the class didn't have the *privilege* of a common language or experience or background. We didn't have access to the assumptions, even the prejudices, that bind groups together sociologically. We had to build a common teaching and learning space, a neighborhood.

My preparation for class intensified. To my chagrin, I discovered I'd always assumed the apostle Paul had read the entire corpus of Martin Luther's works before sitting down to scrawl his letter to the Galatians! I had to go back to the original text and context. After all, Paul had been a rabbi, so I met the apostle anew. I scoured my lecture notes for anything that might be taken as "anti-Semitic," "anti-Catholic," or presumptively Trinitarian. We identified any leakage in class, respectfully, civilly, but firmly. Together we built a common space. Together we shared that common space for the fifteen weeks of the course, a temporary neighborhood, but a neighborhood nonetheless.

We "neighbored" one another into that space. We relinquished *privilege* that in some cases we hadn't known we had. In that space *identities* became more truthfully and generously defined.

Let me close out this section by reiterating something I hear on all of our campuses: Lutheran institutions pursue interfaith work, not *in spite of* the fact that they are based

in a particular religious tradition, but *because* they are based in a particular religious tradition. Let me add only this: Lutherans pursue this interfaith work because we are based in *this* particular religious tradition, one that is always in the process of reforming and one that is graced with a robust sense of epistemological humility.

Neighboring Neighbors

One of the gifts of that tradition is being and seeing the neighbor.⁴ In a world where people are strangers, avatars, pop-ups to one another, but more dangerously, threat or enemy to one another, being neighbors is a revolutionary insight.

American citizens see this very much in their current political landscape, regardless of whether they affiliate “Republican” or “Democratic,” regardless of whom they supported in the 2016 election. Fear dominates rhetoric in the public square. Where a politics of the commons regards the “other” as neighbor, a politics of fear regards the “other” as threat.

“In a world where people are strangers, avatars, pop-ups to one another, but more dangerously, threat or enemy to one another, being neighbors is a revolutionary insight.”

At the vocation conference, where I first presented these comments, I invited participants to move from merely *talking about* neighbors to actually *being* neighbors one to another. I reminded them that, for the space of the conference, they all shared a common neighborhood, which was the space of the Augsburg College campus under construction. Smaller groups also all shared the space of a round table, which offered a tiny theater in the round.

I offered a text from my own tradition, Luke 10:25-37, “The Parable of the Good Samaritan,” rather than adopting or colonizing a story from another. The text tells a story, but on closer examination, it is a story that contains two stories. One is the story of an *intra-faith* encounter, that is, an encounter between two different expressions of the same

faith. The other is the story of an *inter-faith* encounter, that is, an encounter between two different faiths.

Taken together, these stories display what it means *to be* a neighbor to someone and *to see* a neighbor in someone. Let’s unpack that.

The chapter heading printed in my study bible calls both stories “The parable of the Good Samaritan,” a title that attends to the dominant story about a Samaritan. But at the top of my study bible, I’ve penciled in another title alongside that one: “Out-lawyering a lawyer,” a title that attends to the peripheral story about Jesus and a lawyer. It’s in attending to that peripheral story that the reader’s notions about “neighbor” are suddenly deconstructed—or placed under construction.

The Good Samaritan

The first story narrates the sad tale of a man who was robbed, beaten, and left for dead by the side of a road. He’s probably been stripped of any clothing that would have identified him as a “we” or a “they.” A priest and Levite pass him by. In fact, contact with anybody’s bodily fluids and would have defiled them and prevented them from doing their jobs.

A Samaritan stops to help—and Samaritans were not friends to the Jews, but “enemies.” Their country bordered Judea; they worshiped other gods. So the notion of a *good* Samaritan would have been a contradiction in terms to a *good* Jew. This particular Samaritan would have been a stranger, a visitor, even a migrant. The dominant story catches out of his country and out of his comfort zone

The Samaritan is the one who binds up the man’s wounds, transports him to an inn, pays the innkeeper for his care, and promises to check back. End of story.

It’s not a very satisfying story; it rates about a C+. Missing are a lot of important details: How does the story end? Did the innkeeper pocket the money and kick the sick man out as soon as the Samaritan was out of sight? Did the Samaritan come back? Did the man recover? What happened to the priest and Levite?

But that dominant story is nestled in a second story, a peripheral story, at least as important:

Out-Lawyering a Lawyer

That second, enframing story goes like this: Trying to “test” Jesus, a lawyer poses a question: “What must I do to inherit

eternal life?" Jesus responds with a question of his own, always a good move with someone setting a verbal trap: "What's in the law?" The lawyer responds with the *Shema*: "You shall love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." It's the chief prayer of Judaism, not Roman law. Because Jesus is also a Jew, the conversation between the two is an intra-faith encounter.

In effect, Jesus says: "Right answer!" He's gotten the lawyer to answer his own question. But then the lawyer pushes back: "And who is my neighbor?"

And this time, Jesus responds to the lawyer's question with the parable and a final question: "Which one of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The lawyer responds, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus replies, "Go and do likewise."

"Instead of getting an answer to the question 'Who is my neighbor?' he's forced to ask himself the question: 'Am I a neighbor?'"

The exchange leaves the lawyer with a mirror image of the question he posed. Instead of getting an answer to the question "Who is my neighbor?" he's forced to ask himself the question: "Am I a neighbor?"

Jesus asks the only question worth asking, then and now. That old scaffolding for that old joke—"There are two kinds of people in the world"—exposes the need to render the world into "we" and "they," "us" and "them." The lawyer wants to police the border between "neighbor" and "not-neighbor." He's not exceptional in this regard. Christian or non-Christian, Muslim or infidel (*kafir*), Jew or Gentile (*goy*), seeking or found, fideist, atheist, or faithist.⁵

Against all division, the two stories assert that there is only one kind of people in the world, neighbors. The point is to see everyone as "neighbor" and to be "neighbor" oneself.

But what exactly does it mean to see everyone as "neighbor?" What does it mean to be "neighbor?" And how are all these neighbors going to live together in the neighborhoods they variously inhabit?

Let me make a few points about the revolutionary import of being a "neighbor" and sharing a common neighborhood. Along the way, I'll share some stories from the neighborhood I know best, Augsburg College.

First Revolutionary Insight

Neighborhood is not the language of family, a community bound by blood, where, if you don't have the right bloodline, usually on your father's side, you don't belong. Nor is it the language of friendship, a community bound by loves and preferences. Here, if you don't have the right taste in clothes or music or pizza or sports teams, you don't belong.

It's also not the language of "enemy," a community bound tightly together by hatred. If you don't hate the same people I do, you'd better watch your back.

Finally, it's not the language of "stranger," language that erodes community like an acid, creating a place where no one belongs.

Instead, regarding the other as neighbor describes a community bound together by *place*, nothing more—and nothing less. Neighbors share a common neighborhood.

Sharing anything is by definition messy. It's like living in a construction zone. Here on Augsburg's campus, Campus Ministry and Student Affairs have been trying to find an on-campus space for Muslim students, faculty, and staff. They settled on Harbo Chapel, which was a quiet location with good space—but riveted into the wall was a crucifix with the body of a dying Jesus fixed to it. Initially, a sheet was provided, so that Muslims could cover the crucifix when they prayed. One summer, facilities built a box around the crucifix, with a door on the front that could open or close.

"Regarding the other as neighbor describes a community bound together by *place*, nothing more—and nothing less. Neighbors share a common neighborhood."

A few weeks into the school year, one of the janitors came up to me and asked: "Why did you put Jesus in a box?" Only then did I learn that some of our janitorial staff, largely Ethiopian and Eritrean Christian, had been using

Harbo Chapel during their breaks for prayer. Clearly, the operative definition of “neighbor” and “neighborhood” had been too narrow. It got blown open.

Second Revolutionary Insight

Neighbors share relationship that is involuntary. You don’t choose your neighbors—and they don’t choose you. It’s a relationship over which no one has much choice. But sharing a common space, however messy, issues in common projects for the good of the neighborhood.

Another story from Augsburg and our neighborhood: Graphic arts professor Chris Houlberg engaged his class in designing signage for some of the local Somali-American-owned businesses here in Cedar-Riverside. The project traded on reciprocal needs. The students needed to practice their craft; the business community needed signs.

“Sharing a common space, however messy, issues in common projects for the good of the neighborhood.”

Students learned a new palette of colors that would be inviting, designs that would “pop” for this population. It was a new aesthetic. They designed a stylized, forest-green tree. But upon completion, the business community decided the tree looked too much like a cross. That literally meant back to the drawing board. Houlberg concluded: “My students learned more from that first failure than they would have from a first success.”⁶

Here, common space brought together people who did not choose one another, but could gather around a common project for the betterment of the community.

Third Revolutionary Insight

Neighborliness presumes a radical equality. After all, the lawyer cites scriptural counsel to “love your neighbor as yourself”—not *more than* or *less than* yourself. Self-love then is the condition for neighbor-love; self-love is the qualifier of neighbor-love. In the context of the two stories, both loves are ordered by love of God. That primary love keeps the all parties from playing God.

The radical equality of neighborliness cuts through privilege. The neighbor-to-neighbor relationship is not a hierarchical relationship of patron-to-client, employer-to-employee, parent-to-child, or teacher-to-student. A neighbor-to-neighbor relationship confers equal status on both parties.

An example: The Augsburg college football team assembles every August for practice, and August in Minnesota is typically steamy and hot. Coaches set out cattle troughs full of cold water, just so players can cool down after strenuous play. One summer Ramadan began during the month of August. Muslim players couldn’t eat from sunrise to sundown, but they showed up for practice with all the non-Muslim students. In solidarity with their teammates, the non-Muslim students elected to fast with their teammates for a few days, both to accompany them in their practice and to experience what they were experiencing.

And for the space of a few days, the whole team was on a level playing field. For the space of a few days, the whole team became not just teammates, some fueled and some running on empty, but neighbors.

Final Revolutionary Insight

The neighbor is defined not by ethnic background or homeland or gender or race or what spices waft out of their kitchen at 5 p.m. The real neighbor is defined by how she acts. As the stories demonstrate, the one who acts with “mercy” is the “neighbor.”

Actually, the word “neighbor” is more a verb than a noun. In the dominant story, a Samaritan “neighbors” the beaten man in concrete actions, binding his wounds, carrying him on his own mule, checking him into an inn, and paying for his care. The Samaritan embodies compassion; he doesn’t merely talk about it.

But the story of the good Samaritan also “neighbors” the lawyer, in effect showing him how to be a better Jew. And Jesus, in telling the story, “neighbors” the lawyer, demonstrating compassion to a man who starts out trying to trick him. Instead, Jesus engages the lawyer, talking to him directly, rather than *about* him to his disciples.

That kind of face-to-face encounter can be messy. That’s why a key practice of compassion is forgiveness.

A final story from my neighborhood: Several years ago, Eboo Patel came to speak about interfaith work at the college's opening convocation, and the date scheduled was at the beginning Rosh Hashanah. Neither IFYC nor the planning team noticed the conflict. My Jewish colleagues noticed—and they were rightly and deeply offended. It was one more example of Christian privilege, made more egregious since the topic was interfaith understanding.

I had lunch with Barbara Lehmann, my Jewish friend and colleague in social work, one day soon after the conflict surfaced. We were both too upset to eat anything. I asked for and received her forgiveness. But first I had to hear the hurt. And it was hurt. Offense would have been easier to handle, but naming and hearing the hurt cut each of us more deeply.

Barbara forgave me. Forgiveness after all, is a central practice to each of our traditions, but to actually enact it is a great grace. In forgiving me, she taught me to be a better Christian. In forgiving me, we could move from that injury back into the neighborhood. After all, there was work to do.

Four Strategies for Interfaith Encounter

What does it take to live in the neighborhood? If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a neighborhood to do interfaith work. It's a campus-wide commitment; it's a curricular and co-curricular enterprise.

Four strategies of interfaith encounter—theological reflection, spiritual engagement, social action, and everyday experience—provide portals into interfaith work. People enter through the door most comfortable to them, but once inside, they can move into other dimensions.⁷

Theological Reflection

The first strategy is a head-trip. Interfaith work begins with knowing and being able to talk about one's values and belief (knowledge *of or from*). On that foundation, it scaffolds knowledge *about* other religious traditions or stances.

Faith-based and interfaith-dependent Lutheran institutions prize critical thinking. The vaunted "freedom of a Christian" is deeply a freedom *from* academic fundamentalisms of the left and the right and a freedom *for* critical inquiry.

What is more, this commitment to theological reflection expresses itself in curricular and in co-curricular ways. The robust religion departments in the Lutheran ecology of higher education present religion not simply as an historical or cultural phenomenon but also as an expression of the need to make sense of the human condition, human community, and the mystery at its heart. They encourage students to build lives of meaning and purpose oriented around what they believe. They encourage students to think about their futures as something to be carefully "planned" as well as something to which they are deeply "called" (Brooks).

Courses across the disciplines teach the content, skills, and sensibilities of the interfaith studies to prepare students for a professional world that increasingly calls for interfaith competence. For example, an international business graduate headed for work in Southeast Asia needs to know how Buddhism, Islam, and the colonial legacies of Christianity inflect business practice. Should her company host international guests, she will need to be alert to what to serve them and how to accommodate their needs.

"Courses across the disciplines teach the content, skills, and sensibilities of the interfaith studies to prepare students for a professional world that increasingly calls for interfaith competence."

In addition, theological reflection takes place throughout the institution in planned events and spontaneous town hall meetings. Symposia engage the entire community in conversation and moral deliberation. On this campus, a pop-up forum during the occupation of Tahrir Square in 2011 packed the house, because so many in the community were connected to countries experiencing the "Arab Spring."

Spiritual Engagement

Spiritual engagement acknowledges that interfaith work engages the heart as well as the head. In honoring the practice of faith as well as the study of religion, these faith-based and interfaith-dependent Lutheran institutions offer time and space to worship.

And worship is very particular, in ways that are both gracious and tricky. “Spiritual engagement” does not mean more “interfaith” worship services, which are hard

“These faith-based and interfaith-dependent Lutheran institutions offer time and space to worship.”

to choreograph and even harder to execute with integrity. It does mean wrestling with the human needs to worship, to find Sabbath, and to stand in the presence of mystery. It does mean finding ways to be observant that neither balkanize the campus, on one hand, nor serve up inter-religious mush, on the other.

In his much-cited commencement to Kenyon College in 2005, the late writer David Foster Wallace identifies meaning-making as a deep-seated human need:

There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is *what* to worship. And an outstanding reason for choosing some sort of God or spiritual-type thing to worship—be it J.C. or Allah, be it Yahweh or the Wiccan mother-goddess or the Four Noble Truths or some infrangible set of ethical principles—is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things—if they are where you tap real meaning in life—then you will never have enough. Never feel you have enough. It’s the truth. Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you. (Wallace 7)

If humans are hard-wired to worship, how can these faith-based and interfaith-dependent institutions help students discern what gods they will attend? How can a college education point them to what gives life, rather than what “will eat you alive?” What wisdom can be gleaned from other religious, philosophical, and humanist positions? These are lively questions on all of our campuses, and they’re important to keep wrestling with. In this ecology

of Lutheran higher education, we have not only the privilege of asking them, but the responsibility to live them.

Social Action

Social action offers the opportunity for hands-on engagement. Lutheran higher education does not only point toward a career, but to a calling, and that call comes from the neighbor. Service learning and community engagement sites offer opportunities to work in the immediate neighborhood in ways that enhance learning and meet need. Social action also offers unique opportunities to “neighbor” across religious difference, whether those differences surface from the site or within the learning community.

Social action has long been a primary focus of Eboo Patel and the Interfaith Youth Core. Early on, Patel realized that religious diversity was left out of campus conversations on diversity. At the same time, he saw young people perpetrating a lot of religious violence. He felt called to address the situation:

Every time we read about a young person who kills in the name of God, we should recognize that an institution painstakingly recruited and trained that young person. And that institution is doing the same for thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of others like him. In other words, these religious extremists have invested in their youth programs. If we had invested in our youth programs, could we have gotten to those young people first? (Patel 149)

Patel resolved to found a youth organization that would give young people across faith and non-faith traditions a common project to work on together. In the course of working together, they’d come to know and discuss religious differences among them, as well as learn more about the religious backgrounds of the communities in which they worked.

All of our campuses have service learning and community engagement sites in the neighborhoods surrounding campus. These experiences offer practice in seeing and being neighbor, as well as encounter with people from other faith traditions. They serve as an important portal into interfaith work.

Everyday Experience

Interfaith work places head, heart, and hands in the world of everyday experience. The need for religious literacy and interfaith competence asserts itself everywhere—in the newsfeed, on social media, in the locker room, on the dorm floor. A walk across campus offers ordinary encounters with religious diversity. If, as Diana Eck emphasizes, diversity is a fact, but pluralism is an achievement, how will college graduates have the knowledge, skills, and sensibilities to work for pluralism in a religiously diverse world (Eck 191)?

“The need for religious literacy and interfaith competence asserts itself everywhere—in the newsfeed, on social media, in the locker room, on the dorm floor.”

If they have attended a Lutheran college or university, there’s a good chance they will. Because they are faith-based and interfaith-dependent, these institutions cultivate various strategies for interfaith work: theological reflection, spiritual engagement, social action, and everyday experience. Although the four strategies stand together, each person enters interfaith work through a different portal. For some, working at a campus soup kitchen prods reflection on the religious practice behind different dietary needs. For others, thinking through the various dimensions of the Orlando massacre on June 12, 2016 fuels action for justice. For still others, listening Rami Nashashibi describe his return to Islam prompts reflection on their own faith journey. For still others, reading Chris Stedman’s *Faitheist* gives a paradigm for a thoughtful and informed belief stance.

Everyone’s point-of-entry into interfaith work will be unique, but every campus offers developed strategies in each of these areas for further exploration. As Lutheran institutions, we not only can open these doors—we have to. The Lutheran tradition demands interfaith work, and our common future needs it.

Conclusion

Interfaith work is not a luxury for these faith-based and interfaith-dependent institutions, both because of their historical identity and because of their immediate present. Inter-religious literacy is part of being a responsible global citizen in the twenty-first century.

This work may always be a construction zone, but we engage it as neighbors, because we share the planet. We were created to care for it and, in the process, come to know one another: “O mankind, we have created you male and female, and appointed you races and tribes, that you may know one another” (The Quran, *Al-Hujurat* 49:13). As always, the practice of compassion is not the end of the story, but just the beginning.

Go and do likewise.

Endnotes

1. The language comes from Audre Lorde’s classic essay, “Poetry is Not a Luxury,” from *Sister Outsider*, 36-39.

2. Cited in Mark Wilhelm’s preface to the *Intersections* (Fall 2014) issue on “Interfaith Understanding at Lutheran Colleges and Universities,” 4. He thanks Jason Mahn, editor of *Intersections* and professor of religion at Augustana College (Rock Island) for bringing the article to his attention. I thank them both.

3. See the work that Caryn Riswold, blogger for *Patheos* and Professor of Religion, Gender, and Women’s Studies at Illinois College in Jacksonville IL, has done on Christian privilege (Riswold, “Teaching the College ‘Nones’”) see also Goren, “Recognizing Christian Privilege.”

4. I identified four “charisms” or gifts of Lutheran higher education: nimble, flexible institutions through the commitment to ongoing reformation (*semper reformanda*); critical inquiry through Christian freedom; a commitment to the poor through the priesthood of all believers; and regarding the other as neighbor (Stortz). Jason Mahn has similarly named distinctive “tensions” in Lutheran higher education: between religious formation and interfaith, between suspicion and trust, and between vocation as a theological insight and vocation as practice (Mahn). However they are named, the “gifts” of this distinctive approach to learning are needed now more than ever.

5. The word “faitheist” was coined by Chris Stedman in his spiritual memoir *Faitheist*. It describes the common ground between atheists and religious people (see Stedman).

6. Oral presentation by Chris Houlberg for a panel on "Faculty Experiences in Somali Community Engagement," February 14, 2012 at Augsburg College.

7. The framework comes from Scott Alexander, Islamicist at Catholic Theological Union, in his article "Knowing and Loving Our Neighbors of Other Faiths."

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◆ CONFERENCE THEME ◆

Vocation for Life

MATTHEW MARUGGI

The Promise and Peril of the Interfaith Classroom

At the beginning of each of my classes at Augsburg College, I ask students to make a name tent. They fold a piece of card stock paper in half and on the outside, in thick marker, write the name they wish to be called for the semester. On the inside of the tent, I ask them to answer a series of questions, which I explain will be for my eyes only. One question I ask is: What is your religious preference, if any? The cultural diversity of the College is reflected in the wide variety of names on these tents: Samira, Blake, Mai, Alejandra, Mohammed, Hannah, and Ramon, to name a few. The rich differences in how students orient around religion is reflected on the inside of the tent: Muslim, Lutheran, Shamanist, atheist, agnostic, Catholic, spiritual, and more.

It is with great excitement that I view this diversity and think about the learning potential in this kind of classroom environment. At the same time, I hear the caution in the words of world religions scholar Diana Eck, when she writes, “Pluralism is not the sheer fact of plurality alone, but its active engagement with plurality” (191). In other words, while there is great promise in the interfaith classroom, just having a group of students who orient differently around religion in the room does not necessarily lead to a pluralistic environment where interfaith dialogue can flourish.

The Power of Pairing Opposites

My years teaching in the religion department at Augsburg College have given me much practice nurturing interfaith

conversation in the classroom. While there is always an intangibility as to why a robust interfaith community develops sometimes and at other times does not, I have found that there are certain qualities to consider in creating a vibrant interfaith environment. I find that the best way to think about these qualities is in pairs of seeming opposites: dialogue and debate, safety and risk, commonality and particularity. These qualities play out in the classroom, not in adversarial ways, but in creative tension.



“For me, dialogue is the default position in the interfaith classroom because it fosters the qualities of critical loyalty, deep listening, intellectual empathy, and active respect.”

Dialogue and Debate

Diana Eck traces the origin of the word dialogue to the Greek word meaning “through speech.” She posits that, in an interfaith environment, dialogue involves reciprocal conversation. Mutual witness takes place, where each

Matthew Maruggi is an Assistant Professor of Religion at Augsburg College, Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is co-teacher/co-facilitator of the Interfaith Scholars Program at the College.

party bears witness to the truth he or she possesses. At the same time, each participant engages in mutual transformation, which does not imply agreement with the other but rather willingness to question one's own position and to be changed by the encounter (19). For me, dialogue is the default position in the interfaith classroom because it fosters the qualities of critical loyalty, deep listening, intellectual empathy, and active respect.

Conversely, according to Merriam-Webster's dictionary, the definition of the verb debate is "to dispute or argue about," which is certainly how debate is viewed in our political culture. It is a competition in which one side's arguments win out over the other. When we move to the noun form, debate is defined as "a regulated discussion of a proposition of two matched sides." This kind of carefully planned discussion can be a useful technique in an interfaith setting in order to discuss not truth claims, but rather particular issues in an interfaith world that can help students clarify their positions.

Safety and Risk

The second set of qualities—safety and risk— can perhaps be seen as even more diametrically opposed to one another. Currently, there is much conversation about safety in the university classroom, much of it stemming from the positive impulse of ensuring that underrepresented voices are valued and heard, without the risk of micro (or macro) aggressions based on race, class, culture, religion, or sexual identity. As stated above, dialogue requires intellectual empathy and active respect which helps to create safe space.

At the same time, safety is not an absolute value and must be balanced against risk taking. Betty Barrett suggests that while educators should promise that students will not be subjected to behaviors that threaten the social or physical integrity of the learning environment, they "may not be able to (nor should they) promise students in good faith that the intellectual enterprise and scholarly exchanges are safe and comfortable endeavours" (10). Najeeba Syeed-Miller applies this notion to the interfaith classroom, asserting that "we must disarm the notion of a 'safe' classroom and disabuse students of an expectation of a risk-free learning experience" if we seek to prepare students to navigate the complex, rich,

and choppy waters of our interfaith world. According to transformational learning theory, it is only through a series of disorienting dilemmas, where one's taken-for-granted assumptions and perceptions are challenged, that transformation can occur, that the learner may create new, inclusive, and more accurate beliefs to guide his or her actions (Mezirow 17). Disorientation involves sitting with discomfort and risking a change in the way you see the other and the world.

"It is only through a series of disorienting dilemmas, where one's taken-for-granted assumptions and perceptions are challenged, that transformation can occur."

Commonality and Particularity

The final set of qualities for consideration when creating a vibrant interfaith environment is commonality and particularity. A laudable goal of the interfaith classroom can be to create a sense of solidarity across religious and nonreligious worldviews—a sense that we are all one human family and perhaps we share some universal values. Karen Armstrong, scholar of world religions, and founder of the Charter for Compassion, believes that compassion is a universal value that "lies at the heart of all religious, ethical, and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat others as we wish to be treated" (6). Discovering commonality can lay the foundation for lasting interfaith relationships.

At the same time, the interfaith classroom should be a place that affirms the distinctiveness and value of *different* cultures, religions, and worldviews, recognizing the *unique* contributions each perspective brings to the world house. The particularities *within* traditions should be celebrated as well. There are, after all, many Judaisms, Christianities, and secular humanisms. By affirming particularity, students are empowered to bring their unique identities, which are increasingly hybridized, either due to how they were raised or by their own choosing. In the classroom at Augsburg College, I have encountered more than one Christian-Shamanist and Buddhist-Lutheran, not to mention many who identify as "spiritual-but-not-religious."

I have even encountered a “Muslic,” a young woman raised to practice both the Catholic tradition of her mother, and the Muslim tradition of her father. By affirming both particularity and communality, one’s individual and unique story can be put into conversation with the larger narratives of religious and philosophical traditions, thus further expanding the interfaith conversation in the classroom.

Conclusion

The promise of the interfaith classroom is that it can create a space to fulfill the primary purpose of education. According to Trappist monk and interfaith advocate Thomas Merton, this purpose is “to show a person how to define himself [or herself] authentically and spontaneously in relation to the world—not to impose a prefabricated definition of the world, still less an arbitrary definition of the individual” (3). This environment can nurture self-understanding and an expanded worldview while holding the qualities of dialogue and debate, safety and risk, and communality and particularity in creative and productive tension.

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DARRELL JODOCK

Religious Diversity and the Vocation of a Lutheran College



My purpose in this article is to suggest that a college which takes seriously its Lutheran values is well positioned to foster inter-religious relations. I want students and faculty and staff who are Muslim or Jewish or humanist or Buddhist or Hindu to be able to say, "This is a good place for me to study

and work *because* it is built on a Lutheran foundation."

Just to be clear, I am talking about the Lutheran foundations of higher education. My purpose is to help everyone at a Lutheran college—whatever his or her personal faith—to understand and, I hope, appreciate the nature of the college or university where they work and study. This requires exploring some of the Lutheran theological principles and their implications. In no sense do I see this as disparaging other traditions or ignoring the gifts they have offer, nor am I blind to the mistakes that representatives of this tradition have made over the years. I do not want this discussion to make anyone feel like an outsider; this is about the college of which we are already a part.

To say that a Lutheran college is well positioned to foster inter-religious relations is to argue against a commonly held idea—namely, that it must reduce or renounce its religious commitments in order to treat others with respect and welcome them onto campus. I think a Lutheran

college can be both religiously rooted and inclusive. I like to describe this combination as following a third path. This third-path option is in contrast, on the one hand, to those schools who value religious uniformity and require their faculty and staff to sign a statement of belief. These schools are religiously rooted but not inclusive. And, on the other hand, the third-path option is in contrast to those schools that have severed their ties to the faith of their founders and modeled their approach to religion after that followed by American society. These schools are inclusive but no longer religiously rooted.

A college that follows a third path takes seriously both its religious heritage and religious and other forms of inclusiveness. In order to do this, a third-path college distinguishes between its educational values and the Lutheran theological principles that anchor and inform those values. To illustrate this, think of a large bridge. Everything that happens at the college occurs on its expansive deck. The pillars that "hold up" this deck are its educational values—that is, the values that influence decisions about what does and does not happen on the deck. The footings are its theological principles. They anchor, support, and inform the college's educational values (the pillars).¹ A third-path college invites everyone on its campus to endorse its educational values and to appreciate the theological principles that undergird them, even if they do not personally subscribe to the Lutheran faith.

Darrell Jodock is Professor Emeritus at Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minnesota, having served there as the Drell and Adeline Bernhardson Distinguished Professor of Lutheran Studies.

A Relational Theology

So, what is it about the character of this theological foundation that prompts a Lutheran college to continue on a third path? The partial answer is that Lutheran theology is thoroughly relational. Its focus is on the character and quality of relationships. The questions it asks are these: Does the relationship under consideration intimidate, or does it enhance the dignity and freedom and creativity of the other? Does it foster justice, or acquiesce to political or racial or economic injustice? My claim is this: the relational character of Lutheran theology enables it to deepen the educational mission of the college, not stifle or impede it, and inter-religious dialogue and understanding serve this educational mission.

I have to confess that I have difficulty finding short and simple ways to explain a relational theology. So I invite readers to think along with me as I spend some time trying to do just that. Let me begin by asking “What are some indications that Lutheran theology is thoroughly relational?”

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One indication is its fondness for paradoxes. Again and again, Luther put two seemingly contradictory ideas next to each other and affirmed both. For example, he said that God is both hidden and revealed (to reveal is to uncover, so it would seem to be the opposite of hidden), and then went on to explain why this was so. He also said that believers are simultaneously justified (that is, right with God) and sinners (that is, not right with God). And that they are both free lords of all, subject to none, and dutiful servants of all, subject to all. It took him an entire treatise to explain this last paradox (“Freedom”). What paradoxes do is to invite people to look beyond the contrasting ideas to a deeper truth not fully contained in either—a deeper truth that is relational.

Another indication of what it means for a theology to be relational is that Luther objected to letting rules of behavior stand between one person and another. What takes priority is active love and deeds of service. If a person focuses on the other, listens to other, and uses wisdom to decide what to do, something good and beneficial will happen. Though ethical guidelines can be helpful, trying to follow rules undercuts generous listening and transfers the focus back to oneself rather than the neighbor. There was a time, for example, when I decided to practice the virtue of humility—that is, to follow the rule that it was good to be humble. As I went along, whenever I saw evidence of humility, I was proud of my accomplishment. I was like a dog chasing its tail, and the focus was firmly on me. Eventually I came to see that the best approximation of humility occurred when I forgot all about the rule, when the power of another person’s presence so captured my attention that I forgot about myself. The energy was coming from the other. It is this energy that a relational theology affirms.

Sometimes, love for the neighbor may even require a sacrifice of one’s own virtue. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for example, sacrificed the ethical virtue of pacifism to participate in a plot to assassinate Hitler, when it became clear to him that this was the only way to end the deaths of thousands of other humans. He did not think this absolved him of responsibility or that murder had somehow become virtuous. He expected to be held accountable for his actions. Assassination was not right, but the effect on others of doing nothing was still worse. In the Lutheran tradition, the quality of relationships and their effects on the other take priority over obedience—even if the two are not always in conflict.

Still another indicator of a relational theology is that Luther’s primary concern was how the teachings of Christianity were applied and understood. On the basis of his own struggles and his own experience with others, he understood that doctrines could be interpreted either as ways to coerce obedience and conformity or as avenues to freedom and wholeness. A relational theology is concerned about the effect of words and ideas and doctrines. The basic principles Luther advanced were not new doctrines to be set aside other doctrines. Rather, his principles affected the way the teachings were interpreted. More important

than the teaching itself was understanding its effect on the God-human and human-to-human relationships. In fact, a teaching could only be understood properly if its effect on relationships was taken into account. To wrap it up in a single sentence: in this theology, relationships do not serve beliefs, beliefs serve relationships.

“In this theology, relationships do not serve beliefs, beliefs serve relationships.”

And one final indicator of a relational theology is Luther’s concept of faith. Let me approach this concept a little differently, by asking first what the alternatives are to a relational theology. There are at least two. One is to regard religion as entirely inner, entirely spiritual. This approach seeks inner peace by isolating the self from the storms of life. There is nothing wrong with this as a religious option, but it is not consistent with the biblical image of what it means to be human, so it does not fit well with Christianity. The other option, far more common in American Christianity, is to insist that there is a set of ideas or beliefs to which a person must agree. To have faith is to accept these ideas. Endorsing them then becomes the pre-requisite for inclusion in the faith community. When viewed through such a check-list of required ideas, a person who practices any other religion automatically falls short.

How does relational theology understand faith? Faith is a response to a God who has already taken the initiative and in an act of sheer generosity reached out to be reconciled with human beings. Faith tags along after God’s action. It first of all acknowledges what God has already done and is doing. And then it grows into trust—a trust in God’s promises and a trust in the promiser. Just as a person who falls in love wonders, “How is it possible for my lover to view me as lovable?” so the person of faith wonders how God could possibly love the likes of me. And out of this wonder comes a quest to understand—a quest that is never quite satisfied. While it regards every idea about God and about faith to be incomplete and only partially adequate, it also regards every idea about God to matter, because it either highlights or obscures God’s generosity and its implications for human life.

A Relational Theology and Inter-Religious Relations

What does a relational theology mean for inter-religious relations? It means that the focus is on the other person, on getting to know that person, trying to understand how the world looks from his/her point of view, seeking to assist where help is needed, and joining in cooperation for the benefit of the larger community. The focus is not primarily on convincing the other to agree with my ideas about God and the world, but engaging with and befriending that person and seeking ways to cooperate for the benefit of the larger community.

This is not to say that ideas or beliefs are unimportant, because they can and do influence behavior—sometimes in harmful ways and sometimes in beneficial ways. Those beliefs that harm need to be challenged, and those that benefit need to be affirmed and celebrated—no matter whether they are associated with my religion or the religion of another. There is a time and a place for my dialogue partner to challenge the adequacy of my ideas about God and human life, and there is a time and a place for me to challenge the adequacy of his/her ideas about God and human life, but this is not where the relationship begins. We need to understand the effects of unfamiliar ideas before rejecting or endorsing them. And how we assess the beliefs held by the other person does not need to be decided in advance. Those decisions come later—after we have come to know and understand that person.

A college that expects religious uniformity closes its doors to persons who practice another religion, or it merely tolerates their presence. On the other hand, a college that has severed its religious roots achieves inclusivity by considering religion and religious practice to be entirely a private matter. Religion is not part of the public life of that college community. Its absence has the effect of asking people to check their religious identity at the gate. By contrast, a third-path college welcomes the whole person into its midst, inviting her or him into a conversation that it believes will benefit all parties, of whatever religious background. It does so, because it believes that relationships are themselves valuable.

The ultimate basis for this priority is the biblical image of shalom, which is identified there as the goal of God’s activity, a goal we are called to share. Shalom involves whole, healthy relations between God and humans, among

humans, and between humans and nature. In the Bible it is more often pictured than defined—portrayed as a time when the wolf lies down with the lamb, or a time

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when swords are beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks and no one learns war any more, or a time when persons go the second mile and turn the other cheek, or a time when a city is created here on earth with its gates open for all, with enough food, water, and medicine for all, and no temple because God is so close at hand. Forming a healthy relationship with persons from another religion is *itself* one step toward shalom. Cooperating in ways that benefit others is *itself* another step toward shalom. Of course, still more steps are needed, but drawing boundaries and refusing the cross them is not moving in the right direction.

A Communal Theology

If a theology is relational, it is also communal. In isolation, humans are incomplete. Only as part of a healthy community can they be fully human. When a community of faith functions correctly, it is a place to practice shalom, a place of support and encouragement, a place of instruction and feedback, a place to participate in rituals that celebrate the importance of human community.

Because a relational theology is communal, it understands inter-connectedness and cares about the wellbeing of the entire larger community. One small aspect of such a concern is practicing good citizenship. In America, this means making decisions about the common good. Which candidate holds positions that are most likely to serve that common good? What voluntary organizations should I support because they serve the common good? What advocacy project should I join because it serves the common good? All of these questions and decisions

come into play in a Lutheran college because part of its vocation is to educate community-oriented citizens and community-oriented leaders.

This brings us back to inter-religious relations, because as I try to discern and articulate the common good, I need to understand not only how a proposal will affect me and others like me, I also need to know how it will affect those segments of our cities, states, and nation that are unlike me. Developing good relations with people in other religions and listening to what does or does not benefit them is a crucial step in discerning the common good, just as is listening to the poor, listening to those of another race, listening to immigrants and refugees, and listening to the differently abled. As a Lutheran college helps its members develop a healthy vision of the common good, providing access to religious diversity is a valuable asset. It is part of the college’s calling, of its vocation.

“Developing good relations with people in other religions and listening to what does or does not benefit them is a crucial step in discerning the common good, just as is listening to the poor, listening to those of another race, listening to immigrants and refugees, and listening to the differently abled.”

For Luther, the one thing that makes an action good is that it benefits the neighbor. A relational theology finds no reason to exclude the person of another religion from being my neighbor.

A Lutheran Understanding of Freedom, Limits, and Human Nature

“Freedom” is a word that is used frequently in our society. Most often it means doing what I want without anyone else getting in the way, or being allowed to make a choice without any coercion. Given this usage, its implications are often a matter of debate in the political sphere. How much regulation should there be and how much should

individuals be able to do whatever they want? Whether we are discussing environmental protection or gun control or health insurance or motorcycle helmets, debates are bound to arise about how much freedom is desirable. Whatever the disagreements about its political implications, no one doubts that in America freedom is valued and politically important.

Deeper Freedom

What I want to suggest is this: when Lutheran theology talks about freedom, it is talking about something deeper. To begin to envision what I mean, ask yourselves the question, when I make a free choice, why am I choosing what I do? Do my choices reflect a deeper slavery? A person can freely decide to buy this kind of car rather than that kind of car and still be enslaved to consumerism, to the notion that my life is enhanced by possessing things. A person can freely decide to vote for this candidate rather than that and still be enslaved to something deeper, to an overly simplistic political ideology that is potentially harmful to other groups in society. A person can freely decide to major in biology rather than music and still be following a deeper script about good jobs and success that the student has been absorbed from peers or parents or other adults. Deeper freedom operates at this level.

Or we can begin to envision what I mean by noting that typical American usage of the word “freedom” is highly individualistic. To be free, according to this view, is to be unencumbered by committed relationships. Hence all the jokes at weddings about the bride and groom losing their freedom when they get married. But, is there not a deeper freedom that can be found *within* a healthy relationship where partners are committed to each other? When Lutheran theology talks of freedom, it has in mind a relational freedom.

How then can we talk about a freedom that is deeper and is not individualistic? Lutheran theology talks of a “freedom from” and a “freedom for.” Perhaps we can start with an example. In the midst of the Holocaust, there were a few individuals in every Nazi-occupied country who became rescuers. They hid or protected Jews or Gypsies or others targeted by the Nazis—even though, if caught, the punishment was death not only for themselves but also for their families. They exhibited the kind of deeper freedom I have in mind. They were “free from” the onslaught of propaganda

to which they had been exposed that labeled the victims as a danger to society and “free from” the threats of the Nazis. They were “free for” counting among their neighbors

“Lutheran theology talks of a ‘freedom from’ and a ‘freedom for.’”

anyone in need, even wounded enemy soldiers or Jews or Gypsies or targeted peoples of another religion or race. They exhibited a universalistic perception of the needy (Tec 176-80). They were free enough to pay more attention to their neighbor’s problems than to their own. They were free enough to act in unusual and unauthorized ways. They were free enough to come up with highly creative ways to help. They were, in short, both “free from” the fear that came from the polarizing and paralyzing scripts to which they had been exposed and “free for” the neighbor. Such freedom is inherently relational, because it takes the neighbor seriously enough not just to honor his/her humanity but also to act to protect that humanity.

It is interesting to note that scholars who have studied the rescuers have wondered about the role that religion played. The answer seems to be that it depends on what kind of religion a person espoused. If a person had a narrow concept of religion—where the limits of one’s responsibility ended at the boundary of his or her faith community, this form of religion got in the way of rescuing the victims. And if religion and nationalism were too intertwined, this also got in the way of rescuing the victims. On the other hand, if one had a broader understanding of the two highest commandments (shared by Christianity, Judaism, and Islam), to love God and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, then religion was an aid. Folks with this sort of religious outlook have reported that what went through their mind as they decided how to respond to the victim’s request for help was a story: the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), the rich man with the beggar at his gate (Luke 16:19-31), or people gathered before the Son of Man, some of whom are commended for visiting him in prison, feeding him when he was hungry, clothing him when he was naked (Matt 25:31-46). In this case their religious resources and commitments undergirded their freedom.

How does such deeper freedom come about? The experience of generosity is what produces it. In other words, it takes relationships in which I am the recipient of generosity to free me to be able to create a relationship in which I practice this generosity. Lutheran theology affirms that God shows us this kind of undeserved generosity and invites us to pass it along. And, if we are fortunate, other humans do the same and invite us to pass it along. I once heard a story of a young boy who had been bounced from one foster care home to another. Each time the foster parents came back in tears saying, "We've tried everything we know, but he continues to be disruptive at school, in the neighborhood, and at home." After yet another return, someone suggested placing him with an elderly couple who had been asking for a child but did not meet the criteria. The people in charge agreed. A few weeks went by, then a few months, and the couple did not come back. The people in charge went to visit. Things were not perfect, they discovered, but they were working. They asked the parents what they did. They said they didn't know. They asked the school authorities what had happened. They said they didn't know. So, with nowhere to turn, they sat down with the couple and asked, "Tell us

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exactly what you said and did from the very beginning." The parents answered, "Well, we knew this was our only chance, so the very first thing we told him was 'So far as we are concerned, you are and will be our son, no matter what.'" On the basis of that relational security, the young man was free to change, free to listen to others, free to think of others. He had been the recipient of generosity—of a commitment to him *before* he did anything to deserve it. What ended Luther's religious turmoil was the insight he discovered in the Bible that God is like this couple, saying, in effect, "You are my child, no matter what."

In order to be free from and free for, in order to value others, I need to feel valued. I need to be valued, both by

God and by humans. That is why a community is important. And that is why a Lutheran college strives to create the kind of community in which faculty, staff, and fellow students are inspired to treat anyone and everyone with this kind of generosity. My freshman week in college was a complete blur. I was totally unprepared and totally overwhelmed. I knew no one and was 350 miles from home in the days when long distance calls were so expensive they were for emergencies only. But one statement still sticks in my memory. When I wandered in for an audition with the director of the concert band, he must have recognized what was happening and said, "Just remember, Darrell, here you are among friends." To someone more lonely and confused than he had ever been, this was an experience of generosity. And, I am happy to say, it was only one of several similar experiences of generosity, all of which kept me there. In order to survive and flourish, I needed this generous hospitality. The person in another religion needs it; we all need it.

By now, I hope it is evident how deeper freedom affects inter-religious relations. Those who have experienced generosity are equipped to show generosity to others, no matter what the religious persuasion of those others. Their deeper freedom allows them to see on the other side of any boundary creatures of God also loved by God, whether that boundary is political or social or racial or economic or religious. Their deeper freedom breaks open their own bonds of social prejudices and stereotypes and fears.

I do not want to underestimate the importance of yet another factor—it is education. Education helps us identify and recognize the social prejudices and stereotypes and fears to which we have been exposed. And, when done well, education helps us understand the factors that have led to the boundaries, have made that group's experience different from ours, and have shaped their religion. Education can enhance our deeper freedom. That is why the Lutheran tradition has valued it so highly!

A Theology of Limits

Alongside of this concern for a deeper freedom, the Lutheran tradition also adds another emphasis. Luther was upset about the theology of his day for claiming to know too much. What it did was to take an idea from the Bible and infer from it answers to questions not addressed

in the Bible. It then took all of these answers and organized them into a systematic whole, which obscured the difference between what had been borrowed from the Bible and what had been inferred.

A contemporary version of this kind of approach is any attempt to answer the question—when and how will the world end? It is a question not answered in the Bible, and every attempt to answer it jerry-rigs together assumptions, inferences, and snippets drawn haphazardly from various parts of the Bible, all arranged like one would lay out pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. And it then claims biblical authority for this mixture. Though at first Luther thought the Bible provided all the answers, as he studied and studied he came to recognize that we humans are left with many unanswered questions. What led him to see this was noticing that the Psalmists often voiced questions for which they provided no answer, as did Jesus himself, who said he did not know when the end was coming. To give it a name, what this means is *a theology of limits*. Some things are known, others are not. As humans, there is no way we can understand God fully or the world fully or even ourselves fully. A theology of limits avoids claims that exaggerate what little we do know, and it raises doubts about the claim to completeness made by any ideology—whether political or scientific or ethical or religious. The security of a divine-human relationship built on generosity is what allows humans to live without pretense and to live within these limits.

Inter-religious relations is one place that a theology of limits comes into play. In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul spends three chapters trying to figure out God's relationship to the Jews who had not accepted Jesus as the Messiah. After three chapters, he comes to no conclusion. He throws up his hands and ends with a doxology; "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! . . . For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen" (Rom 11:33, 36). If Paul could live without understanding God's relationship to those on the other side of a religious boundary, then a theology of limits can live without understanding God's relationship to other religions.

Not only does a theology of limits affect one's view of the other, it also affects one's view of oneself. If I do not

understand fully, then I always have something more to learn. When I begin talking with a person in another religion, I do not know in advance what I will learn. I do not know how my world will be expanded or how it will be re-shaped by an alternative perspective. A theology of limits means I enter into the relationship expecting to learn something.

"I do not know how my world will be expanded or how it will be re-shaped by an alternative perspective. A theology of limits means I enter into the relationship expecting to learn something."

I am *not* saying, however, that expecting to learn something and to have one's world re-shaped includes expecting to lose one's own faith. The experience of those engaged in inter-religious dialogue is that this is seldom the result. What is challenged is my *understanding* of my own faith, not my faith itself. Almost universally, each participant in an inter-religious encounter comes away with a deeper understanding and appreciation for their own religion. They come away seeing in it things that they had never noticed or never appreciated before, while at the same time coming away with a deeper understanding and appreciation for the religion of the dialogue partner. When the Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding at Muhlenberg College was formed, one of its first steps was to organize living-room dialogues between members of Christian congregations and members of Jewish congregations. Participants soon sensed they needed to know more both about their own religion and about the religion of their conversation partners. They requested that the Institute offer classes to increase their understanding of both religions.

A Complex Anthropology

Let me make one additional observation. The Lutheran tradition has been very clear that humans are a complex mixture of goodness and evil, of love and cruelty, of faith and unfaith. Participation in a community of faith does not

magically change that, so a church is also a mixed body, with people of all sorts and degrees of commitment and of freedom in it. If this is true of one religion, it is likely true of others. So, it is important to remember that when we engage with people from another religion, it is persons engaged with persons, not one religion engaged with the other. People on either or both sides might well be uninformed about their own religious tradition. People on either or both sides might be poor embodiments of that to which their religion aspires.

So, inter-religious dialogue may also expose us to the challenges that arise from dealing with flawed human beings. These experiences are disappointing, to be sure, but they should not result in new stereotyping or new disengagement. We would do well to follow Luther's advice in his explanation to the 8th commandment, to "put the most charitable construction on all our neighbor says and does." Otherwise inter-religious relations will be counterproductive, producing new enmity and new stereotypes rather than new cooperation, reinforcing boundaries rather than fostering a new harmony and a new understanding.

So, a Lutheran college—or any community—built on the principles of deeper freedom, of limited knowing, and human complexity is well equipped to support and encourage inter-religious relations.

Lutheran Resources for Overcoming Anxiety and Fear

Our project has been to show why the theological foundations of a Lutheran college support inter-religious relations. We have discussed the relational character of Lutheran theology. We have discussed its concern with deeper freedom and its theology of limits. In this third section I want to begin by asking, what gets in the way of inter-religious understanding? Why have there been incidents where places of worship have been vandalized? Why have we been exposed to so much public rhetoric that targets refugees or members of another religion?

Yes, for some, there may be beliefs that get in the way, but the larger answer to what stifles inter-religious understanding is anxiety and fear. Please bear with me as I try to characterize the larger setting, and then I will return to inter-religious relations.

Fear and anxiety are not the same thing. Fear is focused. When I am afraid, I am afraid of something—a speech at a conference, a tornado, a speeding car that may not stop, an angry encounter, or whatever. When the cause of the fear disappears, it comes to an end. By contrast, anxiety is more free-floating. It is pervasive rather than focused. It arises from things that seem out of one's control. It attaches itself to any fear that comes along and, in so doing, heightens that fear, making it less manageable.

Anxiety

Let's first consider anxiety. There seems to me to be a high level of anxiety in America. What is fueling it? Many things. Americans are, for example, anxious about our country's role in the world. Do we dominate or cooperate? Americans seem not to have found a credible story to guide their expectations for the future and their sense of national identity in today's world. Moreover, our sense of entitlement has been threatened. We are anxious that scarce resources will mean new consumption patterns and such changes will threaten our consumerist expectation that possessions create the good life. Americans are anxious about the even more significant adjustments required to slow down climate change. And those workers left behind after the recession are understandably anxious about wages and employment and changing global economics. Middle-class Americans are anxious about sliding down the economic scale. And, finally, many are anxious about the changing face of America, about losing white privilege and losing Christian privilege. What has been seems threatened, and, without an alternative vision, the result is anxiety. Jim Wallis tells the story of visiting a fifth-grade class in 2013 in Washington, D.C. Here are his words:

They were studying the subject of immigration and invited me to speak about it. First, we went through the long history of immigration in this country. All the children in my son's class learned that they were part of our national history—of people who had chosen to come to America (or were forced to by the chains of slavery). So they all heard the history of their own ancestries.

Then I told the students about our current problem of 11 million undocumented people living

in uncertainty and fear for years and even decades; being unable to safely obtain medical care and police protection; being exploited without protection by unscrupulous employers; and, most painfully, being separated from family members, with fathers and mothers being torn away from their children. Hardworking and law-abiding people were being deported every day—at that time about 1,100 per day.

Looking very surprised, these students asked the obvious question, “Why don’t we fix that? Why doesn’t Congress change the system?”

I answered, “They say they’re afraid.”

The students looked even more confused and asked, “What are they afraid of?”

I paused to consider their honest question and looked around the room— . . . at . . . a group of African American, Latino, Asian American, Native American, and European American children. Then it hit me.

“They are afraid of you,” I replied. [Using my terms, he could have said, “You are the source of their anxiety.”]

“Why would they be afraid of us?” the shocked students asked, totally perplexed. I had to tell them.

“They are afraid you are the future of America. They’re afraid their country will someday look like this class—that you represent what our nation is becoming.” . . . “They are afraid this won’t work,” I said, “Does it work?”

The children looked at one answer, then responded with many voices, saying, “Yeah. . . Sure. . . Of course it works . . . It works great . . . It’s really cool!”

Together we decided that our job was to show the rest of the country that this new America coming into being is, in fact, really cool. (Wallis 187-88)

What anxiety does is to decrease our capacity to learn, replace curiosity with a demand for certainty, stiffen our position, prompt a desire for a quick fix, foster either-or thinking, diminish flexibility, and create imaginative gridlock that prohibits one from being able to think of alternatives, options, or new perspectives (Steinke 8-9). More than anything, anxiety exaggerates fears.

Fear

So, how does fear enter the picture? It assumes that those whose ideas differ from ours are dangerous. They are poised to undermine everything we value. Fear selects a target upon which to focus our anxiety. The unsavory acts of a few are often mistakenly associated with the whole. Our discomfort in unfamiliar settings makes maintaining existing boundaries easier than stepping over them. Crossing over boundaries requires us to revisit the most basic questions of identity and purpose, and this means confronting our own insecurities. Doing so is never comfortable. Yes, there are credible dangers, but too often some politicians and political pundits cultivate fear to serve their own purposes. In so doing, they enhance the polarization that already paralyzes our public life.

“Fear assumes that those whose ideas differ from ours are dangerous. They are poised to undermine everything we value.”

What fear does is slightly different from anxiety. It transforms social boundaries into barriers and demonizes those on the other side. And very often, religion gets drawn into the fray, as differences and antagonisms that are not fundamentally religious are ascribed religious significance. What all of this suggests is that when we are confronted by public suspicion and misunderstanding of another religion, we are confronted by something deep and complex.

Theological Resources to Combat Anxiety and Fear

So, my question is, what theological resource does a Lutheran college have to address this current, public anxiety and fear with regard to other religions?

My answer is that it offers a down-to-earth image of God, an image of an active God at work behind the scenes to foster shalom. This claim requires some explanation. There are, I think, three common images of God prevalent in our society. One sees God above it all, in control of everything, micromanaging, we could say, so that everything that happens is either specifically willed by God or, if not willed, then specifically allowed. A second image sees God above

it all, running an orderly world, but a world that from time to time needs intervention. So God occasionally interrupts the orderly sequence. A third image sees God above it all, setting up the rules but then letting things occur without intervention. God sits back and lets human events unfold until at the end of each person's life stepping in to restore justice—by means of rewards and punishments in an afterlife. In all three of these views, God is above it all, and the world is fairly well-ordered. Our job is to make sense of it and fit into the established pattern. Luther's image is different. According to his view, God has given humans a great deal of freedom to influence what happens, and this freedom has led to a confusing, disorderly world. What God does is not to stand above it all, but to enter into the fray. God does this, not by intervening here or there, but by working behind the scenes, working incarnationally—that is, in and through creatures, in and through human beings—to invite and nudge the world into shalom.

This behind-the-scenes activity means at least two things:

First, it means that discerning specifically what God is doing is not easy. Events are not stamped with a sign that says "caused by God" nor are they readily noticeable interruptions of the natural order. The difficulty is heightened because our finitude, our limited perspective, keeps influencing what we think we see. For example, Hal Lindsey's 1970 book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, sold millions and millions of copies, as it predicted the order of events that would end the world. Looking back on the book 46 years later, it is interesting to see that the bad guys are all nations on the other side of the cold war and the good guys are all allies of America. The author's outlook directly, though likely not consciously, influenced his interpretation of Daniel and Revelation and his perception of what God was up to. So, mindful of our limits, we are left with the task of discerning as best we can what does or does not contribute to wholeness and peace and justice. To guide us we have the many biblical images of shalom that I mentioned in my first presentation.

Secondly, this view of God means that there is hope, even when the problems loom so very large and so very intractable. God has a way of taking dry bones and making them live, of raising up new leaders in the darkest of times, of inspiring both the old and the young to dream dreams and roll up their sleeves to work for change. Rabbi

Irving Greenberg has defined religious hope as "a dream which is committed to the discipline of becoming a fact" (8), and that's the kind of hope that a down to earth, behind the scenes, active God can inspire. Such hope is the best antidote to anxiety and fear.

"Mindful of our limits, we are left with the task of discerning as best we can what does or does not contribute to wholeness and peace and justice."

So, how does this affect inter-religious relations? It means that a Lutheran college enters into such explorations with hope—the hope that whatever good comes out of our engagement serves to increase shalom, with the confidence that we can count on God's presence, and with the expectation that, however deep and real the differences between religions, with a dose of generosity, their adherents can find ways to work together for peace and justice in the world.

Fear Not

The louder the rhetoric that vilifies another religion, the higher the barriers become and the more frightening it is to cross them. Time and again (in fact, over 200 times), we find in the Bible the words "fear not" or "do not be afraid" when someone encounters the divine. Often this occurs when a biblical figure is asked to cross a boundary and is called to a new task. We think of Moses at the burning bush, reluctant to go back to Egypt. Or of Jonah, reluctant to go to Nineveh, Israel's enemy. Or of Joseph, called to become a refugee in Egypt in order to save the life of his son. For all of these figures and many others, the borders seemed so imposing. Yet, such persons hear from God, "Do not be afraid, I will go with you."

Not only does Lutheran theology count on the gracious presence of God, it also affirms that God is already at work on the other side of the boundary. Despite Luther's inattention to inter-religious relations and the serious mistakes that he made in this arena, he was very clear that the down-to-earth God in whom he believed was at work in

“Time and again (in fact, over 200 times), we find in the Bible the words ‘fear not’ or ‘do not be afraid’ when someone encounters the divine.”

every society. Even though Germany and the Holy Roman Empire were at war with the Turks, and even though the Turks were enjoying successful campaigns that brought them as close as Vienna and inspired widespread fear, he could see God at work in their midst. Through their parents, God was giving Muslim children good gifts, and through those rulers who ruled wisely, God was giving Muslim citizens good gifts. The implication is this: in an inter-religious encounter, a person who acknowledges being gifted by God meets another recipient of God’s gifts. “Do not be afraid,” for God is already at work on the other side of the boundary we are being asked to cross.

My guess is that anxiety and fear will not disappear from our society any time soon. If so, reaching across religious boundaries is not going to be something we do because it is nice or because it is merely interesting. It is going to require some commitment in the face of societal anxiety and societal fear. The theological foundation to support this commitment includes the behind-the-scenes activity of God who is at work to fostering whole, healthy relationships all around, and it includes God’s invitation for humans to serve this same goal. This footing can anchor a Lutheran college’s commitment to inter-religious relations, even in the face of adverse pressures.

When Basic Values Differ

In addition to societal anxiety and fear, there is another problem. Inter-religious understanding and cooperation are not always easy. The planning committee for this conference posed the question, “How do we relate to those whose basic values are fundamentally different from ours?” Sometimes these differences occur *within* a faith community and at other times they occur between religions. In either case, this question is a difficult one, well worth serious and extended discussion. I do not pretend to have the answer. But I see no alternative other

than beginning with a generous hospitality and a generous willingness to listen.

An ecumenical institute² of which I am a part calls this the first-person method. In an ecumenical consultation, everyone at the table shares his/her own story and then listens to the stories of the others to learn what brought their conversation partners to their present stance. Only after this does the group tackle the topic that divides them. If we think of other settings, it helps if an occasion can be found to surprise the other with an act of love, concern, or assistance. Once some level of personal understanding and trust has been established, then the differences can be explored. A combination of attentive listening and generous action is what forges a connection, on the basis of which the two parties can search for moral common ground. It takes a good amount of the deep freedom that we discussed in section two and the fearlessness we have been discussing in this section to engage in this process without defensiveness. I see no easy shortcut through this hard and challenging work, and I can offer no guarantees that it will always work. But, if we are called to foster shalom and to work for the common good, then we can never escape the assignment of seeking and identifying moral common ground.

But there is another factor. It takes committed leadership on both sides of a basic difference to be able to convince the forces of mistrust in one’s own religion that there is another way. Educating and inspiring such leaders in faith communities—both Christian and non-Christian—is part of the vocation of a Lutheran college.

Wisdom and a Sense of Agency

Let me come back to Lutheran higher education. Lutheran higher education has two very basic educational values—fostering wisdom and fostering a sense of agency guided by wisdom and by vocation. Let us consider first one and then the other.

Wisdom. Anyone who is free from established scripts needs wisdom to guide their behavior. By wisdom, I mean an understanding of humans and of communities, how they react and what they need to be whole and healthy. Good intentions alone are not enough. Wisdom is what can guide those intentions in ways that actually benefit the other. When Luther wrote to the city councils of Germany,

urging them to create schools for all young men and young women, he identified wisdom as the goal and suggested that it be found by examining the history of all the peoples of the world—what they did that went well and what they did that got them in trouble (“To the Councilmen” 368-69). The scope of this education encompasses human history, its many religions, and its many cultures. Even the wisdom

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found in the Old Testament (in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, for example) is not distinctively Israelite. It was gathered from all the surrounding cultures. Wide-ranging study, including exposure to other religions, is thus an important pathway to wisdom, as long as it involves the kind of engagement that moves beyond knowledge to dialogical understanding. The point is this: when a college facilitates inter-religious understanding, it is embodying one of its core values—that of fostering wisdom.

A sense of agency. What I mean by agency is a sense that I can do something, however small, to influence and benefit the world around me. To gain the courage to act, I need someone who believes in me, I need a vision of wholeness, I need some experience of getting things accomplished, and I need a support community. These a college can provide—not only for its undergraduates, but, I would advocate, for its alumni and friends. What anchors this empowerment is a sense of vocation built on God’s down-to-earth activity in the world. In addition to extending and deepening a person’s sense of vocation, inter-religious engagement can develop a person’s sense of agency and thereby advance the educational values of a Lutheran college.

The foundation provided by Lutheran theological principles offers a college hope in the face of both anxiety and fear. The wisdom and the sense of agency it fosters help

move the overall project forward so that boundaries do not become barriers and the future can move toward shalom.

Conclusion

My claim has been that Lutheran principles anchor, support, and inform a college’s commitment to inter-religious relations. These principles encourage it to follow a third path—both religiously rooted and inclusive—and to do so both for the sake of educating and equipping students and for the sake of advancing the common good.

Endnotes

1. A religiously uniform college moves directly from its theological principles to decisions about life on the deck; it collapses the footings and the pillars. A college that has severed its ties has no theological footings. Thus, neither makes this distinction.

2. The Collegeville Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research, located on the campus of St. John’s Abbey and University, Collegeville, Minnesota.

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SONJA HAGANDER

Risky Speech—Gifted Friendships



The Augsburg community was shocked to learn of the brutal murder of one of our students. It was a weekday morning in September 2008 when Achmednur Ali was shot and killed while on his way to volunteer at the nearby Brian Coyle Community Center. It is our practice as a College

to gather in the chapel on the news of the death of a student—to pray, support one another, cry, and provide safe space for the entire community. How might we now, as Christian pastors, provide that space for the campus in light of the death of our friend Ali—a practicing Muslim? What would we say? What would we pray? How might we gather with the cross of Christ present in the space, amidst reporters and cameras and, most importantly, a grieving community?

In our brief chapel planning time before the service, my friend Mohamed Sallam, director of Pan-Afrikan Student Services, was gracious enough to join us. We all sat together in the space as colleagues in grief and people of faith, even though our faith traditions were different. I experienced the feeling of “standing on holy ground” as we prayed—Christians and Muslims together—for the day. Mohamed says that “before we gathered as a community, four or five agents of the College gathered to ponder where we thought the conversation should go. What this

event provided us with was an opportunity to do what was right. Had we gone about our business without stopping to think, I am not sure that anyone would have made a fuss. However, since as a College we decided to pursue the most appropriate course of action, we not only did the right thing, but we also became friends in the process.”

During the 20 minute service the president gave an overview of what had happened in Ali’s death, we shared a public prayer for comfort, and Mohamed explained part of the Islamic tradition around death and shared some insights into Ali’s life and contribution to Augsburg College as a student. We sang songs from the Taizé community such as “Wait for the Lord,” “Stay with Us,” and “Bless the Lord My Soul.”¹ We, as a community—no matter what our individual faiths—shared our grief, our pain at the injustice of such a death, and our concern for Ali’s family.

Mohamed notes that our location in the Augsburg community brings particular gifts and challenges when he says, “It would have been convenient if we were in some other place where Muslims and non-Muslims know one another better. But, I am not interested in convenience. I can say honestly that after that gathering, my coworkers earned my friendship and I hope that I have earned theirs.”

As a pastor I ask myself, “How do I care for members of my community in crisis?” What does it mean for me and others to be actively engaged with populations in whose religions I have little theological expertise?² How do I give pastoral care to all students (faculty and staff, too), no matter what their beliefs, especially in terms of trauma,

Sonja Hagander is the College Pastor and Director of Ministries at Augsburg College, Minneapolis, Minnesota. She earned a BA from Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, an MDiv from Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, and an MSc from the University of Edinburgh. She is married to Jonathan GUSDAL and they have two children.

“How do I give pastoral care to all students (faculty and staff, too), no matter what their beliefs, especially in terms of trauma, rites of passage, familial relationships, personal development, and their pursuit of meaningful lives?”

rites of passage, familial relationships, personal development, and their pursuit of meaningful lives? I am drawn to these questions because of our students, Augsburg’s unique geographical location, and my own friendships.

The Gift of Interfaith Friendships

I found her or she found me in the library stacks about a decade ago. She, a new faculty member and a Jew—and I, a pastor and a Lutheran Christian. I was pleased to welcome her to campus and be received by her warmth, and Barbara Lehmann was happy to make my acquaintance. The friendship grew over Asian food in Dinkytown, the planning of interfaith services, campus meetings, and the natural inclination to reach out to one another immediately following September 11, 2001. By that time we had developed a deep sense of mutual trust. In my office, she and I and another faculty member, a Muslim, met over a period of time, hoping to model a peace-filled response to the horrible occasion of 9/11. Over the years, she has deeply respected my preaching of Christ crucified and risen and my commitment to the broad themes of new life that arises out of death through baptism.

I have come to her for friendship, and she has celebrated the birth of my two children and advised and lifted me up as a new parent. I have learned from her a deep commitment to ritual and the cycle of life. She has taught me about our shared grief, and her Jewish practice of *shivah* now informs my own grief practices and pastoral care on campus. We have pondered the book of Job together and wondered about its consequences and God’s actions in our own lives. I have learned about the importance of the specificity of the chosen people and the vitality

of the land associated with modern-day Judaism. In her grace she has allowed me to make mistakes about how I understood Judaism. She has gently taught me about how she has interpreted and lived out her faith. We, as friends, have created a safe space in which to learn from each other. We do not avoid religion; instead, it is a core component of our friendship.³

My friend tells me, “I find gifts in interfaith relationships...I can learn about different ways of prayer, thinking about the Bible, interpretation of texts. I find that we have different rituals of celebrating lifecycle events—births, deaths, weddings, or divorces...it helps me deepen my understanding of myself by seeing my culture in relationship with others.”

It is important to note that on the Augsburg campus, Christians are the majority. Even though this essay is about interfaith relationships, it is written within that context. My friend Barbara perceptively notes that her religion suggests that “our purpose is to heal the brokenness of this world,” and that it “obligates us to treat the stranger with kindness and graciousness.” She reminds me that in being a member of a religious minority, one cannot help but interact with people of other faiths. But she believes that mere contact is not enough—that being in this position “compels us to do more.” She actively engages with others, and in so doing she shows them that “stereotypes of Jews may need to be updated (or maybe confirmed) through knowing me.” In other words, friendships take place in public.

“Friendships take place in public.”

As a member of the Augsburg community, I personally have been blessed and enriched by my colleagues and students who come from a variety of faith traditions. For several years the College has made both formal and informal attempts at interfaith dialogue.⁴ For example, in 2008, Campus Ministry sponsored an interfaith dialogue on “Creation: The Common Story” led by Abrahamic faith leaders.⁵ Last year we hosted another such dialogue on “Death, Grief, and the End of Life,” attending not only to broad themes but responding to the deaths of six students in 2008-09.

This interfaith commitment has an institutional history. As I understand, Augsburg's sixth president, Bernhard Christensen, not only valued scholarship, studied scripture at a deep level, and cultivated his interests in critical theory, he also broke new ground by reaching out to other religious groups. It is important to note that while the idea that "interfaith friendships enrich learning" is a part of Christensen's legacy, this emphasis is more gleaned than a direct gift from him. Christensen was very interested in ecumenical dialogue, which was considered the leading edge of Christian thought during his time.⁶ For instance, he attended the very first gathering of the World Council of Churches in 1948 (Amsterdam). He also strongly advocated that the Lutheran Free Church (LFC) join the American Lutheran Church (ALC). And though it might not even be considered noteworthy today, Christensen was a radical in that he befriended Catholic and Orthodox Christians. This behavior was especially significant given Christensen's context—a position of distinction in the LFC, which was a small, pious denomination. And so, we might extrapolate from Christensen's attitudes toward other Christians that, if he were with us today, he would feel similarly toward persons from other faith traditions.

One may also conclude from Christensen's work with Hubert H. Humphrey on the Human Rights Commission that he was very much committed to combating discrimination against Jewish-Americans and African-Americans in the Twin Cities during the 1960s. Alongside this, Christensen was a strong supporter of Christian missions to people of other religions. According to Brad Holt, Christensen "had the courage to go beyond what was conventional in exploring the faith of the Other."

Vital to our interfaith endeavors on campus is that they be both personal and public. The idea that friendships are personal is incontestable, but the idea that friendships are public may be a challenging notion for some. Certainly, people do not always assume that matters of faith are public matters. Yet I would argue they are, and as I understand the Christensen legacy, the public nature of faith was instinctive for him. Paul Sonnack, professor emeritus, explained the connection Christensen drew between personal faith and the community:

There is another important dimension to Dr. Christensen's understanding of religion as primarily personal. To put it bluntly, he was convinced that the personal is never simply to be equated with the individual. There is a strong inclination, particularly in a society like ours where rampant individualism prevails in both religion and secular arenas, to make that mistaken equation. For Christensen, that which is personal *necessarily includes the dimension of community*. A person is never only a discrete individual who lives in isolation from other individuals. What is constitutive of personhood is precisely relationship with other persons, and it is that relationship which forms and shapes human community."⁷

Friendship With and In God

The Gospel of John is a communal gospel. Ever since I entered the ministry, my journey through John has significantly informed my work as a pastor on campus. In June 1995, this passage from John was read at my service of ordination:

I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another. (John 15:15-17)

It seems to me that the Gospel of John has several key themes that may nourish interfaith friendships and enrich learning on campus—love, friendship, free speech, and public space. Because of these elements, I believe this gospel can provide a roadmap (though not necessarily the only roadmap) for further interfaith endeavors at Lutheran colleges and universities.⁸

The connection between love and friendship portrayed in John has intrigued me because of its implications for interfaith conversation. This Gospel uses the two Greek words *agape* and *filia* when referring to love

and friendship, respectively, although *agape* appears more than twice as many times as the other. After the Lazarus story (John 11:1-57), the text gradually blends the two terms, and by the end of John the words become completely transposable. It is in the *conversation* between Peter and Jesus that both words are used repeatedly and interchangeably. The repetition shouts to the reader to “take notice!” What does this repetition and collapsing of terms mean for us as readers, and moreover, as members of our diverse community?

“One might dare say that to enter into interfaith friendships and commitments is to *enter into friendship with God!*”

For one, we are encouraged to think about how God’s sending the Son relates to friendship. The death of Jesus seems to make friendship between God and humanity possible. God’s love for the world (*agape*) is present prior to Jesus’ presence and death and glory; *but it seems that through Jesus’ glorification we become friends with God.* John broadens the notion of love to include love as friendship. We cannot miss the point that *we are friends because we are drawn up into the very life of God.* This is not a life of domination, for we are no longer as servants, but a life of freedom and friendship. Glorification is not for the sake of itself, but for the sake of community, and this creates in us a sense of freedom. This has significance in terms of our interfaith setting on campus. One might dare say that to enter into interfaith friendships and commitments is to *enter into friendship with God!*

Risking Radical Speech

The invitation to friendship in the Gospel of John also challenges one to explore and reflect on the role of conversation and language in the gospel. The gospel writer emphasizes—even delights—in the theme of speaking and speech. We see this in the very first verse: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). God is not cause; God

is speech. The word *parresia*, which means “plainness of speech, outspokenness, or frankness”⁹ provides an avenue into this discussion. The word is used nine times in John; the only other time it is used in the four gospels is in Mark—once. This number alone draws our attention. In John’s gospel we find a direct connection between speech and openness.

Significant for John is that *God is a speech-bringer.* Jesus’ voice, not work, draws people into God. From the mouth of Jesus, the idea of speaking plainly is directly connected to friendship; speech is transparent to thought. This is also a model for the language of interfaith friendship—where one speaks in a free, unguarded manner. John models for us the public nature of conversation, a quality that applies particularly to interfaith conversations and relationships since they not only occur on a personal level but also extend into our public lives on campus. One notices early in the narrative that Jesus’ speaking openly is radical. In fact, it gets him killed. We read, “Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him!” (John 7:25-26a). The danger of openness is frequently repeated in John. There is risk in conversation when it takes place in public, even when Jesus is the one who sets the stage.

A variety of voices enter into this conversation space in this gospel. John includes confused disciples, voices from the margins, faithful confessions, and angry crowds—just to name a few. Emphasizing the speakers reveals the power and dialogical nature of the relationships, and this in turn encourages members of a community to enter into space with one another, to create in conversation something new. When we follow the conversation modeled in John, we are able to listen to the many voices of others with confidence, in a space where all voices are free—no shame, no dominance, no muting. As in the text, we become participants in the conversation, not simply spectators.

In John’s gospel, the narrator weaves all these terms together—speech, love as *agape*, love as *filia*—to emphasize their interconnectedness and open our minds to imagine God’s presence in the world in a new, radical way. In John, God’s power is channeled into making all things open. The future that arises from the present is not one of dominance, but of communication. Being in conversation means that both God and we risk change. How much

are we willing to risk? To receive? No matter the answer, the Gospel of John gives me as a pastor, and all of us as conversation partners, room to breathe. How risky—and yet how freeing.

“Being in conversation means that both God and we risk change. How much are we willing to risk? To receive?”

Friends, colleagues, students, and scripture have all shaped my understanding of how interfaith friendships enrich learning. Over the years, insights from these various sources have organized themselves into themes. I offer them now in the form of resolutions:

- That we allow and nurture a *deep love for one another*, keeping in mind that interfaith friendships might entail suffering on behalf of one another.
- That we assume the *freedom to speak without shame*.
- That we *speak from our relationships* with other human beings, not only from doctrine or a formal set of beliefs. Participation in the conversation is as vital as the end result of the conversation.
- That we hold these friendships to be personal, even though they exist in the *public space*.
- That we allow ourselves to *risk*—to make mistakes, to be changed, to challenge, even to offend.
- That we recognize that we are in the *presence of God* as we participate in interfaith conversations.

May this collective wisdom nourish our efforts—no matter what our individual faiths—to come together in true community.

Endnotes

1. The Taizé Community is an ecumenical Christian monastic community in France. Taizé music emphasizes repetition of short phrases, often taken from scripture, set to simple melodies.

2. Augsburg College sits in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, amidst the largest population of Somali Muslims outside Somalia. We have, in our College community, a broad spectrum of faith traditions.

3. In his challenging article “The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions,” Gavin D’Costa cheers on the honoring of particular truth claims. He argues that there is “no high ground in the pluralist position, for in principle its logic is no different from the exclusivist position. The only difference is in terms of truth claims and the criteria for truth employed by the practitioners.” *Religious Studies* 32 (June 1996): 225.

4. Over the years formal dialogues, events, and worship services have occurred alongside a myriad of friendships, relationships, and even pastoral care across faith traditions on this campus. It goes without saying that one essay barely “scratches the surface” of the depth of friendships shared through the years on this campus.

5. Lectures and interfaith worship took place in the Hoversten Chapel at Augsburg on March 3-4, 2008. The panelists included Dr. Hatem al-Haj, Islamic scholar and pediatrician; Rabbi Lynn Liberman, Beth Jacob Congregation in Mendota Heights, Minnesota; and Mark Throntviet, professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota.

6. Conversation with Brad Holt, Augsburg College Religion Department, Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 20, 2009.

7. Paul G. Sonnack, “A Perspective on Dr. Bernhard M. Christensen” (address, Augsburg College, Minneapolis, Minnesota, date unknown), 3.

8. It could be fruitful to embed this conversation in overarching qualities like “hospitality” or “justice” found in many of the major religions of the world. And other writings have done this. I wonder, is it possible, for me, as a Christian, to embed these kinds of relationships in even the specificity of a gospel text?

9. Walter Bauer, et al. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 630.

CALLISTA ISABELLE

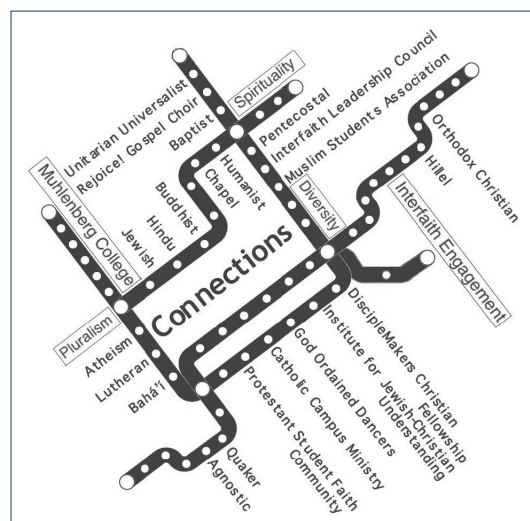
Mapping Interfaith Encounters

As someone who grew up on an Iowan farm, I find the idea of travel by subway rather intimidating. Will I get on the right train? Will I be able to navigate the chaos of Grand Central Station? Will I find my way back home?

In reality, subways provide opportunities to (quite literally) bump into people of diverse cultures and beliefs. Travel stretches us out of our comfort zones and connects us with new communities.

Rebecca Diamond, a 2015 graduate of Muhlenberg College and a member of our Interfaith Leadership Council, designed this subway map as an image for interfaith engagement here. To a blank map of the Montreal subway system, she added the various religious and spiritual communities of our student body. The map is a powerful image for interfaith engagement. Students often begin at one point, perhaps identifying strongly as Roman Catholic or atheist. Other students start at one of the unnamed stations, which we could label “questioning” or “exploring.”

While many students feel most at home at one point on the map, diverse college environments invite students to “jump on a train” and learn about another point. Lutherans attend Shabbat dinner with their Jewish friends. Muslims celebrate Holi with Hindu classmates. An atheist talks with a Catholic about social justice. Many travel back to their home base communities, of course, to be nurtured in their religious (or non-religious) practices and beliefs. But



once given the opportunity to learn about a peer’s tradition, one’s worldviews has been stretched.

Interfaith encounters enable students to articulate—often for the first time—what they believe and don’t believe. Conversations with new neighbors often lead to a discovery of common ground. But lingering for more than a few minutes at a new subway stop inevitably leads to points of theological disagreement as well. Interfaith dialogue should not only

be kumbaya circles of commonality. It should provide sanctuaries for civil discourse and, at times, respectful disagreement.

Consider the major intersections in the subway map. Where are these intersections on your campus? Muhlenberg students are especially eager to explore the intersections of religion and science, spirituality and the environment, faith and mental health. These topics invite students of any or no religious belief to participate in deep conversation. These intersections also invite collaboration between academic departments and co-curricular partners to co-sponsor speakers, panel conversations, film screenings, and art exhibits.

I invite you and your students to draw an interfaith engagement map for your campus. Where do students call “home” on the map? What intersections and partnerships would you like to explore? The train is about to leave the station. Will you get on board?

The Rev. Callista Isabelle is College Chaplain at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Negotiating Legitimate and Conflicting Values: A Conversation with Mark Hanson and Eboo Patel, Moderated by Katie Baxter

Katie Baxter

I'm an alumna of a Lutheran college. I graduated from Wittenberg about 15 years ago and being at Augsburg College the last couple of days has given me the opportunity to reflect on my Lutheran education and how it has brought me to the place I am now. I use the liberal arts education I received at Wittenberg every day in my work with Interfaith Youth Core.

And so, I'm thankful for my Lutheran education. I am also thankful for the opportunity to speak with Mark Hanson and Eboo Patel about where interfaith engagement and Lutheran higher education is going. Each has strong convictions about the next stage of interfaith cooperation in civil society and on our campuses.

Eboo Patel is president and founder of Interfaith Youth Core. The reverend Mark Hanson is presiding



bishop emeritus of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; he now serves on the faculty here at Augsburg College.

As two people who think a lot about interfaith cooperation in multiple safe spaces, and about public interfaith engagement, what are you seeing out there? What situations, settings, and scenarios would you

like to call attention to? I'm asking this question now especially as we think about the role of our colleges, and about what we will do when we return from this conference to our individual campuses.

Mark Hanson

Thank you. It's always curious to be asked to predict the future—to be a prophet. I simply work for a nonprofit

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson is Distinguished Fellow in the Christensen Center for Vocation at Augsburg College, Minneapolis, Minnesota, and former presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. **Eboo Patel** is the founder and president of Interfaith Youth Core, an organization that helps train American college students, supported by their campuses, to be interfaith leaders. His latest book is *Interfaith Leadership: A Primer* (Beacon, 2016). Hanson and Patel exchanged these comments on the closing day of the 2016 Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference; the session was moderated by **Katie Bringman Baxter**, Campus Engagement Manager at Interfaith Youth Core.

organization! I want to get to the specifics of your question with an illustration from the Jimmy Fallon show last night. Barack Obama was the guest; they took a playful riff on the news, and the President was insightful and relaxed, and at one point President Obama said this: "Democracy—for it to work—means learning to compromise even when you are 100 percent certain that you are right. What is at stake is not just proving that you are right, but finding ways to work together to move this country forward." I think that this is his way of saying that one must serve the common good. He may be channeling Marty Stortz or Eboo Patel! After all, Dr. Stortz is telling us that the politics of the common sees the other as one's neighbor, and then asks about what it means to *be* neighbor?" And I heard Eboo Patel saying that inter-faith leadership in a religiously diverse democracy calls for leaders to commit to building bridges from the bottom up, precisely because bridges don't drop from the sky.

"We are building mature leaders for religiously diverse contexts who are not going to be scared by the questions of complexity before us."

When I talk about the future, it's not to predict it, but rather to live today as signs of God's promised future. A question that we don't engage fully enough across our religious traditions is this: How does your religious tradition imagine the future? How do we live as signs of that future *today*?

In a polarized culture that is so frightening and mean-spirited, what I witnessed at this conference and see on our campuses is certainly a sign of hope. I think we are building mature leaders for religiously diverse contexts who are not going to be scared by the questions of complexity before us, who will have confidence in their own position. They will also understand what President Obama says: To build a democracy is not to convince others that *you* have it right but to seek the *common* good. That's called engaging in an ethic of proximity. You must come to your neighbor with your values shaped by your deeply held religion and then ask: What does it mean to be neighbor together?

Bethany Lutheran church on Franklin Avenue is not far from where we sit. It was born out of an old controversy at Trinity Lutheran Church. (When Lutherans have controversies, especially among Scandinavians, rather than talk to each other, they go start another church.) But Bethany Church is now in a very diverse community. It hosts a soup kitchen that welcomes the community five days a week. Besides a free meal, it provides free conversation—and it is quite holy. I have had soup next to the homeless person that I see when I get off the freeway ramp, the one holding a sign asking for money. And I've had soup with high executives from the Fairview hospital system.

A few years ago, Bethany Lutheran, like many congregations, had to ask who is welcome there, and how they should express that welcome. Communities that have often felt excluded from the church include people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender, as we all know. So Bethany chose to be part of a movement within the Lutheran church called "Reconciling in Christ." They wanted the community to know about this commitment, so they painted the metal strips along the window that faces Franklin Avenue with all the colors of the rainbow. It was a marvelous sign of welcome.

Well, fast-forward a couple of years. Recently, the chair of the Minnesota chapter of the Council on American Islamic relations approached Bethany about moving their headquarters and sharing space with Bethany. But they also admitted that those rainbow colors will provide tension for many Muslims, endangering their own sense of being welcomed. So how does a community wanting to welcome one community that has been excluded now extend a welcome to another community that's also excluded without excluding the ones who have already been welcomed?

A meeting was called a week ago. It was a living laboratory. Different peoples and traditions, each with deeply held convictions, each of which was 100 percent right, now had to ask of one another: How shall we be neighbors? How shall we be in community together? Out of that conversation came a creative resolution. They decided not to have just one flag, the rainbow flag, but also flags painted for the residents who live in the Cedar Riverside neighborhood so that they all know they are welcome. They will also ask an artist to build a mosaic that includes the rainbow as part of the narrative of Bethany, but that

also includes images of people who are newer to the community and out of whose tradition they are currently building community together. I think that's part of the vocation of Lutheran higher education—to prepare citizens to be faithful stewards of their own traditions but also committed to being neighbors to others. It will take hard work to create an ethic of proximity to our neighbor in order to serve the common good.

Eboo Patel

I almost just want to repeat Bishop Hanson's story because it's so very important. Let's think more about this scenario for a moment. On the one hand, how many people in this room feel wounded and hurt that gays and lesbians continue to be unfairly marginalized in our society? How many believe that their religious institution ought to be proactive in reaching out to the LGBT community to involve those folks? On the other hand, how many people feel wounded and hurt when they see stories of seventh grade Muslim girls getting their head scarves pulled off in junior high after a particularly loud and pompous pump rally the night before? How many people feel that they ought to be proactive in reaching out to the Muslim community and get involved in that? All the same folks are raising their hands. And here's the rub: What happens when one of those communities says, "I cannot share space or symbols with that other marginalized community"?

Welcome to a religiously-diverse democracy.

Some years back, I would do my best to not think about these examples because they didn't fit into my paradigm. My paradigm was basically: I'm for *all* the marginalized and for justice in *any* form. But gay folks are marginalized and Muslims are marginalized and they have different views on sharing spaces. The more I grow in interfaith leadership, the more that I can recognize that these are *precisely* the issues for which we should be preparing our students. Other issues—it's not that they're not important—but if there is a clear right and a clear wrong, well, then it's not that hard. It's just a matter of marshaling forces around the right choice. But when there are legitimate views (which doesn't mean that they are perfectly right, but they are legitimate), when there are legitimate views and they are in tension, the question to me is not so much: Who is right? But rather: How do we move forward?

This is a less poetic way of saying what Bishop Hanson said. What I have now is basically a set of files in my brain where I keep track of the dozens of things that happen on an everyday basis where legitimate views conflicts with other legitimate views among people who orient around religion differently.

"When there are legitimate views and they are in tension, the question to me is not so much: Who is right? But rather: How do we move forward?"

Just yesterday, I received an email from the associate dean of religious life at Vanderbilt University. She happens to be a Lutheran pastor. She has an increasingly sophisticated understanding of mental health and wellness issues; she has learned with that sophisticated understanding that well-trained dogs can be of a particular comfort to students experiencing mental strain and stress. She really cares about this issue and believes that it is part of her vocation as a chaplain to be proactive in welcoming people who might be experiencing issues related to mental health. She also has an increasingly sophisticated view of Islam and Muslims. And so, she is aware that certain groups within Islam believe that the presence of a dog cancels or interferes with a Muslim's prayer. She has a conundrum. She wants to get a well-trained dog to help serve within the chaplaincy offices at Vanderbilt, so that they are a place that welcomes people with mental illness, and so—to use Muslim language—they can be a "special mercy." At the same time, she is aware of being in a position where a number of people cannot come because they believe that the presence of that dog cancels their prayers. The beauty of this particular example is that it is the most everyday of issues.

Or take a different issue: If you are the park district manager in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and a group of Orthodox Jews comes to you and says "Orthodox Jewish women of a particular school of thought cannot swim with men; will you create special swimming hours to accommodate our particular religion?" What do you do? Is meeting

that request a violation of church and state? What about other people who want to swim in those hours? Have you now excluded them?

Or this: If take your “Intro to Religion” class to visit a local mosque and the friendly Muslim imam at the mosque says that women should go in this direction, and men should go in the opposite direction, and anybody who is wearing a skirt or a sleeveless shirt can’t come in, have you just exposed your female students to the worst form of religious misogyny? Or are you exposing them to a different cultural pattern? The instructor has to figure out what to do in that very moment. And it’s not just a decision. He or she also has to figure out how to have a conversation in class about this.

Or this: When Orthodox Jewish men of a particular school board a plane and discover that their seat is next to a woman, they sometimes refuse to sit down. In their Jewish school even inadvertent touch with a woman is a violation of their religious ethic. Is that not okay? Should the flight attendant say, “Hey man, if you don’t want sit in your seat, then get off the plane”? Or can she or he find another, more creative way to move forward?

Or finally: If “fireman friendly” comes to the Boys’ and Girls’ Club two blocks away with a dog and this dog has thrilled kids for thirty years, but today 20 percent of the kids in that Boys’ and Girls’ Club are Somali, do you still bring the dog?

These are the kinds of decisions that interfaith leaders face every day. Increasingly, my mind focuses on case such as these rather than on religious slurs, or other clear cases of right and wrong. In what ways do Lutheran colleges and universities prepare students to be leaders in these situations? These are the kinds of decisions that interfaith leaders face every day.

Katie Baxter

Thank you both for these stories that highlight and complicate interfaith leadership within our civil spaces.

In addition to my part in Interfaith Youth Core, I am the chair of the council at my Lutheran congregation. We are an urban congregation; we are a growing congregation; and we have just sold our building and are exploring shared spaces within our community. So we are about to embark on an 18 month process where we will be

engaging the Latino Episcopal Congregation to share space. We’ll also engage a progressive, protestant, non-denominational congregation that does lots of social action in the neighborhood. Finally, we’ll talk with a Jewish congregation that draws people from across Chicago. As a faith leader, what am I to anticipate in the next 18 months? What might come up as we work together and consider whether we can live in community together? What can Lutheran colleges and universities campuses do to prepare students to be leaders in these kinds of scenarios?

“What can Lutheran colleges and universities campuses do to prepare students to be leaders in these kinds of scenarios?”

Mark Hanson

I think we’re ready to publicly declare that, in order to complete an education at one of the 26 ELCA colleges and universities, a student will need to prepare to live in a religiously pluralistic context. We are committed to that outcome.

I’ve been a part of far too many institutional “visioning” committees and planning processes. I’ve realized that almost every planning process has really been about institutional survival and viability; almost never does it put forward a bold vision of what kind of world we want to create, and what contribution our institution can make to that kind of world. I think the work of interfaith engagement on campuses, by contrast, is about the kind of world we really do want to build.

Yesterday four incredible students sat on this stage as a panel. I almost texted Eboo and said, “You know, we really don’t need to do this dialogue tomorrow morning because we have seen the future and they are sitting right here among us.” When I project those four lives into the vocational paths that they have described—a lawyer, a doctor, a bioengineer, and a person in biological sciences—and when I consider that over the next 10 years they will bring deep rootedness in their own tradition, a relational capacity for friendships (including friendships with those who identify as atheists and secularists), I am

absolutely convinced that they will bring deep awareness and commitment to building a religiously pluralistic democracy. *They* are the future that we are committed to building as Lutheran colleges in America.

I think it's time that we agree that college campuses can be safe places to explore various religious expressions and traditions. Certainly we provide holy spaces or sacred spaces. Are these spaces also respectfully used to honor the traditions of others?

"In what ways can we be together as an academic community but also engage the community beyond the college? How might we do so in service, and justice, and reconciliation? "

How might we teach about religious pluralism in a way that is both curricular and co-curricular? In what ways can we be together as an academic community but also engage the community beyond the college? How might we do so in service, and justice, and reconciliation? Finally, how do we hold each other accountable? Can we build a culture of mutual accountability and together to create a religiously diverse and pluralistic democracy of which we are citizens as individuals but also as representatives of our respective colleges and universities?

Eboo Patel

What would it look like for Lutheran colleges and universities to say publicly that part of the signature of an education at Grandview or Susquehanna or Muhlenberg is that each student becomes an interfaith leader, which means being able to be a proactive, engaged, effective citizen in our in a religiously diverse context? At least as important is this: How do we substantiate that?

In the classroom, or in an interfaith scholars program, or in a chaplaincy program, there are a number of "best practices" for teaching interfaith. First and foremost, we must teach the tensions and complexities, not the easy stuff. In case studies within business school or law school or medical school, it is the hard cases—not the easy

"We must teach the tensions and complexities, not the easy stuff."

ones—that produce genuine reflection and wisdom. People know what to do when a Muslim girl's headscarf is pulled off by seventh graders. It's not that those cases shouldn't be mentioned, but they should not comprise the bulk of a college education. By contrast, the question of what do you do when the Muslim organization that you want to welcome wants to paint over the rainbow flag representing others that have been welcomed—a question such as this one generates genuine tension and invites creative responses.

Second, it does seem to me that the case study format is the best way to teach tensions. By putting students into the role of community leaders, things get real really quickly. What do you say to the Muslim group? What does the subsequent email look like to the LGBT community? What does the next meeting look like? How do you even open up the next meeting? Literally, what is the set of things that you do?

Third, all this connects to an institution's survival and mission to the extent that these kinds of issues are to be standard operating procedure for the rest of our society. In other words, about 12 versions of the dilemmas represented by these scenarios are happening right now within 5 square miles of here. There is some interesting tension at a healthcare facility around religious diversity. There is some interesting tension happening at a school. There is some interesting tension happening at the Boys' and Girls' Club. Your students become nurses, doctors, teachers, counselors, social workers, and community leaders in these environments. How might they get an ethnographic sense of the tensions in these spaces? In other words, in professional environments where people interact, where students get jobs, what are those kinds of tensions?

My colleague Brendan brings up a fascinating issue—namely, that the definition of the end of life for a Buddhist is considerably different than for a "Westerner." What implications does that have if you work in a hospital and are responsible for declaring a patient dead? What do you do if you're that nurse? Some version of this is occurring a dozen times over at any given moment. Again, then, what does it look like to get a thick ethnographic sense of these kinds of

tensions in professional situations, to keep track of actual cases, and then to build a bridge from your college to the medical center or the local Boys' and Girls' Club? How might your school produce nurses, teachers, doctors, and social workers capable of engaging the kinds of tensions and issues that are becoming increasingly common?

Mark Hanson

But I also think we have a lot of work to do to convince many of our colleagues of the importance of interfaith engagement. Many on our campuses assume that interfaith leadership is currently the issue *de jure* on campuses, and that something else will become more pressing in 3 to 5 years. Not at all. This is about our life in the world. This is not an issue *de jure*. But if we are to back up that assertion, we need to explain articulately why we are so engaged. Scholars such as Darrell Jodock have been helping us reflect on why Lutherans are inexplicably engaged in higher education. It is all about the freedom that we experience to be neighbor, the freedom to have an insatiable

"Many on our campuses assume that interfaith leadership is currently the issue *de jure*."

curiosity about life, the freedom to live with complexity and even embrace paradox. If we cannot articulate the deeper footing on which the bridge is being built, then interfaith will be an issue of interest for only a select few.

For me, the weakness of this Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference has been the lack of presence of self-identifying atheists, secularists, and humanists. I, for one, will no longer identify millennial young adults as "nones" because to define someone on the basis of what they *lack* almost always comes from position of privilege. It does not honor the other. By contrast, to create a context where people can define *themselves*, and out of that self-definition begin to share their narrative and begin to strive to grow into an ethic of proximity and building community together—well, that's what we ought to be after.

Katie Baxter

I'd like to spend the remaining time hearing what others in the room want to talk about. So your questions are welcome, as are your affirmations or challenges to anything that you have heard. And I invite you to consider thinking of an example or story to share, particularly cases where legitimate concern meets legitimate concern. What are you preparing your students to do? What are they encountering in the world?

► **Question #1 from audience:** "I'd like to ask Eboo Patel about his term 'legitimacy.' I ask because I am wondering whether evoking religious legitimacy threatens to give a free pass to discrimination just because it's in the name of God."

Eboo Patel

Actually, this is why I think "legitimate" is a slightly better term than a "right" because the latter often means "I agree with you." "Legitimacy," by contrast, doesn't necessarily connote agreement. I don't believe a dog cancels my prayers. I don't believe that touching a woman inadvertently somehow violates sexual ethics for me. But if I respect your identity, I have to have an appreciative understanding of how you come to that view. That's what diversity is. Diversity is to say: "I don't superimpose my terms upon you." Diversity is to recognize that you operate under a different set of terms and I respect how you come to a view based on that set of terms. That doesn't mean I agree with you—and there are limits! There are legal limits and limits by way of civil discourse.

"If I am to say that I respect your identity, does that mean I only respect it when I like it?"

The greater danger in the rest of higher education is the option of saying, "if you do not share my views—straight down the line—I'm gonna shout you out of this space, your identity damned." I don't agree with Muslims who are made uncomfortable by a symbol of gay pride. But they have a *legitimate* view. I don't agree with the Orthodox Jewish man on a plane, but if I have sympathy for the

Orthodox Jewish women who want to swim in a same-sex environment, based on their understanding of gender and coming out of a Jewish tradition, then why would I not offer that same sympathy to the Jewish man?

If I am to say that I respect your identity, does that mean I only respect it when I like it? Honestly, I think that's the great danger in progressive higher education right now. When, for example, the African bishop speak of the challenges racism, I will stand up and applaud, but when they follow that with an opposition to same-sex marriage, I don't really know what to do. And yet, that's diversity!

► **Question #2 from audience:** "I see what you're saying, but that problem is not the problem I face most often with my second-year students. The problem I face most often is the question of relativism. The students don't want to take a side at all; they want to say that everyone has the right to a position, and so we have to show them a place to start so that they can even make some kind of evaluative claims."

Eboo Patel

Yes, this is why case studies are so important. The New York Times had a story about the pool in Brooklyn that I was using as an example; it's a real-life scenario. And it is an entirely likely scenario that one of your students will work a job like the park district manager. If one of your students winds up as the manager at a YMCA or of a public pool, he or she will face such issues. The good thing about case studies is that you do not have to convince someone of the relevance. The relevance is right in front of them.

Mark Hanson

Relativists reduce to the lowest common denominator. They are eclectic, and non-evaluative, saying everything is fine. Critical pluralists, on the other hand, presupposes a deep commitment to move to engagement with the other out of one's own tradition.

I was the parish pastor at a congregation that loved to write resolutions about issues and bring them to church conventions. When we'd have disagreements, some would want to poll private opinions, asking: "Are you for this or against this?" But when you phrase the question that way, one side would eventually win and the other side would

lose. A better way forward for us was to assume that there is a continuum of perspectives along a spectrum that we're trying to reduce to a polarity. So rather than having a resolution, we would get newsprint on the wall, and we would begin to develop the continuum of complex responses to a particular complex issue. And we literally asked people to go to the point on the continuum and stand where they most closely self-identify. And then they could talk to those around them because they found some allies that could strengthen their case. They would move onto the group a little further down the continuum. In this way, they got to build strength and also the capacity to listen to a different perspective. And then they would keep progressing to a perspective that was even more different than their own. Activities such as these call one to deeper listening but also to the possibility of changing one's mind.

"If it's dialogical and contextual, then my mind might just be changed!"

The same is true for interfaith dialogue. If it's dialogical and contextual, then my mind might just be changed! We're talking today as if all of these perspectives are hardened forever, but that's not my experience. We may need to call each other to change for the sake of the other and as we examine our impact on civil society.

► **Question #3 from audience:** "The question I want to ask is about framing interfaith education around the term 'leadership.' I think this language is compelling, but I wonder—as Lutheran higher education tries to find entry points into this work, does framing that work as 'interfaith leadership' limit how people imagine themselves and their roles in this work? Others use language of interfaith 'competency' or 'service.' Does interfaith leadership indeed provide the broadest possible orientation so that people who are not convinced that this has relevance for their vocations can see the power of embracing interfaith?"

Mark Hanson

I think "leadership" has its limits. People may exclude themselves because they do not perceive themselves as leaders. I think "being neighbor" is a much more helpful entry point. And I think "vocation" is a more helpful entry point. What does it mean to be called to a meaningful life, a purposeful life, a life that serves the other and the common good? So, I agree that "leadership" can be too narrow and exclusive for what we are trying to do.

Eboo Patel

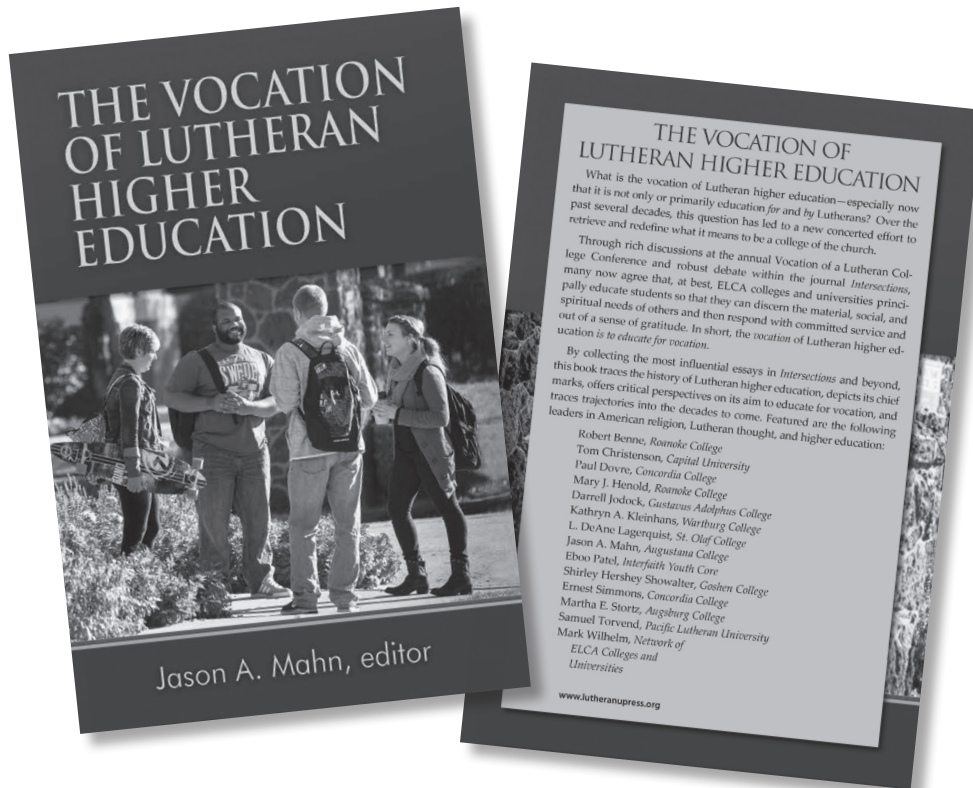
Why call this leadership? At the end of the day, we at IFYC want to say, "Here's our term, here's our definition, but we will agree to any alternative term that anyone wants to use." We'll use inter-religious instead of interfaith; we can

use neighbor instead of leader, and so forth. But let me just say why I use the word leader.

Honestly, if I were at Amherst, I might say "neighbor." People have been whispering in the ears of those kids since they were four years old: "You were born a leader." But just because you are from Susquehanna or Muhlenberg or Grandview or Augsburg and not Stanford or Harvard, why wouldn't we want to plant the idea in the heads of graduates that they are leaders? Why wouldn't we say to them, "You know what, you grew up salt of the earth, but we're going to call you something that you never thought you could be, and inspire you to be it"? I think that that is a big part of what colleges are about—especially colleges such as yours.

◆ NEW BOOK ◆

Some of the most helpful essays from 20 years of Intersections now appear in book form. Please look for opportunities to discuss the book on your campus!



ALLISON BERMANN and MEHAK SACHDEV

Interfaith Campus Organizing at California Lutheran University



Over the past few years, interfaith participation at California Lutheran University has grown from a grassroots movement to a sustainable and integral part of our campus identity. We have integrated several aspects of interfaith into our campus and have created a variety of opportunities into which students to immerse themselves.



Interfaith at CLU

During the 2015-2016 academic year, interfaith experiences reached approximately 550 individuals, logged about 28 programming hours, and

hosted 15 original programs. The key components of interfaith at California Lutheran University include the following:

Intern Program

Our intern program is integrated into our Student Life Office. Students are able to apply for an on-campus

internship through Student Employment. We hire approximately 3-4 interns per semester to work for the Community Service Center. For the first time in 2016-17, we will also hire a Graduate Assistant. Interns are responsible for interfaith programming and logistics. They put together events, manage social media pages, host weekly meetings, and serve as liaisons with other campus groups.

Interfaith Allies

The Interfaith Allies are a group of students, faculty, and staff that promote interfaith cooperation and dialogue between faiths and non-faith groups. Allies focus on fostering a more inclusive campus community by working across all lines of religious difference.

Co-Curricular Programming and Tools

Interfaith at California Lutheran implements a variety of programs and tools on campus. These include the following:

- **Weekly Meetings:** The Interns host weekly meetings at the coffee shop on campus for the Interfaith Allies. Each week, the group is presented with a discussion topic that can range from current events to dialogue about love.
- **Events:** We host gatherings with food for all to learn about religious festivals, to partner in serving

Allison Bermann is a secular Jew and a member of the Class of 2018 at California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks, California. **Mehak Sachdev** identifies as a Hindu and is a member of CLU's Class of 2017. Together they led a Campus Organizing Workshop at the Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference, June 2016. At the conference, Sachdev also participated in a plenary panel of intercollegiate and interfaith students moderated by the Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

refugees, and to hear students' reflections on their research in religious communities. Past events include a Diwali Dinner, Children of Abraham (which was hosted when the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur coincided with the Muslim holiday of Eid El Adha), and Engaged Buddhism (where students experience a 4 day retreat).

- **Alternative Tablings:** Tabling events are held once or twice a month. There is usually a monthly theme where we have an open question and answer period with the Interfaith Interns. We give away swag, along with informational postcards about our organization, events, and meetings. We also hold tabling events to promote our larger events.
- **Fast-A-Thon/Hunger Banquet:** The Interfaith Hunger Banquet was created through our partnership with Oxfam America. We collect food for a local food bank and invite speakers from local hunger agencies. Their insights leave a lasting impact on participants.
- **Interfaith Prayer for the World:** We host these prayers when tragedies occur around the world. They occur at the main campus flagpole during the ten minute break between classes.
- **Come Together Now:** Campus Ministry and Interfaith Allies collaborate for Come Together Now dinners. They are casual dinners where we have topics (such as rest, sacrifice, love) and dialogue about how religion and our faith/non-faith traditions tie into the topic. A few speakers are invited to speak on the topic, followed by open discussion for all.
- **Resident Assistant/Peer Assistant Training:** Non-religious identities and interfaith cooperation are included regularly in diversity training for student leaders on campus.

Additional programs include staff luncheons, interfaith meditation chapel, and other collaborations and cooperation with other departments and existing programs.

Students Teaching through Stories

On our campus, every student is required to take Introduction to Christianity. Some students are uncomfortable or even unwilling to be involved with this subject matter. I (Allison) was definitely one of these students at first, mostly because I was worried that as a non-Lutheran student, my religious traditions would be ignored or even viewed as unacceptable. However, because my professor taught us the importance of interfaith cooperation and made the space an inclusive one, the study of religion has become a big part of my college career. I believe that without a focus on creating a safe and comfortable space for interfaith discussion, no one in our class would have been willing to talk about our personal identities and share our stories. Not every professor that teaches this class puts an emphasis on interfaith, but I believe that made all the difference.

In my sophomore year, students from my interfaith seminar taught a lesson on interfaith for the introductory class in religion. We opened the lesson by telling our personal stories, focusing on why we were involved in interfaith. We talked about our own personal struggles with our religious identity, times where we had a memorable experience with a person of a different faith tradition, and how we want to continue interfaith work in our careers and throughout our lives. By sharing our experiences with fellow Millennials, we were all able to connect and empathize with one another and the new students became less apathetic about the subject matter. Regardless of whatever religious or non-religious tradition they adhered to, they were able to find similarities between our stories and their life experiences, which made all of us more comfortable discussing sometimes difficult subject matters.

Through these and other experiences, students in the Interfaith Seminar have realized how essential and helpful storytelling is when connecting with others. We look forward to making our campus an even stronger community by hearing one another's stories.

Intersections

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