Intersections

Volume 2014 | Number 40 Article 1

2014

Full Issue, Number 40, Fall 2014

FALL 2014

Intersections

IN THIS ISSUE

Interfaith Understanding at Lutheran Colleges and Universities

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 Congregational and Synodical Mission Unit of the ELCA, 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

This issue of *Intersections* features the work of many artists. Sarah Bromberger, Augustana College (Rock Island) class of 2016, took the digital photograph of five student participants in the Interfaith Understanding Conference at Augustana, June 1-3, 2014. Each hails from one of the 17 ELCA colleges and universities that sent cohort groups of students, faculty, chaplains, and presidents to participate in the conference. Rumor has it that the intercollegiate students went frolicking in Rock Island public fountains late in the evening while older conference attendees, less accustomed to dorm life, settled in for an evening of rest.

Behind the students is a section of a 100 foot-long mural, entitled *Cadence of Diversity*, painted on a concrete wall on the east side of Augustana's campus. Working with more than 50 Augustana students, art professor Peter Xiao led the mural's design and execution in 2009 and 2010. It was first promoted by Augustana student Felipe Villagomez, president of Order of the Phoenix, a student organization promoting cultural diversity on campus, and then supported by the Student Services and the Office of Diversities. (The whole mural can be viewed at: http://www.rcreader.com/images/stories/2014/859/augie-mural-full.jpg.)

As a tribute to diverse places, nationalities, races, cultures, religions, and even musical styles, the mural features the word "coexist" in the middle (contributed by one of the student designers), which is appropriated from a popular logo created by Polish artist Piotr Mlodozeniec for an exhibition about religious tolerance in Jerusalem. According to Bruce Walters, another artist and art professor at Western Illinois University, "The mural poetically finds rhythms and patterns in diverse activities and distant places. It reaches for universal themes but is rooted in [Rock Island] through its use of symbols from the college, the community, and our railroad heritage. It is also Midwestern in its stylistic abstraction and rolling forms, similar to paintings by Grant Wood and the other regionalist artists." For the full article, see Bruce Walters, "Art in Plain Sight: Cadence of Diversity," 18 June 2014, *River Cities' Reader*, available at: http://www.rcreader.com/art/art-in-plain-sight-cadence-of-diversity.

And so, featured here is a popular logo created by a Polish artist, appropriated by 50-some art students and their professor within their tribute to the diversity of their community, and then photographed by another student, along with her new friends from across the country, to commemorate their work (and play) at the Interfaith Understanding Conference. A diverse group of artists indeed!

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

ON THE WEB
www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Education/Colleges-and-Universities/Resources/Intersections.aspx

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

From the Publisher

Not that long ago, few would have considered the promotion of interfaith understanding as a central feature of Lutheran higher education. We had buried the important implications of the gospel for the work of interfaith understanding in the same way we had once buried the implications of the doctrine of vocation for our mission.

The parallels between the rise of a renewed interest in vocational reflection on our campuses and the more recent emphasis on interfaith understanding are remarkable. Both have occurred in the context of a wider engagement with the topics (you will have to trust me about the popularity of the theme of vocational reflection in larger circles if you are unaware of it; the wider interest in interfaith matters is well known). Both have had the support of nationally influential agencies (the Lilly Endowment and now the Council of Independent Colleges for vocation; the Interfaith Youth Core and Federal Education Department for interfaith work). And both the themes of vocation and interfaith understanding have pushed Lutheran higher education leaders to rediscover rich resources in the Lutheran intellectual tradition long overlooked.

The work of unpacking the Lutheran tradition for the work of both vocational reflection and interfaith understanding also occurred intermittently, with ups-and-downs for both. Here I will only remind readers about the ups-and-downs of interest in interfaith work. Tensions in the Middle East of the 1960s and 70s and the rise of OPEC, as well as the opening of the United States to new immigration, led to a spate of interest in interreligious work, which continued into the early 1990s. Interest dissipated or at least seemed less urgent to many after the First Gulf War. Then 9/11 occurred, an awareness of a new multi-religious America increased, and global engagement and international student enrollment expanded significantly on our campuses. Interest in interfaith study and understanding was here to stay.

Since then we have been discovering that Lutheran higher education should have always been involved in interfaith understanding work, and how previously underemphasized aspects of the Lutheran tradition point us to the work of interfaith understanding. We are learning again what Florence Amamoto, then assistant professor in Gustavus Adolphus College's English department, wrote in the Summer 1996 issue of *Intersections*, "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." (Thanks to our editor, Jason Mahn, for pointing me to this quotation.) Even more, we are learning again how the Lutheran tradition compels us to teach that an educated person will honor, serve, speak well of and understand the faith of others, no matter what their religion—or lack of religion. The presentations in this issue of *Intersections*, from Augustana (IL) College's June 2014 conference for our campuses, provide the reader with the state of the growing engagement of interfaith work in the ELCA college and university network. We are learning that—and this issue describes how—an authentic Lutheran college or university will make interfaith understanding a feature of its mission.

Mark Wilhelm is Program Director for Schools, Congregational and Synodical Mission Unit, ELCA.

Guest Editorial

As many of us can attest to, there is a lot of "buzz" about interfaith engagement on our campuses. As we reflect on the themes and questions of "What does it mean to be interfaith?," we can't help but hear the questions of "What does it mean to be a Lutheran College" echoed in the same question.

Two anecdotes as further background: First: two years ago, we attended a conference on Interfaith Engagement on college campuses. In one session, we heard a powerful personal story from a Sikh student also attending the conference. With bold pride, he explained to us how the Jesuit values of his university enabled him to be welcomed, accepted, and invited to fully participate as a Sikh on his own campus. This conference began a thought process for us: What would it sound like to hear a non-Lutheran or non-Christian student articulate with bold confidence the Lutheran identity of his or her college as a foundation for a thriving, welcoming, and religiously diverse community? What story could we collectively share as a group of ELCA colleges that might be surprising to "outside" observers?

A second anecdote: A new faculty member visiting campus before moving to Rock Island met with us. As excited as she was to be on campus, she shared that she had "Googled" the definition of a Lutheran, a Lutheran College and other items she had read about on the college website. As a non-Christian, she was happy and surprised to learn of and be invited to think about the role of interfaith initiatives on the Augustana campus. She also did not know what a college chaplain was and was very interested to learn about the role of a chaplain. She said, "I wondered if these things I read about only concerned the history of the college and had nothing to do with the present or the future."

We imagine there are many similar experiences among our 26 ELCA colleges and universities. In response to a growing movement of interfaith initiatives on campuses such as the White House sponsored *President's Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge*, it seemed there could be a unique opportunity for the colleges and universities of the ELCA to bring students, faculty, staff and chaplains together to explore the central question of *why* a Lutheran College is *compelled* to be a part of an interfaith movement *because* of our unique heritage, identity, and core values.

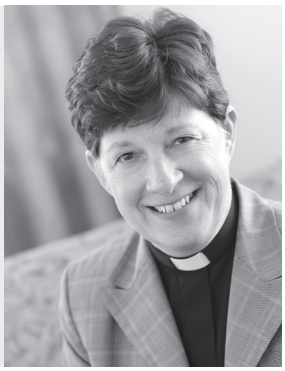
At the invitation of Augustana president Steve Bahls, we began exploring the design of such a conference with the various constituent groups above. In June of 2014, Augustana College in Rock Island hosted the first Interfaith Understanding Conference for ELCA Colleges and Universities. Grounded in the question, "What does it mean to be Interfaith at a Lutheran College?," presidents, students, faculty and chaplains from 17 of the 26 colleges and universities gathered as cohort groups. Participants not only engaged in dialogue, but also in planning for and implementing these types of interfaith partnerships on campus. Throughout the conference we heard from excellent scholars, students, faculty, and chaplains of various religious and non-religious identities as well as from ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and other community partners in this work.

We are grateful for the many people who helped make the conference possible, including Mark Wilhelm and Kathryn Lohre from the ELCA Churchwide Organization, President Steve Bahls of Augustana College, the conference planning team, staff of Interfaith Youth Core and the Pluralism Project at Harvard University, and all of the attendees who offered their full participation in the conference. Many of the reflections, including the keynote addresses by Jason Mahn, Eboo Patel, and Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, are captured in the pages of this journal. But perhaps what stands out the most for us in the months since the conference is how this kind of conference was a living, breathing example of the praxis of what it means to be a part of a Lutheran college in the twenty-first century.

Kristen Glass Perez and **Richard Priggie** are the campus chaplains at Augustana College (Rock Island). Along with a planning committee representing various ELCA colleges and universities, they organized the first Interfaith Understanding Conference for ELCA Colleges and Universities, June 1-3, 2014, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois.

ELIZABETH A. EATON
ELCA Presiding Bishop

Vocational Re-Formation for a Multi-Religious World



What it means to be Lutheran in a multi-religious world is one of the most significant challenges facing our church today. This is not simply an ecclesial question—left to those of us in positions of religious leadership—but a deeply liberal arts one. It is increasingly essential that students of every discipline prepare for vocational lives in a multi-religious world. Whatever the calling, religious literacy and the capacity to engage with religious difference are integral skills—*and* faithful responses to Christ's call to love our neighbors.

In June I had the privilege of being present with several ELCA college and university presidents and their delegations at a conference hosted by Augustana College, Rock Island on interfaith understanding. I was deeply encouraged to learn more about the significant work being done in these places. Several of the students present reminded us that they have come of age in this rapidly changing religious landscape, bringing new questions and gifts to the work ahead of us.

While the religious diversity present on these campuses varies significantly from place to place, the challenge of vocational formation for a multi-religious world is ubiquitous. Drawing upon our Lutheran heritage and mission, might we live into what Prof. Darrell Jodock has called "the third path" between sectarian and non-sectarian schools by developing initiatives for interfaith understanding and engagement that are "both deeply rooted and dialogical"? Is there an opportunity in all of this for the ELCA colleges and universities, together with the church, to make a lasting contribution to the five hundredth observance of the Reformation in 2017?

As presiding bishop, I have lifted up four fundamental expressions of who we are, and who God is calling us to be: we are church, we are Lutheran, we are church together, and we are church for the sake of the world. We are a church that belongs to Christ, with worship at our center. The good news of Jesus Christ liberates us and gives us the freedom and courage to wonder, discover, and boldly participate in what God is up to in the world. We believe that we are freed in Christ to serve and love our neighbor. With our hands, we do God's work of restoring and reconciling communities throughout the world, reaching out to and working beside other faith communities to promote understanding and build relationships for a better world.

Being Lutheran in a multi-religious world is our identity. What this means—including how we prepare ourselves and our students to live this out—is our challenge, our opportunity. Thanks be to God!

Elizabeth A. Eaton

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 June Interfaith Conference, she had a formal exchange with Eboo Patel and interacted with college presidents, students, and other participants.

JASON A. MAHN

Why Interfaith Understanding is Integral to the Lutheran Tradition

Several years ago, I was attending a gathering in Minneapolis called "Jesus Radicals" for the first time. As far as I could tell, I was one of the very few participants who did not have dreadlocks, who had never dumpster-dived, and who did not blend into the anarchic-vegan punk scene of that area of Minneapolis. Participants spoke of Christian discipleship as thoroughly countercultural, at least until the powers of domination submit to God's way of peace. This was radical stuff, as the name of the gathering implied.

The name of this conference, "Interfaith Understanding," perhaps seems less radical. Don't let that fool you. We are here to fundamentally rethink very standard, seemingly "normal" ways of making sense of the different religious traditions that we practice as they intersect with the Lutheran tradition that we share by virtue of teaching and mentoring, of learning and being formed, within our 26 ELCA colleges and universities. Some will assume that claiming one's institutional identity as Christian or Lutheran necessarily dampers diversity and prohibits interfaith cooperation, or inversely, that cultivating interfaith cooperation depends on secularizing the context of that work. These assumptions must be called into question in order to develop institutional perspectives that are *both* committed to their religious traditions *and* hospitable to others. Indeed, we must reconsider the very idea that identity and hospitality, commitment and openness, are counter forces that must be balanced somehow—as if the more robustly Lutheran means the less engaged with and challenged by the traditions of others, and vice-versa. Perhaps identity and openness are more like two sides of the same coin. Or better, perhaps they are connected like cultivating one's own Buddha-nature depends on cultivating nonattachment to that nature. Such re-thinking is indeed *radical* stuff.

In this essay, I return to the *root* or *radix* (from which we get *radical*) of the Lutheran tradition to show how interfaith encounter, understanding, and cooperation are integral to it. By the "Lutheran tradition" I mean three things. We can speak of Lutheranism as a church or denomination, where membership is typically considered incompatible with membership elsewhere. Lutheran theology is a broader designation; it refers to a 500 year old reform movement within the church catholic (lowercase c)—a grouping of *particular* and *distinctive* (but not absolutely unique) ways of encountering God in light of Jesus and of cultivating Christian faithfulness and human flourishing. Finally, we can speak of Lutheran higher education, a designation that can and should remain irreducible to the other two without

Jason A. Mahn is Chair of the Religion Department and Associate Professor of Religion, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois. He serves on the planning committee of the Vocation of a Lutheran College conference and as editor of *Intersections*. In his second book, *Becoming a Christian in Christendom* (Fortress Press, forthcoming), he thinks through problems posed by Christian enculturation and accommodation for authentic discipleship and community today.

thereby meaning anything and everything. Lutheran education or Lutheran pedagogy has its own particularity—it is a distinctive approach to educating whole persons in mind, body and spirit with the goal of fulfilling one's calling by responding to the deep needs of the world. How does interfaith understanding and action crisscross with these three spheres of the Lutheran church, Lutheran theology, and Lutheran education? How might interfaith engagement be seen not as the vanishing point—a last receding concentric circle—of Lutheran identity but something central to Lutheranism from its inception?

"How does interfaith understanding and action crisscross with these three spheres of the Lutheran church, Lutheran theology, and Lutheran education?"

Lutheranism as Church

As I write of how Lutheranism pushes people beyond their fold to recognize God in other peoples and to work together toward the common good, I am *painfully* aware of Martin Luther's dramatic shortcomings when it came to understanding and working with people of other religions. The sixteenth century reformer had only a cursory knowledge of "the Turks" (as he called Muslims south and east of Saxony), and he displayed a good deal of ambivalence about them. On the one hand, the expanding Ottoman Empire extended much more religious tolerance than did the church from which Luther was dissenting, and Luther knew it; he wondered whether the Sultan might not become a tactical ally. He also writes, in a sort of double-critique, that "a smart Turk makes a better ruler than a dumb Christian" (Spitz 330). On the other hand, Luther could describe a "clash of civilizations" between the Christian West and Turks from the East with enough good-versus-evil imagery as to make Samuel Huntington blush. When Luther pens his famous "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" around 1527, it was probably first used as a battle song to inspire soldiers to rise up against those encroaching Muslims (Merriman 101). When in the fourth verse Luther writes, "Were they to take our house, goods, honor, child, or spouse, though life be wrenched away, they cannot win the day. The kingdom's ours forever," the "they" may in fact be Muslims and the "kingdom" over which they battle may in fact be Western Europe, even if the song also refers to other forces and powers, both visible and invisible, then and today.

Luther's anxieties about and caricatures of other traditions gets more treacherous when it comes to Judaism. As is well known, Luther had hoped that once his own evangelical reforms did away with "papist" distortions, Jewish people would finally see that their own Hebrew scriptures pointed toward their fulfillment in the Gospel, and thus would start lining up for Christian baptism. Early in his career, he writes "That Jesus was Born a Jew" (1523), condemning the fear-tactics and baptism by sword used by earlier Christians and encouraging his contemporaries to "treat the Jews in a brotherly manner." They are the "blood relatives" of Jesus, insists Luther; we Gentile Christians are only "aliens and in-laws" (200-201).

When, despite Luther's soft-sell, most Jews continued to politely decline the invitation to convert, Luther became outraged. Writing "On the Jews and Their Lies" twenty years later (1543), Luther mounts a violent invective against the Jews. Where earlier he called Jews the blood relatives of Jesus, he now calls them poisoners, ritual murderers, and parasites. In his last sermon, delivered just days before his death, Luther calls for the expulsion of Jews from Germany altogether. Luckily, the influence of these invectives was not very great in Luther's time. Yet German Nazis did not need such texts waiting to be picked up and used for ideological justification 400 years after the fact. Luther's writings have

"The *confession* of Lutheran complicity in the stereotyping and scapegoating of others must be the starting place for any candid commitment to interfaith understanding and cooperation."

not only led to deep anti-Judaism, the defamation of Jews on theological grounds, but have also been appropriated in support of anti-Semitic racist ideology, scapegoating, fear-mongering, and murder.

I say this first of all simply to be honest and to name the elephant in the room whenever one speaks of the Lutheran tradition and interfaith cooperation. I also say it because the *confession* of Lutheran complicity in the stereotyping and scapegoating of others must be the starting place for any candid commitment to interfaith understanding and cooperation.

In this light, one of the most significant contributions Lutherans have made to interfaith is the statement on Lutheran-Jewish relations that the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America adopted in 1994. This document underscores the importance of Luther's central confession of faith:

> Honoring [Luther's] name in our own, we recall his bold stand for truth, his earthy and sublime words of wisdom, and above all his witness to God's saving Word. Luther proclaimed a gospel for people as we really are... (ELCA)

But at this point, as Lutherans confess God's saving Word and sufficient Grace, they also confess their sin, how that "grace [must reach] our deepest shames and address the most tragic truths." The document continues:

> In the spirit of that truth-telling, we who bear his name and heritage must with pain acknowledge also Luther's anti-Judaic diatribes and the violent recommendations of his later writings against the Jews.... [W]e reject this violent invective, and yet more do we express our deep and abiding sorrow over its tragic effects on subsequent generations....Grieving the complicity of our own tradition within this history of hatred, moreover, we express our urgent desire to live out our faith in Jesus Christ with love and respect for the Jewish people. We recognize in anti-Semitism a contradiction and an affront to the Gospel, a violation of our hope and calling... (ELCA)

Confession of sin is central to Lutheran identity—Lutherans typically don't start worship without it. So, too, with interfaith encounter. Such confession—of what we have done badly and failed to do altogether—*is* one of the gifts that Lutherans bring to the table when meeting our brothers and sisters from other traditions. Kathryn Lohre's essay that follows describes other foundations upon which ELCA interfaith relations build.

Philosophical Interlude

As I transition from speaking of the Lutheran church to Lutheran theology, I want first to rehearse some fairly well-worn categories for interpreting and regarding different religions. As far as I can tell, these categories were invented, or at least formalized, with the publication in 1987 of *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*. In the Introduction, the editors lay out a typology that has structured interfaith understanding since. They write of the "exclusivist" position, the understanding that one's own religion has a monopoly on truth or is the only road to salvation. The line between my way of true faith and devotion and those heretical and idolatrous beliefs and practices *over there* is clear and stark. The editors then describe a second, "inclusivist" position, comprised of the idea that while my religion has the fullest manifestation of truth or gives it proper name, other traditions also glimpse this truth and designate it with their own analogous terms. In many ways this mindset remains more open to listening to and learning from others; still, it remains supremely confident that Christ, for example, is the *full* and *final* revelation of God; other traditions are affirmed only insofar as they *resonate* with that final truth.

Third and finally, we get the position called "pluralism." We should emphasize with Diana Eck that pluralism is distinct from the sheer fact of religious plurality or diversity (Eck 191). It entails an interpretation of that diversity and an affirmation of multiple religions for contributing to an understanding of God (or "the Ultimate," or "the Real") or for joining in efforts for social justice. The editors of *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* describe the passage from inclusivism to pluralism as crossing the Rubicon towards recognizing the independent validity of other religious approaches (Hick and Knitter viii). Even more suggestive is this earlier imagery: Going from inclusivism—where it is still *my* tradition that provides the norms and sets the terms of inclusivity—to pluralism is like going from a Ptolemaic understanding of the universe to a Copernican

model, where each of our traditions is but circling around something that is beyond the sphere of each (Hick 133-47).

Now, this typology of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism can be incredibly helpful for reminding religious folks that God is not contained within any of their traditions, that God (or Buddha-nature, or Dharma, or "the Real") always transcends the terms and stories that we have for Her (or Him, or It). According to a famous Jataka Tale of Buddhism, we should not confuse the finger that points to the moon for the moon itself. Each tradition points to the truth, but none of them contains it.

"Once one understands that all religions are like planets circling around the same sun, are like different paths leading up the same mountain, one has just portrayed them as essentially or functionally equivalent, as versions of the same kind of thing."

At the same time, however, the categories are limited and sometimes unhelpful (compare Heim and Legenhausen). To start with, notice the way that the account of *plurality* that you find in the *pluralist* position subtly relegates religions into different versions *of the same thing*. Once one understands that all religions are like planets circling around the same sun, are like different paths leading up the same mountain, one has just portrayed them as essentially or functionally equivalent, as versions of the same kind of thing. "Salvation," "enlightenment," "moksha" and "paradise" get relegated to specific versions of a more abstract and overarching "final end." "Yahweh," "the Triune God,"' "Allah," and "Dharma," all become different ways to describe "the Ultimate" or "the Real." At worst, then, differences can appear so shallow and unimportant that the traditions begin to resemble brand names—you prefer your New Age iPhone and I'm still clinging to my Doctrinal Blackberry but either gets the job done and the wiring is about the same once we peel off the plastic.

Ironically, then, "pluralism" *as a category* can undercut the plurality it is meant to affirm. Related to this problem is this: many self-proclaimed pluralists end up introducing a philosophical framework that is meant to mediate differences between religious "frameworks," but simply adds an additional framework in need of mediation. To return to our earlier metaphor, we could say that the Ptolemaic model of the universe is also just a model of, an earthly perspective on, the universe—*itself* no more heliocentric than other perspectives. Or again: Seeing that each tradition's finger only points to the moon gets one no closer to standing on the moon. In fact you can only indicate *that* truth with yet another finger that points to the fingers pointing, and so on.

Let me go at the difficulty related to pluralism as a category in a different way by suggesting that it answers a problem that may not in fact be our most pressing one. Certainly the tactics of "othering" employed by the exclusivist—her proclivity to stereotype, scapegoat, and even demonize those outside her own fold—have been and are a major concern of Christianity, in particular, with its too-long history of baptism under duress, of pogroms, and of "holy wars." But does that too-clear understanding that I possess absolute truth and you do not characterize the majority of Christians in this time and place? According to a well-known National Study on Youth and Religion, the vast majority of teenagers who call themselves Christian actually have little to no idea what Christianity entails aside from the idea that they are supposed to be nice and that God will reward and protect them if they are. Propounding a religion more accurately called "Moralistic, Therapeutic, Deism" these Christian kids believe in a pretty hand-off God, an ethereal Big Daddy in the sky, who just wants them to be good, which often means nonjudgmental, and, most of all, to be happy. (Smith and Denton 118-71).

The researches make clear that this is not just a teenager problem; youth have been thoroughly schooled into this indeterminate faith through the equally abstract "religiosity" of their parents (191). Perhaps then an overly-stark separation of me and my tradition from you and yours is not the primary obstacle to interfaith understanding today. Perhaps the primary challenge is how to recognize and cultivate difference in the first place—to notice that you and I see the world differently, and that these differences are good.

I'm not trying to suggest that, as a response to relativism, we should concentrate *first* on cultivating one's native religious identity and then move on to encountering

difference if we have some extra time. In his beautiful book, *Acts of Faith*, Eboo Patel writes of trying to get interfaith cooperation among youth off the ground in Chicago by meeting with synagogue, mosque, and church leaders. The repeated response he heard was this: "We barely have enough time to teach our kids about their *own* religion… It's just not a high enough priority to spend that precious time exposing them to others" (164). That again is the sort of zero-sum thinking that understands difference as a threat to identity rather than the two arising together. Patel's Interfaith Youth Core gracefully cuts through this perceived dilemma of priorities by showing how understanding other religions and one's own each happen "better together." What I am trying to warn against here is that "plural*ism*," when made an "-ism," when regarded as a final position and answer, might enable our many moralistic-therapeutic-deists to settle too quickly for shallow relativism, skirting the difficult and rewarding work of interfaith exchange and action.

One final qualification about these philosophical categories before returning to Luther: Notice the way that positioning "inclusivism" along a spectrum spanning from the narrowest forms of "exclusivism" to the widest embrace of "pluralism" tends to reduce it to a kind of halfway house position. To the pluralist, it looks not as good as pluralism but a whole lot better than exclusion. To the critic of pluralism, inclusivism seems like a happy medium—not as closed-minded as the exclusivists but also not as abstract and all-accommodating as the pluralists—like Goldilocks preferring the middle bed: not too hard, not soft. I happen to think that describing inclusivism in this way actually obscures the *unique* set of challenges that arise when people understand other religions as being analogues or shadows of their own. These challenges are especially prevalent in traditions that share histories and texts—as when Christianity interprets Judaism as having part of its full truth, or when Islam thinks in a similar way about the other "religions of the book."

This is the specific problem of supersessionism—the idea that one's faith, as newer and more complete, surpasses and supplants that which has gone before (see Soulen 1-12; Wyschogrod 183-84). Notice that the problem of supersessionism is not the problem of relegating the other as completely "other," as strange and unique, but rather the temptation to include her under terms that are really my own. Perhaps then Luther's first, seemingly more benign interpretation of Jews as "almost Christian" was just as mistaken and dangerous as his final, exclusivist rant when they claimed their own uniqueness. If inclusivism can be toxic, and history shows that it can, then the remedy must come by *underscoring differences* and by keeping them from becoming divisive by cultivating gratitude and even holy wonder for them. I want now to show how some core themes in Luther's theology help cultivate such gratitude and wonder for the particularity and uniqueness of our traditions.

"If inclusivism can be toxic, and history shows that it can, then the remedy must come by *underscoring differences* and by keeping them from becoming divisive by cultivating gratitude and even holy wonder for them."

Lutheranism as Theology

First things first: The Lutheran emphasis on justification by grace through faith apart from the work of the law is about Christian identity, about who humans *are* as they stand before a God made known in Christ and before their neighbors in need. It is important to say this because so much popular religious sentiment takes "justification" and "grace" as things that get you other things, as an admission ticket for eternal life. For Luther, justification—being made right in the gracious eyes of God—is not the way one gets to salvation. It is salvation.

The way that Luther and Lutherans speak of salvation (including justification or righteousness, grace, faith, and freedom) matters for how they regard Christian identity as it relates to the identity of others. We could say that justification is about encountering others and that such encounters necessarily stem from justification—at least for Christians. Being justified by grace through faith matters because "my" graced identity *is never truly mine*

as a security and possession. Rather, I am graced with my identity as loved, healed, and capable of service only insofar as I receive it, share it, and have it drawn out by others. It is only before others—the capital *O* Other and then other others—that I become the one I am.

Now, Lutherans are rather good at witnessing to the necessary relationship with God and God's unmerited grace in determining their Christian identities. One is justified before God, by God's loving regard, or not at all. But they should remember, too, that for Luther Christian righteousness and freedom are "secured" only insofar as they are lived out before other human beings, regardless of whether those others share Christian understandings. Early in the reforming movement Luther writes of "Two Kinds of Righteousness" (1519) and, a year later, of two kinds of freedom in "The Freedom of a Christian" (1520). First is the righteousness "instilled from without," whereby Christ "is entirely ours with all his benefits" ("Righteousness" 297-98) and where we are entirely freed *from* having to construct our own holiness. The second is the Christian's "proper righteousness" which comprises "that manner of life spent profitably in good works" (299) and the freedom *for* humble service to any and every neighbor in need ("Freedom" 364-73). Once God's gift of righteousness becomes "ours" in faith, we can and should be willing to grasp it less tightly, so to speak. In Luther's words, once a person hears Christ the Bridegroom declare "I am yours," and she answers, "I am yours," "Then the soul no longer seeks to be righteous in and for itself, but it has Christ as its righteousness *and therefore seeks only the welfare of others*" ("Righteousness" 30). Having been opened to the self-giving Christ, the Christian almost ineluctably passes on whatever he or she can in order to meet the needs of others.

Luther imagined that Christian "encounters" with others happened primarily by serving them. In imagining interfaith engagement, we must of course imagine more reciprocal, symmetrical exchanges as all participants "come to the table" with their own stories and gifts as well as their needs and receptivity. But note just how constitutive standing before other humans, open both to their need and to their gifts, is for Christian righteousness and freedom, according to Luther. It is not as if Christians become fully Christian and then happen to share that identity (and a little bit of time and money) with others or decide to keep it to themselves, afraid that they'll lose it with too much openness. Rather, becoming open to the other—to God and other others—*is* what Christian identity is all about. The Christian becomes properly righteous only when that righteousness is lived out before others. The Christian becomes fully free only when freely binding herself or himself to others in service for the common good. Or, somewhat anachronistically, we could say that *Lutherans* become fully *Lutheran* only as they participate in dialogue and service for and with people who are *not*.

> "Becoming open to the other—to God and other others—*is* what Christian identity is all about."

The subtext for these early Lutheran texts is the "Christ hymn," a bit of verse probably sung or recited by the earliest Christians, which Paul quotes in Philippians 2. Paul there beckons fellow Christians in Philippi to look to the interests of others above and beyond their own, and to "have the same mind in you" that was in Christ Jesus,

> who, though he was in the form of God,
> did not regard equality with God
> as something to be exploited,
> but emptied himself,
> taking the form of a slave,
> being born in human likeness.
> And being found in human form,
> he humbled himself
> and became obedient to the point of death—
> even death on a cross. (Phil.2:6-8)

In this so-called kenotic or self-emptying Christ, Christians have an example of one who resists clinging to the identity he has through equality with God. Christ chooses instead to humble himself, receiving his identity through friendship, solidarity, and communion with those who are radically—*radically*—"other." Christians pattern their lives after this kenotic Christ when they, too, meet religious others in all their otherness not *despite* being Christian but *because* they are Christian and *in order to* be more fully Christian.

Recalling those philosophical terms, I want also to show how Luther's framework might couple seemingly exclusivist claims with openness to honest interfaith exchange. Early in his career, Luther distinguished theologians of glory, whom he critiqued for having all-too-cozy understandings of God, from theologians of the cross—those who rightly know and serve the God revealed through the suffering of Jesus. In his famous Heidelberg Disputation (1518), Luther puts it this way: "A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is." Luther then explains:

> This is clear: He [the theologian of glory] who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glow to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil. These [however] are the people whom the apostle calls "enemies of the cross of Christ" [Phil. 3:18], for they hate the cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works… [But] *God can be found only in suffering and the cross*… ("Heidelberg Disputation," Thesis 21, my emphasis)

Certainly these are exclusivist claims, including a clear distinction between "the friends of the cross" and "enemies of the cross of Christ." To claim that God can be found *only* in suffering and the cross is enough to make almost any non-Christian uncomfortable. Muslims and others with an understanding of the absolute indivisibility and impassibility of God may here downright cringe. But we should be careful to note what exactly Luther's exclusivist claims exclude. The theologian of glory is one who looks around to whatever has value in our dominant society and projects them onto God: God is like the power of domination—only stronger. God is like a kingly authority—only more unquestionable. God is like the Unmoved Mover—only more invulnerable. It is over-and-against these seemingly obvious, self-assured, and typically *ideological* understanding of "the divine" (in other words, ones that function to secure our own power and authority) that Luther posits the God who freely discloses God's self in the most unusual places—in a barn in Bethlehem and on a cross outside Jerusalem. Luther thus underscores the *particularity* and *peculiarity* of a God who fully reveals God's self in such unlikely places and the necessary peculiarity of Christians who follow this God.

How might particular and seemingly exclusivist claims such as these help foster authentic interfaith encounter? First, theologians of the cross—if they take this peculiar self-revelation of God seriously—are formed to see God in unlikely places. The One revealed "outside the camp" (Hebrews 13:13) is utterly free to be revealed outside Christian circles as well. Christians will be ready to find God in unusual places, and so enter into interfaith exchange with eyes wide open.

> "Theologians of the cross are formed to see God in unlikely places."

Second, embracing their own scandalous particularity, Christians allow space for others to inhabit their own stubborn particularity. Without a sense of the tradition's particularity and limits, without ample witness to a God who eludes their own grasp, theologians of glory are bound to mistake their particular glimpse of God with full and final comprehension. When others can't or won't see it the same way, they will get exasperated, as Luther himself became with the unconverted Jews around him. A theologian of the cross, by contrast, knows the limits of her sight of God. Or, to put it positively: Appreciating the fact that her God is strangely, wonder-fully revealed in this peculiar way, she allows space for other revelations, each of which are no more graspable and incontestable—and no less wonderful—than her own.

Lutheranism as Pedagogy

We turn finally from the Lutheran church and Lutheran theology to our Lutheran colleges and universities. How do they—how might they—provide the place and space for interfaith encounter, understanding, and shared service for the common good? I will name three more gifts (and tasks) that Lutheran higher education brings to interfaith understanding.

1. Religious Formation and Interfaith

Many who write about the distinctive third path (Jodock 5-6) or set of charisms (Stortz 9-15) characterizing Lutheran higher education today connect the best of its

pedagogy to Luther's proclivity toward "both/and" thinking, toward abiding tensions or even paradoxes. Luther wrote that "a Christian is perfectly free lord of all, subject to none" *and* that "a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to none" ("Freedom" 344). A person before the law is bound to sin *and yet* wholly responsible for doing the sin that does her. And perhaps most paradoxical of all, a person before the redeeming God is "*simultaneously* sinner and saint"—not half and half, but entirely sinful and yet entirely virtuous in the eyes of God. Embodying this tensive outlook in new ways, Lutheran colleges and universities become places where the reforming tradition is empathically taught *and yet also* places where academic freedom still reigns supreme. They are places that honor the scientific method and empirical research *and yet also* address questions of ultimate meanings, purpose, and value.

"Colleges and universities of the Lutheran Church are assuming the role of the Christian faith formation of young people in unprecedented ways, and yet this is best done not prior to or instead of encountering people of other faiths, but by facing them in conversation and joining them in pursuing justice."

One more tension intrinsic to Lutheran education is this: Colleges and universities of the Lutheran Church are assuming the role of the Christian faith formation of young people in unprecedented ways, and yet this is best done not prior to or instead of encountering people of other faiths, but by facing them in conversation and joining them in pursuing justice. Certainly there was a time when first year students arrived on our campuses already well catechized in their faith tradition. Nowadays, college has become the place of many students' first serious formative encounter with the meaning and values of the Christian faith. We must now help them not only critically reflect on their faith, but also to grow *into* it. The question then becomes: Does teaching other faith traditions, does fostering conversation and joint service projects among students of different religions, do even some experiments in interfaith worship foster or undermine the faith formation of a college student?

I am convinced by the work of Eboo Patel and the Interfaith Youth Core, Dianna Eck and the Pluralism Project, and by my own experiences with Augustana students that a person comes to know and embody her own tradition more fully and gracefully when working with others as they embody theirs.

2. Suspicion and Trust

The second gift that Lutheran higher education brings to interfaith work is its institutional willingness to straddle the sometime ambiguous line between the academic study of religion and more personal and pastoral approaches to religious faith and meaning. All of our colleges have both religion departments and chaplaincy offices, centers for vocational reflection, and the like. While a distinction between these curricular and extra- and co-curricular offices is needed and helpful, I would guess that only in rare cases has the distinction become an absolute divide. Our campus pastors teach the Christian tradition and other traditions as they lead Christians, Jews, Muslims, "whateverists," and seekers into deeper lives of meaning and conviction. Our religion professors, too, though they may need to clarify that courses in religion are not the same as Sunday school, do help students name their burning questions and sometimes walk them across the hot coals. Our campus pastors disabuse students of uncritical faith, and our professors often model ways of remaining faithful to the tradition they are critiquing. On both sides of the curricular/co-curricular distinction, then, Christianity and other religions are both criticized and claimed, investigated and entrusted.

This distinctive ability to treat religion with both a hermeneutic (or interpretative lens) of suspicion and a hermeneutic of trust stems directly from the Lutheran Reformation as a re-forming tradition. Unlike some other reformers, Lutherans did not want to do away with 1600 years of Christian history in order to start from scratch. Rather, they critiqued the church as faithful members of it. Yet unlike those ecclesial powers that resisted every reform, Luther and Lutherans were not and are not afraid to name all the ways that the church they love falls into idolatry and perpetuates ideology. One of the deep mores of Lutheran education is this ability to critique the faith that you love—precisely because you love it.

If Lutherans are called to call their own tradition into question so that they can inhabit it more fully, then conversations with people of other religions provide the primary vehicle for them to do so. Unlike empty skepticism or something that we assume to be "purely secular reason,"

"One of the deep mores of Lutheran education is this ability to critique the faith that you love—precisely because you love it."

the differing beliefs, practices, and abiding virtues of other faiths provide the footing, so to speak, as Christian step back and forth from their own, just as the committed Christian provides the opportunity for the Hindu or Jew to reconsider and re-inhabit her or his own faith. Learning about Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, from the committed Mahayana Buddhist might help a Christian consider whether his own self-sacrificial love hasn't been too self-serving, a round-about strategy to get into heaven. Listening to the committed Muslim speak of God's radical oneness and transcendence might help the Christian consider whether her Christ doesn't look too much like the Buddy Christ from the satirical film *Dogma*. Finally, even listening to the committed atheist—or even the sophomoric atheist who has read his first bit of Nietzsche and goes around proclaiming to his churchy friends that "God is dead"—even this one might help the Christian consider how her own tradition might repeat the same truth in a different register. Yes, God is dead—fully revealed in the cross of Christ—and yet still ruling the world with that vulnerable, suffering love.

3. Vocation

Finally, then, we come to *sine qua non* of Lutheran education—namely, that education is not primarily a financial investment, a privileged cultivation of the life of the mind, or access to upward mobility, *but the development of and reflection on one's giftedness so that one can capably respond to God's calling and the deep needs of the world.* In shortest form: Lutheran education is education as and for vocation.

Now, when Lutheran theologians are talking among themselves (that's a party for you!), it matters where one places understandings of vocation within Lutheran intellectual schemata. Most assert that to answer God's call belongs to what Lutherans call a first use of the law, the law as applicable to all and as guiding civil society toward a semblance of peace and order. I happen to think that Luther's language of calling is best understood as a second use of the Gospel, as that second form that grace and righteousness take when put into play among the neighbors and strangers and enemies that Christians are called to love. I think, in other words, that for Christians living out one's calling should take a deeply Christological shape as they begin to have the same mind in them that was in Christ Jesus. But note well—even if vocation properly construed is decidedly Christian in name and shape for the Christian, the *enactment* of it can be shared by many folds of religious and non-religious types. Thus, while Christians come to humble service because their Lord humbly serves, they shouldn't be surprised to find Jews engaged in the same service, who come in the spirit of the Jewish prayer *tikkum olam*—from the hope that by doing small acts that contribute to God's ongoing creation humans can "heal the world" (Largen 235-37). And they shouldn't be surprised to find Muslims so engaged, perhaps responding to the Qur'an's exhortation to believers to "strive in the way of God with a service worthy of Him" (Qur'an 22:78). When Buddhists participate in shared service with the Heart Sutra on their lips, or when lovers of the *Bhagavad Gita* come with intentions to act for good simply and purely, "without attachment to the fruits of their actions," Christians, again, should not be surprised.

We can thank national leaders of interfaith work for underscoring the importance of moving beyond dialogue alone and actually *acting* together, across religious boundaries, to combat poverty, bigotry, injustice, and environmental degradation. The colleges and universities of the ELCA will continue to train their religious and nonreligious students to come to this work expecting to see their own and other lives transformed. We will continue to train Christian students to look for Christ hidden in those they serve and in those that they serve beside. But we need also to provide the institutional support—places to gather, time to reflect, even curriculums to be followed—that enable diverse people to better

hear and respond to their callings. Lutheran educators have a particular yet versatile understanding of vocation, of radical, cooperative service for a needy world. Let that, too, become what draws many together as peoples of God and healers of a broken, and redeemable, world.

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EBOO PATEL

What it Means to Build the Bridge: Identity and Diversity at ELCA Colleges

I'd like to open with the stories of two good friends of mine, women who work at senior levels at Interfaith Youth Core.[1] Both were devoted Christians when they went off to Midwestern liberal arts colleges in the 1990s, campuses that have much in common with yours in terms of size and liberal arts ideals, but do not happen to be Lutheran.

Cassie

I'll begin with Cassie's story. Cassie grew up in a largely secular household in the Seattle-area and converted to Evangelical Christianity when she was in high school. She loved the closeness of the community and the fervor of the faith. When she got to college in upstate Wisconsin, she discovered that there were only enough active Christians on campus to form a single student group. It included people who grew up speaking in tongues and those more accustomed to smells-and-bells rituals. At first, Cassie had a hard time praying with Catholics; she'd been taught in her church back home that they weren't really Christian. But soon Catholics were the least of Cassie's theological worries.

One day in the library, Cassie was approached by a young man she'd been seeing around campus. He carried a notebook in his hand and asked if he could sit down. Cassie said sure, and Ahmed plunged into his purpose. He had to do a project for an Anthropology 101 class on an exotic tribe. He'd been noticing that Cassie's Christian group had a distinct set of rituals and symbols; they even seemed to speak a special language. He was wondering if he could do the project on her.

This surprised Cassie, especially as it was coming from a dark-skinned man with an accent. From her perspective, if either of them could be described as being a member of an exotic tribe, it wasn't her. But she agreed to answer Ahmed's questions. And once she'd explained the purpose of her Wednesday night song circle and the meaning the Bible held for her, she turned the Anthropology 101 assignment on her interlocutor. She learned a little about Islam in the process. Ahmed explained that he was from Bangladesh, that observant Muslims pray five times a day and refrain from alcohol, and that the majority of the world's Muslims live in South Asia, not the Middle East.

Cassie found herself shook, in the way college ought to shake people. First of all, she was stunned that observant Muslims pray five times a day, including a pre-dawn prayer. She could barely get some of her fellow Christians out of bed by mid-morning on Sundays for church. The more Cassie thought about the encounter, the more challenged she felt. It had been deeply impressed upon Cassie by her home church that people who were not Christian

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were going to hell and that it was a signal duty of practicing Christians to seek to convert them. Yet she found herself a little uncomfortable with that approach in this particular scenario. It's not that she didn't believe in the truth of Christianity, it's just that she also found herself fascinated by Islam, and she realized that she both liked and admired Ahmed.

In the following weeks, as their friendship grew, Cassie experienced something of a crisis of faith. Was she being a bad Christian if she didn't view her interaction with Ahmed as primarily an opportunity to evangelize? Was she being a false friend to him if every time they were together she was looking for ways to sneak in the truth of Jesus Christ? Finally, Cassie went to see a pastor about the situation. He listened with great sympathy, but what he offered in return was almost entirely saccharine. He talked about the mystery of faith and the beauty of diversity. The message Cassie came away with was that college was a time to explore new things and that it was important to be a nice person. But honestly, she was looking for more than that. She was looking for a distinct Christian language for building a deep friendship with someone who she admired but who did not hold the same truths that she did.

April

My second story is about April Kunze Mendez. Growing up in Minnesota, April was the poster child for church involvement. She led Bible studies and prayer circles; she participated in church camps and went on mission trips to the other side of the world. She even learned other languages so that she could proselytize more effectively. April went to a selective liberal arts college in Minnesota in the mid-1990s. The same year she was the leader of her campus Christian group, a mosque was burned down in the Twin Cities. There were claims that it was arson, a religiously-motivated hate crime. April was on a state-wide email list of religious leaders, where she received a message from the Imam asking her to attend a candlelight vigil in support of the mosque. She instinctively wrote back "yes."

The following week, at a meeting of her campus Christian group, April shared the email request and said she'd be organizing a van for people who were able to attend the vigil with her. There was some shifting in seats and some rustling in the back of the room. April asked what was up. A member of the group stood and said, "We think you are supporting devil worship." He then got out his Bible and started quoting chapter and verse about the wickedness of praying to false Gods and the importance of bringing people to the true path. Other people started speaking in the same vein. Somebody said that this fire, however it might have started, was an act of God, divine punishment for those who followed the wrong religion. Another claimed that true Christian charity at this time would be to use this opportunity to invite the misguided Muslims to their church and evangelize them.

It soon became clear to April that her Christian group was not going to attend the vigil with her. When April insisted she was still going, they declared her unfit for Christian leadership, and deposed her. The people who went to the candlelight vigil with April were called nice; the people who applauded the arson attack on the mosque were called Christian. April started to feel like those were not just distinct responses to this incident, but separate paths altogether. So this once-poster child for the church felt like she had to make a tragic choice—in a world of diversity, she could be nice to people from different religions, or she could be Christian. She chose the former, but not without an awful lot of pain.

Fundamentalism and Relativism

What strikes me about Cassie and April's respective experiences is that they illustrate what the great social theorist Peter Berger characterized as two especially prominent religious paths today—relativism and fundamentalism. April's story is, of course, an example of a form of fundamentalism. It's not violent fundamentalism—we have comparatively little of that in America, thank God—it's a fundamentalism best characterized as: Being me is based on dominating you. Cassie's story is one version of relativism—not cognitive relativism or moral relativism, but identity relativism. It can be summarized like this: I no longer know who I am when I encounter you.

We are all well aware of the dangers of fundamentalism. We read about its more violent expressions in the newspaper every day, and likely deal with the dimension that April encountered (the nonviolent though quite vocal domination approach) at least occasionally. In this essay,

I want to focus on the challenge posed by Cassie's experience—relativism. Certainly, relativism is less ugly and less dangerous than fundamentalism. But in my experience working on over a hundred college campuses and speaking with thousands of college students, it is far more prevalent.

"Certainly, relativism is less ugly and less dangerous than fundamentalism. But in my experience working on over a hundred college campuses and speaking with thousands of college students, it is far more prevalent."

The sociologist of religion Christian Smith has given this form of identity relativism a name: moralistic therapeutic deism. In his book *Soul Searching*, the product of the most comprehensive survey of young people and religion ever undertaken, Smith talks about how the religious identities of most young Christians basically boil down to this: God exists and wants me to be a good person. Smith comments on how Christian young people are articulate about all sorts of things, from the dangers of drugs to the importance of safe sex, but have little more to say about religion than noted above. Drawing from the philosopher Charles Taylor, Smith emphasizes that "articulacy fosters reality"—in this case, the reality of identity (Smith 268). Simply put, this means if you can't talk about Christianity, it's very hard to be Christian.

Why this inarticulacy? Smith posits that it may well be the result of being trained to be polite in a world of diversity. Here, I will quote him at length:

> Committed and articulate personal and congregational faith does not have to be sacrificed for the sake of public civility and respect for others who are different. Pluralism does not have to produce thinness and silence. But for it not to, people need to learn to distinguish among…(1) serious, articulate, confident personal and congregational faith, (2) respectful, civil discourse in the pluralistic public sphere, and (3) obnoxious, offensive faith talk that merely turns people off. … In efforts to be civil and accessible, it seems that many youth, and no doubt adults, are getting the wrong message that historical faith traditions do not matter, that religious beliefs are all alike, that no faith tradition possesses anything that anybody particularly needs. (Smith 268)

This is certainly the message Cassie got from the Christian minister that she talked to about her experience with Ahmed. I've taught several seminary classes for liberal Protestants and asked them to role play the scene between Cassie and this Christian minister. They play the Cassie character exceptionally well. It's clear that they have all experienced a profound encounter with diversity that shook their faith along the lines of what happened to Cassie. But these seminarians universally had a difficult time being articulate about Christianity when playing the role of pastor. Like the pastor Cassie talked to when she was in college, they spoke the language of mystery, diversity, love, and friendship. Occasionally, they attached all this to the Holy Spirit, but that was about the limits of their faith vocabulary when it came to giving a young Christian like Cassie advice about what it meant to be both committed to the truth of Jesus and friends with a Muslim.

If there was one thing at the center for these future ministers it was attention to diversity. They cared about it in all its forms—race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, religion. Thinking back to our class discussions through the lens of Christian Smith's research, I find it entirely plausible that this concern for diversity thinned out their language of Christian identity.

For Peter Berger, while relativism and fundamentalism are at opposite extremes, they are actually closely connected in that they are both "products of the same process of modernization" (*Between 2*). As he emphasizes in the Introduction to *Between Relativism and Fundamentalism*, frequent and intense encounters between people with different identities is the signature characteristic of the modern era. In Berger's pithy phrase: modernity pluralizes. This is a consequence of a variety of technological breakthroughs from mass communications to air travel, resulting in everything from rapid urbanization within nations to easy migration between them to knowledge of the beliefs and actions of people who live on the other side of the world.

The bottom line is that more people regularly interact with people different from them today than ever before.

If modernity pluralizes, then, Berger claims, "pluralism relativizes … both institutionally and in the consciousness of individuals" (5). In the pre-modern era, institutions, ideas, and identities had a largely taken-for-granted status. For the vast majority of human history, the vast majority of humankind had little to no choice about which institutions they were going to participate in or what their identities were going to be. Such matters were experienced as fate. In the modern era, institutions become voluntary associations—people choose whether to participate—and identity has moved from "fate to… choice" (6). This puts an awful lot of pressure on moderns like us to constantly make conscious choices about what we participate in and who we are. This is pressure that our ancestors, who simply took for granted the network of institutions they grew up in and the identities they were handed, simply did not have.

One response to this pressure is to float uncomfortably in the mists of modernity, not committing to much of anything. This is the dynamic that produces relativism. But as human beings are hardwired for certainty, and because where there is a demand someone will generate a supply, the explanation for growing fundamentalism is pretty clear as well. So there you have it—a quick explanation for how the phenomenon of modernity pluralizing produces both Cassie's experience of relativism and April's encounter with fundamentalism.

From Blasé to Bridge

I believe that some version of Cassie and April's stories are happening on a regular basis on ELCA college and university campuses. These encounters take place in classrooms and cafeterias, in dormitory conversations and on the quad, in RA training and during freshman orientation. And that is as it should be. Campuses are places where students ought to have intense interactions with deep difference and wrestle with what that means for who they are. But how frequently is the result of such encounters some form of relativism or fundamentalism? And what are the implications for campuses that both seek to be rooted in their Lutheran traditions and welcoming of diversity?

Right now some of you might be thinking about the voices in your communities who grumble about pro-active approaches to diversity. I imagine that among some of your alumni, perhaps even your donors and board, there are those who say, "A Lutheran college is where Lutherans go to become more Lutheran. What are we doing allowing Muslims and Jews and atheists and pagans in, letting them have their own student groups, accommodating their religious practices, even teaching courses about their traditions? What's up with having a Hindu chair the Department of Religion at St Olaf?"

If Peter Berger and Christian Smith are to be believed, and if my experience with the liberal Christian seminarians above is at all telling, then such critics are far more than just cranks. Diversity does in fact undermine identity—at least it can. To complicate matters even further, the sociologist Robert Putnam has shown that diversity reduces social capital and weakens community bonds. And the political scientist Samuel Huntington famously posited that increased interaction between different identities is a recipe for outright conflict—his infamous clash of civilizations thesis. Simply put, diversity is not an unalloyed good.

> "Can campuses be places that do both identity and diversity? I think the answer to that is yes, and I think Lutheran campuses have an especially good shot at it."

Here's the fundamental question: Can campuses be places that do both identity and diversity? I think the answer to that is yes, and I think Lutheran campuses have an especially good shot at it.

Let me go back to the scholars for a moment. Peter Berger is not just a describer of "what is," he is also an articulator of "what ought to be." He despairs about the growth of both relativism and fundamentalism, claiming that they make a common life together impossible, even as he understands how the dynamics of our times have given rise to both phenomena. Berger hopes to stake out a middle position, what he refers to as "the location of those who want to be religious believers without emigrating from modernity" (*Between* 13).

Christian Smith holds out this same hope, stating that there is plenty of room for faith traditions to claim and emphasize confidently their own particularities and distinctions without risking religious division or conflict. Youth should be able to hear and embrace (or reject) what are the particularities of their own faith traditions and why they matter, without having to be afraid that this inevitably causes fighting and discomfort (268).

Peter Berger also happens to be a Lutheran layperson, quite conversant both in Lutheran theology and history. He points out that it was the Lutheran tradition that first recognized the possibility "to have faith without laying claim to certainty" (13). Moreover, Lutheran intellectuals were among the first to take the courageous step of putting modern historical scholarship in conversation with elements of faith and scripture. He expands on these notions in an essay in the book *Between Relativism and Fundamentalism* (152-163). For the purposes of this essay, I want to consider what this heritage means for ELCA college campuses.

Let me begin with a quick typology of religious identity responses to diversity: faith can be a bubble of isolation, a barrier of division, a bomb of destruction, or a bridge of cooperation. A fifth response—the final "b"—is blasé. Faith can be something we neither care too much about nor think too much of. Barriers and bombs—the fundamentalist response—are actively destructive in a diverse democracy. Bubbles are extremely hard to build and maintain (that's one answer to give your alum who ask why Lutheran colleges are no longer just for Lutherans seeking to be more Lutheran). Blasé seems to be the order of the day, and the question then is how do you help shift the tide from blasé to bridge? I think the answer lies in the metaphor.

A bridge goes from here to there and has to be made of something, preferably something solid. Without a strong anchor "here," you can't bridge to "there." Furthermore, without the materials and the skills to build the bridge, it won't come into being. For Cassie to continue a Christian conversation with a knowledgeable Muslim like Ahmed, she needs to know an awful lot more about Christianity than the pastor she spoke to was offering. My guess is that Ahmed was hoping for that. After all, he was standing on his "here," using the materials of his knowledge of Islam to build a bridge to Cassie's "there." For the conversation to be enriching for him—to borrow a phrase from a master—there has to be a there there (Stein 289).

> "The answer to the problem of nurturing both identity and diversity—of carving out a religious location that does not flee from modernity—is not to weaken either. It is to do more of both."

The answer to the problem of nurturing both identity and diversity—of carving out a religious location that does not flee from modernity—is not to weaken either. It is to do more of both. Brian McLaren puts this well in his recent book on Christian faith and religious diversity, *Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Muhammad Cross the Road?*. He points out that strong Christian identity has long been associated with hostility towards others, while positive feelings towards others are connected with weak Christian identity. He wants a third alternative—strong faith identity associated with benevolence towards others. He quotes one of his mentors, "In a pluralistic world, a religion is judged by the benefits it brings to its nonmembers" (40). This is what I have started calling a theology of interfaith cooperation. It means being able to weave from your own religion's resources—its scripture, doctrines, history, theology, poetry, heroes, etc.—a coherent narrative and fundamental logic for being in positive relation with others, even though you disagree with them on some significant things. This is the substantive material from which we form the bridge that connects here and there, a bridge that can withstand bombs and break through barriers, a bridge that invites people out of their bubbles, and a bridge that provides solid footing for those floating in the blasé.

The Example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Many readers will know better than I the finer points of how to use the raw materials of the Lutheran tradition to build a bridge to diversity. What I'd like to do right now is hold up a Lutheran figure who has deeply inspired me as a Muslim, a man who both eloquently articulated and

courageously embodied a theology of interfaith cooperation, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. It is not an overstatement to say that his Christian identity was about building a bridge to diversity. Indeed, it was the cause he died for. Consider the following scenes from Bonhoeffer's life:

Bonhoeffer declaring after the Nuremberg Laws were passed in 1935: "Only he who shouts for the Jews is permitted to sing Gregorian chants" (Nelson 35).

Bonhoeffer preaching at the funeral of his grandmother in 1936. She was a woman who—just days after Hitler ordered Germans to boycott Jewish businesses—walked into a Jewish-owned grocery store right past a group of Nazi stormtroopers, stating that she would do her shopping where she always did her shopping. Bonhoeffer eulogized, "She could not bear to see the rights of a person violated… her last years were darkened by the grief that she bore about the fate of the Jews in our country…This heritage, for which we are grateful to her, puts us under obligation" (Nelson 26).

"Bonhoeffer famously asked, 'What does Jesus Christ mean for us, today?' He answered that question with his life, a life rooted in the cement of genuine conviction, a love and mastery that built out of the Lutheran tradition a bridge to everyone."

Bonhoeffer, returning to the United States in 1939 to teach a summer course at Union Theological Seminary and go on a lecture tour organized by Reinhold Niebuhr, realizes that he made a mistake. He boards the last ocean liner that sails east across the Atlantic during World War II, leaving Niebuhr with a letter that says: "I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people" (Nelson 38).

Bonhoeffer in the wan light of Cell 92, Tegel prison, writing to his friend Eberhard Bethge: "The church is only the church when it does for others" (Green 130).

In a school house turned prison near the Nazi extermination camp at Flossenbürg on April 8, 1945, a small group of prisoners who know the inevitable has arrived asks Bonhoeffer to lead a prayer service for them. He offers a meditation on I Peter: "By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope" (Nelson 44). Dietrich Bonhoeffer was assassinated by the Nazis the next day. Upon hearing of his martyrdom, Niebuhr wrote, "The story of Bonhoeffer…belongs to the modern acts of the apostles" (Nelson 22).

Such a commitment does not emerge from the ether of relativism. In Tegel prison Bonhoeffer famously asked, 'What does Jesus Christ mean for us, today?' He answered that question with his life, a life rooted in the cement of genuine conviction, a love and mastery that built out of the Lutheran tradition a bridge to everyone.

The scholar Keith Clements describes how Bonhoeffer's ecumenism is what connects his pilgrimage from peace-worker to political resister. In 1931, Bonhoeffer accepted an invitation to an ecumenical conference. In the mid-1930s he began making plans to go visit Gandhi (plans that came to an end when he was called to lead the Confessing Church's illegal seminary at Finkenwalde). He said of the Mahatma, "Christianity in other words and deeds might be discovered…in Gandhi and the East." Bonhoeffer's last known words before he was killed were a message for his friend and mentor in the ecumenical movement, Bishop George Bell: "Tell him… with him I believe in the principle of universal Christian brotherhood which rises above all national interests, and that our victory is certain."

But Bonhoeffer saw problems in the ecumenical movement as well. He said in a speech at an ecumenical youth peace conference in 1932:

> Because there is no theology of the ecumenical movement, ecumenical thought has become powerless and meaningless, especially among German youth, because of the political upsurge of nationalism. And the situation is scarcely different in other countries. There is no theological anchorage which holds while the waves dash in vain … Anyone concerned with ecumenical work must suffer the charges of being unconcerned with the Fatherland and unconcerned with the truth, and any attempt at an encounter is quickly cried down. (Clements 160)

As I read this critique today, nearly a century after Bonhoeffer made it, it occurs to me that the development of theology isn't the primary problem when it comes to bridging identity and diversity. Since Bonhoeffer we have had untold numbers of important figures who have written interfaith and ecumenical theologies—Diana Eck, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Martin Luther King Jr, Fazlur Rahman, Farid Esack, Paul Knitter, Hans Kung, Catherine Cornille, and Jonathan Sacks, to name just a few. The problem is moving this theology from seminar rooms at Harvard Divinity School and Union Theological Seminary to articulacy amongst a critical mass of a rising generation. And that is where your institutions come in.

High Impact Interfaith Practices

A religiously affiliated college is the rare institution with the natural resources to cultivate a strong, benevolent faith, to bridge identity and diversity, to help a critical mass of young people develop articulacy in a theology of interfaith cooperation. Unlike a congregation or most other church bodies, you have religious diversity in interaction. Unlike a public institution, you have a clear and strong faith heritage. Unlike the vast majority of our society, you neither infantilize young people nor treat them primarily as purchasers of your products. Instead, you ask them to inquire into their vocations and empower them to be leaders. Unique amongst all institutions, you have an intense residential community, exceptional intellectual and pastoral resources, and an ethos that prizes respect for identity, relationships between different communities and a commitment to the common good. You are both a laboratory for interesting new ideas and a launching pad for the nation's future leaders.

"A religiously affiliated college is the rare institution with the natural resources to cultivate a strong, benevolent faith, to bridge identity and diversity, to help a critical mass of young people develop articulacy in a theology of interfaith cooperation."

So how should you take advantage of your unique environments when relativism and fundamentalism seem woven into the dynamics of the age? I think the answer is to name the challenge and face it head on, to recognize that if you are not proactive about becoming an ecology that nurtures articulacy about religious identity bridging to religious diversity, you forfeit your campus community to the overriding forces of our times.

I remember trying to find language that expressed this urgency at a lunch meeting with President Richard Torgerson of Luther College about five years ago. Luther College had chosen my book *Acts of Faith* as its common read, and had invited me to give the first-year convocation. I was fumbling around for words when Rick stopped me and said, "Luther recently put into its strategic plan that no student should be able to graduate from our college without wrestling with how their actions will impact the environment. It is one of the principles we have built our curriculum and co-curricular activities around. It seems to me like you are saying that interfaith cooperation ought to be at that level of significance for campuses?"

"That's exactly what I am saying," I responded.

So how does a campus do this work? Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) will soon be putting out a list of high impact interfaith practices for campuses. Let me highlight a handful right now.

Mission

The first high impact practice is to connect interfaith cooperation to the mission and values of your college, and to state this clearly in the strategic documents that guide your campus. Over the past two years, we have partnered with Concordia College in this endeavor, and senior campus officials have recently put together this statement:

> Concordia College practices interfaith cooperation because of its Lutheran dedication to prepare thoughtful and informed global citizens who foster wholeness and hope, cultivate peace through understanding, and serve the world together. (see Concordia)

There is a high-level conversation happening at Concordia about how that statement should be connected to the mission statement of the college.

Ecology

The second high impact practice is to not see your interfaith efforts as a single program, but as integrated into your entire campus ecology. At IFYC, we think there are three parts to this:

1. Integrate the curricular and co-curricular. One of the advantages of colleges like yours is the barriers between your academic departments and your student affairs programs are relatively low. As interfaith leadership is about scholarly study, vocational discernment, and effective application, campus units that primarily encourage reading and writing (academic departments) and campus units that specialize in personal reflection and applied skill-building (frequently units in student affairs like service-learning, university ministry, and diversity programming) should be working closely together.

2. Create a "horizontal." All of your students should get some robust touch with religious diversity issues (preferably in an integrated fashion, as noted above). Religious identity/diversity themes should be woven into initiatives that touch the majority of your students, such as freshman orientation, large service-learning days, and convocations. Furthermore, texts and modules on interfaith cooperation should be integrated into required general education courses. Other high priority issues like sustainability, racial diversity, and global learning have integrated horizontals that ensure most students substantively engage with them. So should interfaith issues.

3. Create a "vertical." For students who are inspired by their touch with interfaith issues in the horizontal, there ought to be integrated curricular/co-curricular ladders that they can climb to increase their expertise. These verticals can take the form of a course sequence where students can get a minor and/or a certificate in interfaith studies or leadership, or a student group that is large and well-organized enough for students to take leadership in it, to serve as officers, and to organize activities for the broader campus. One concrete benefit of having this ladder is that students in the vertical lead activities in the horizontal.

Staff and Faculty Conversations

Interfaith Youth Core did a consultation with DePaul University and in one of the interviews a staff member commented, "We love religious diversity at DePaul even though we are Catholic." When I mentioned that to the President, Father Holtschneider, he said, "When we are done with our next five year plan, every faculty and staff person will be able to say, 'We love religious diversity at DePaul because we are Catholic,' and will be able to tell you specific Vincentian reasons for why that is the case." In order for that to happen, the subject of interfaith engagement has to become central to your faculty and staff agenda. This means things like:

- Making it the topic of your faculty convocations;
- Bringing in speakers who would draw a faculty and staff crowd to their talks;
- Sending faculty and staff to relevant conferences; and
- Encouraging and incentivizing your faculty and staff to develop courses and programs in this area.

Measuring

One of the most important developments in the field of interfaith cooperation is the move from "let's do an interfaith something" to "let's do an interfaith something that's effective." The field is long overdue for an effectiveness discourse, and this means evaluation. Measurement should not feel suffocating and does not have to be entirely quantitative. It does require you to state your goals clearly up front, and to devise evaluations that answer to key questions: How well are our programs achieving our goals? How should we improve these programs to more effectively achieve our goals in the future? In other words, the great gift of evaluation is to encourage your strategy team to set clear goals, to devise programs that you believe will meet those goals, and to create a mechanism for continuous reflection and improvement.

Conclusion: Places Where the Light Falls

I once had a conversation with Martin Marty about Bonhoeffer and Lutheran resources for a theology of interfaith cooperation. What he said to me then applies profoundly to Lutheran colleges and universities. He spoke of Bonhoeffer and the Confessing Church and the seminary at Finkenwalde as archetypes. He pointed out: "We live by examples, and these examples define. They are like a clearing in the wood; it is where the light falls, it is where cultivation occurs."

At a time when it feels like the only faith options are relativism and fundamentalism, I think ELCA higher education institutions are examples—places that define, places where the light falls. I think this is precisely the purpose of your Lutheran colleges. As I was leaving Marty's home, he quoted Goethe to me on the task of reaching into the resources of one's tradition to advance an ethic of interfaith cooperation. I will leave you with the line he left with me: "What you have as heritage, take now as task. For thus you will make it your own."

Endnotes

1. These stories are told in full in Eboo Patel, *Sacred Ground*, 129-52.

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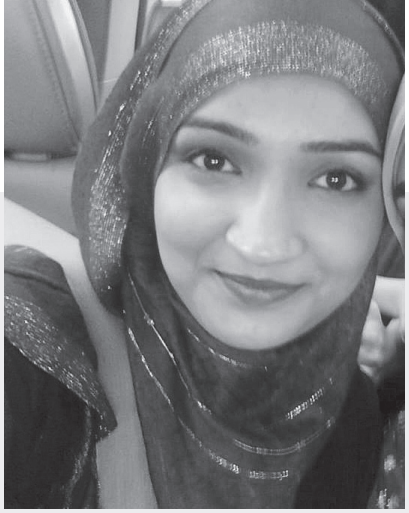

From Our Students

DANYA TAZYEEN
Augustana College (Rock Island), Class of 2016

I'm a proud "Interfaither" and a junior at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. I was born in Pakistan and raised in the United States. As a four-year-old, I moved to the United States with an English vocabulary of maybe two words at my disposal. One day my family and I were walking over to my uncle's apartment. As we crossed a nearby park, I greeted a kid on the playground with the customary and respectful Muslim greeting: "As-salaam u alaikum" ("peace be upon you"). It was then—when the boy seemed to ignore me and I heard my mother laughing from behind me—that I learned that the world speaks more than one language. From the very beginning, diversity in race, language, and beliefs has been a source of tension and joy for me.

A lot of that tension can be attributed to lack of understanding through communication barriers—the joy, to moments when those barriers are broken down. On point with what I've learned, there is this verse from the Holy Qur'an:

> O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted. (49:13)

The more I grow and encounter the complexities of dialogue between differing groups, the more I come to appreciate this passage, in which God says that He has made us into different tribes so that we may speak to, understand, and benefit from one other. Simply put, it is revealed that diversity was created so that our cultures and our opinions may complement one another's. As I did more research on this verse, I found that the "male and female" mentioned refer not only to our parents, but to the parents of all people, Adam and Eve. It is God's gentle reminder to the reader that no matter what race or color you identify with, no matter what culture you come from, we all come from the same place. We are all family, part of the human race before any other. We are all equal in the sight of God, differing only by our piety and our conduct with each other.

As a Muslim who has grown up alongside kids from all kinds of backgrounds, I have stood by them and they have been with me as we furthered ourselves in our faith journeys. Through being able to have open dialogue with them, I have gained wisdom and perception unattainable by those who shun ideas different from their own. I have learned the value of not just saying you believe something but being able to articulate why.

When hearing about the bloody events of history and today, it's easy to conclude that differences only cause friction and lead people to violence and destruction. So I am grateful to all who don't just stop at that immediate impression but study those conflicts deeper to seek understanding. They help to break down this false presumption that differences are a thing to fear. It is my hope that our world will become one which can foster open and genuine dialogue that dissipates this fear, because it seems that fear is the main barrier that obstructs us from the sight of one another. With fear gone, and understanding in its place, we may see each other clearly as that which each of us is—flawed and relatable fellow human beings.

KATHRYN M. LOHRE

Building on a Firm Foundation: ELCA Inter-Religious Relations

Today's rapidly changing religious landscape provides new opportunities for thinking about and engaging in inter-religious relations. Over the years, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has built a firm foundation of relationships and resources, and now is undertaking new projects to address emerging needs.

Jewish Relations

Inheriting significant work in Jewish relations from its predecessor bodies, the ELCA's initial inter-religious focus was on Jewish-Christian relations. In the early 1990s, a Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations was established, serving in an advisory role to the Presiding Bishop and to the whole church in order to increase cooperation with the Jewish community, to advance the conviction that anti-Semitism is "an affront of the Gospel, a violation of our hope and calling," and to live out our faith "with love and respect for the Jewish people" ("Declaration"). The Panel invested its initial efforts in building a firm foundation for this mandate by developing a document that would become central to our inter-religious life.

Twenty years ago, in 1994, the ELCA Church Council adopted the "Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to the Jewish Community," rejecting Luther's later anti-Judaic writings, acknowledging their tragic effects throughout history, and reaching out in reconciliation and relationship to the Jewish Community. This Declaration served a dual purpose; it enabled the ELCA to address a troubling aspect of our legacy and sent an important message to our Jewish partners. The Jewish community received the Declaration with a great deal of appreciation, expressed in various ways. To offer some examples, in Allentown, Pennsylvania, the modern Orthodox synagogue reached out to the Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding at Muhlenberg College in a spirit of cooperation. The National Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC included mention of contemporary American Lutheran rejection of Luther's anti-Semitic views in one of its featured films. One of our Jewish dialogue partners and colleagues has a framed copy of the Declaration hanging on her office wall as a reminder of our commitments to her community.

In 2005, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, then president of the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), addressed the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, the first Jewish leader and inter-religious guest to do so. He acknowledged his appreciation for "the role played by the [ELCA] in forging meaningful relationships between Christians and American Jews" (ELCA

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"Assembly"). This was in reference to the bilateral dialogue between the ELCA and the URJ, but also to longstanding local and national Christian-Jewish dialogues. Over the years, the Consultative Panel had undertaken significant work to develop resources in support of such dialogues, including *Covenantal Conversations*, a book and companion DVD published by Fortress Press in 2008, which explores "the shared theological framework, special historical relationship, and post-Holocaust developments and current trouble spots that situate the contemporary Jewish-Christian relationship" (Jodock).

Muslim Relations

Luther also wrote some troubling things about Islam in the context of the Ottoman Turkish advances in Europe, as they approached German borders. Nevertheless, while addressing difficult theological and pastoral questions about warfare and possible crusade, he sought reliable information about Islamic teachings, and insisted that Muslim Turks could live virtuous lives—a useful precedent for contemporary Muslim relations. In this vein, the ELCA and its predecessor bodies nurtured a variety of relationships and participated in several initiatives with Muslims over the years. In response to 9/11, however, the ELCA, like many other churches in the United States, sought to give greater focus to Muslim relations, both bilaterally and through national Muslim-Christian dialogues.

"In response to 9/11, the ELCA sought to give greater focus to Muslim relations, both bilaterally and through national Muslim-Christian dialogues."

In 2007, the ELCA participated in efforts to respond to "A Common Word Between Us and You," an open letter from 138 Muslim leaders around the globe addressed to Christian leaders that both underscored religions' emphases on love of God and neighbor and called for unity and peace on that basis. The following year, a group of ELCA scholars and leaders convened to explore how the church could enhance its Muslim relations, an initiative that became the Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Muslim Relations. With the work of the Lutheran-Jewish Relations Panel as a model, this new panel set out to develop several resources to educate ELCA members on Islam and to nurture local dialogue and engagement (see Sample of Resources on adjacent page). The need was only increasing. By Fall of 2010, Islamophobia had reached a fever pitch as pundits weighed in daily on the so-called "Ground Zero Mosque" controversy and as Terry Jones threatened to burn copies of the Qur'an. Together with over 20 interfaith partners, the ELCA became a founding member of the Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign: Standing with American Muslims, Upholding American Values.

In 2011, on the tenth anniversary of 9/11, Dr. Sayyid Sayeed of the Islamic Society for North America (ISNA) was the first Muslim speaker to address the ELCA Churchwide Assembly. He described how "during the last millennium mountains of hate [and] discrimination have been built." "Our job," he said, "is to see those mountains of hate removed." He was received by the Assembly with a standing ovation. Later that same year, with the endorsement of ISNA, Discover Islam: USA generously offered ELCA members and leaders complimentary copies of their six-disc DVD series entitled, *Discover Islam.* The Consultative Panel, in partnership with A Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, developed a study guide for use with the series, providing an interpretive framework from a Christian (Lutheran) point of view. This study guide is also used by several ecumenical partners (see Sample of Resources).

Expanding the Table

ELCA inter-religious relations have historically focused on the "Abrahamic" traditions of Judaism and Islam, and for good reason. Not only does our specific legacy as Lutherans connect us, albeit in difficult ways, to Judaism and Islam; Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are also connected through history and tradition. Yet as our religious landscape becomes increasingly diverse, reflecting the spectrum of the world's religions and the diversity of global Christianity, we must continue to ask ourselves: What kinds of inter-religious relations are

Sample of ELCA Inter-Religious Resources

Developed by the Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations and the Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Muslim Relations.

- Talking Points: Topics in Lutheran-Jewish Relations
- Windows for Understanding: Jewish-Muslim-Lutheran Relations
- Talking Points: Topics in Christian-Muslim Relations
- Discover Islam DVD series Study Guide (DVDs available at: www.discoverislam.com/elca)
- Why Follow Luther Past 2017: A Contemporary Lutheran Approach to Inter-Religious Relations

Each is available for download: http://www.elca.org/Resources/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations

needed today? How can we most faithfully respond to the eighth commandment?

The ELCA participates more broadly in inter-religious relations through bodies such as Religions for Peace USA and the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, and in partnership with organizations such as the Interfaith Youth Core. Conversations have recently begun about possibilities for national ecumenical dialogues with the dharmic traditions, beginning with Sikhism. For the ELCA, this is a growing edge. After the Oak Creek shootings in 2012, the ELCA was amongst the first interfaith partners to reach out, and a fledging relationship was established with Sikh leaders in the United States. As a sign of this, Tarunjit Singh Butalia of the World Sikh Council, America Region was the first inter-religious guest from a dharmic tradition to address the 2013 Churchwide Assembly. Who else are our neighbors? How do we understand what it means to be neighbors in an era of globalization and global migration?

In order to discover the real-life practical and theological challenges facing Lutherans today, the ELCA Consultative Panels jointly launched an inter-religious case studies project in early 2013. After receiving dozens of submissions over the course of a year, a drafting team has begun to weave them together into a narrative of best practices and challenges, with the goal of publishing a resource booklet for study and reflection in local contexts. This project is a first step toward building a framework for the future of ELCA inter-religious relations on the firm foundation that has already been established.

An important question as we look toward the 500 year anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 will be: What of Luther's legacy, then, is instructive with regard to inter-religious relations? The ELCA's newest resource for inter-religious relations explores this question in depth. "Why Follow Luther Past 2017? A Contemporary Lutheran Approach to Inter-Religious Relations" lifts up four underlying principles of Luther's theology as particularly instructive: (1) God adopts people solely out of God's generosity, without any prerequisites; (2) God is active in the world in such a way as to empower but not to control; (3) theology of the cross; and (4) vocation as a calling from God.

"Who else are our neighbors? How do we understand what it means to be neighbors in an era of globalization and global migration?"

The development of this resource, like the others preceding it, modeled one of the key learnings of inter-religious relations, namely, that "the common experience of individuals who have engaged in inter-religious dialogue is that their understanding and appreciation of their own tradition is enhanced in the process" ("Why Follow"). But it also enhances relations as well. The Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations invited Jewish partners to review and offer input as part of

the revision process, which strengthened the content and demonstrated an ongoing commitment to mutual accountability. The ultimate hope is that the resource will be used by Lutherans to better understand our legacy, and to "equip Christians to engage Jews and others in positive, constructive and honest ways" ("Why Follow").

Expanding the table of our inter-religious partners must be done with careful attention to the reasons for doing so. There is a real concern that if we engage in inter-religious relations, we are participating in a form of religious relativism, sliding down the slippery slope to a compromised faith in Jesus Christ. Yet, one of the learnings from inter-religious relations is that, in practice, precisely the opposite is true. By authentically engaging with others, we become more deeply grounded in who we are, reinforcing our faith and witness. In dialogue with others, we are challenged to clarify what it is we believe, and why. In partnership with our neighbors who share our concern for the common good, we find opportunities to collaborate for the sake of the world. In other words, inter-religious relations both strengthen and support our Lutheran vocation. The role of ELCA colleges in vocational formation for a multi-religious world has been and will continue to be significant. Together we have a firm foundation on which to build. Thanks be to God!

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RABBI BELLE MICHAEL

Building an Interfaith Bridge

Shalom.

What has struck me most at this Interfaith Understanding conference is the sincere and honest conversations I am witnessing, including the openness to say that we need to work towards interfaith dialogue. We need to see differences as values, something to celebrate, reflect upon, and learn from. I have also learned from Diana Eck that the definition of pluralism is not just tolerance, "hospitality," or even inclusion, but an *active* seeking of *understanding* across lines of differences. I want to use Eboo Patel's inspiring metaphor of "the bridge" from "here" to "there" to unfold my reflections.

Starting from the "here": Tonight, in my Jewish tradition, is the holiday of Shavuot, a biblical holiday mentioned in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Together with Sukkoth and Passover, it is one of the three pilgrimage major holidays. The Holiday of Shavuot represents to us the renewal of the covenant between God and the Jewish people.

Interestingly enough, on this holiday that seems "exclusive" we read the Book of Ruth from the Torah. Ruth was a Moabite woman who followed her mother-in-law to the Israelite community. The story of Ruth is about successful interfaith relationships, about respect, care for each other, and love. It is a good example of the biblical teaching, "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19). In one way or another, we can all relate to this story and respond to the teaching to love our neighbors.

The "catch" is that in order to love, one first needs to get to know the neighbor. This understanding brings me to building "the bridge," which might be composed of three building blocks: experiences, relationships, and holy curiosity.

Experiences: The former First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, wrote a memoir called *You Learn by Living*. Indeed, we learn by being fully engaged with life's gifts and hurdles. We learn mostly through experiences and encounters with one another. My first encounter with Christianity was with Kathy and Rod Leard of Agoura Hills, California. My encounter with Lutheranism was with Pastors Melissa and Scott Maxwell Doherty from California Lutheran University. Through them—living by their values, modeling by behavior—I have learned about Christianity more than from any book. We in Lutheran colleges and universities need to provide our students with these opportunities for encounters and experiences with different ethnic and religious groups.

Relationships: We must cultivate genuine and long-lasting relationships. We must get to know "the other" as a person: as Belle, Joan, Michel. As mom, dad, friend, painter, hockey fan, computer geek and so on. Find out about another's personal life and you'll find something that connects you to that person. The rabbis taught us that relationships with each other come before the relationship with God. The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber explained that only through an I-Thou encounter with another person can one encounter the great Thou.

Rabbi Belle Michael is Campus Rabbi and Hillel Executive Director at California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks, California. She gave a version of these remarks while leading a "Dwelling in a Tradition" session at the Interfaith Understanding Conference.

Holy Curiosity: Sincere intellectual interest in someone who is different is the key to starting a dialogue. Unfortunately, I found that many are often *afraid to ask*. The fear of not being politically correct, or worse, of offending without knowing prevents them from asking. They would rather ignore and be ignorant than engage in a conversation that might lead to controversy. But if we want to build this bridge, we must be brave and make the first step. We must overcome this cultural barrier. By asking, we learn—and relationships begin.

From Our Students

GIFTY ARTHUR
Luther College, Class of 2017

"The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." (John 10:3)

Having grown up Christian, I have come to understand that although faith is about knowledge, belief, and behavior, it is also—and perhaps most importantly—about relationship: relationship with God. It is about a relationship that focuses on God and the diverse ways He reveals Himself to people through various personal encounters. That spiritual intimacy is very personal and distinct to each individual or group of people. It means that, although we may have our eyes focused on One Being as the object of worship, our mode and means as well as our expression of worship may greatly differ based on our personal understandings of what we believe and the faith traditions with which we identify.

Interfaith cooperation at Luther College has made me deeply rooted in my spirituality. I have had various interactions and interfaith dialogues with students of different faith backgrounds, mainly through the college's *Journey Conversations*. There are times set within the school's curricular activities where students are given the room to interact and share personal experiences and beliefs that are central to their own traditions. I believe this has and continues to serve as a unique opportunity for other students who are also in search of a spiritual identity. They bring on board the pertinent questions they have about faith, as well as gain insight into the tradition with which they identify. This quest for knowledge is central to the diversity to which a liberal arts college commits.

As the scriptures mention in the book of John, God knows each of us. I believe that the various traditions we have are a result of the understanding we have construed from relationship we have with God through our personal encounters. In appreciation of this, I am of the view that we can still uniquely identify with our various faith tradition and still work in an atmosphere of love and mutual respect for others' beliefs. We know that the spiritual diversities we have today are a result of the different expressions of worship that come out of personal relationships within different faith backgrounds.

JACQUELINE BUSSIE

Journey Toward Pluralism: Reimagining Lutheran Identity in a Changing World

Who are we as an institution? Who do we want to become? What does it mean to be a Christian college when our students, faculty, and staff are atheist, "nones," Muslims, Christians, Baha'is, and Jews, among others? These questions pepper the pressing conversations regarding mission and identity happening all across the United States, especially in church-related institutions such as ELCA colleges and universities. As one result of wrestling with these questions, Concordia College in 2011 founded the Forum on Faith and Life, which takes as its mission "to foster a deeper and more compassionate understanding of one another across traditional boundaries" by creating "opportunities for genuine encounter with the intra-faith and interfaith neighbor." Hired to help establish and direct this interfaith resource center, I was overjoyed to be a part of a pioneering initiative that so clearly took seriously the reformation claim that the church—and its colleges and universities—must live *semper reformanda*, that is, always being reformed in light of a changing world and the ever-changing needs of the world's people. This essay will share crucial insights gleaned and practical steps taken by Concordia College thus far on our journey toward religious pluralism, in the hopes that our learning might prove illuminative for institutions on a similar trajectory. I begin with two anecdotes.

First: It is August, 2012, and Dr. Eboo Patel, founder and president of Interfaith Youth Core and the first Forum on Faith and Life guest speaker, has just given the keynote at Concordia's fall convocation. A mother whose daughter is considering a religion major sits in my office and muses, "I don't get it. Why would a Lutheran Christian school have a Muslim convocation speaker?" Her tone is curious, not confrontational. It's not the first time this question will be asked, nor will it be the last. I ponder: Are we, as a community, prepared to answer this together in an articulate, thoughtful, informed, and theologically-grounded way?

Second: It is January, 2013, and Concordia is offering for the first time its new course on interfaith studies entitled Faith in Dialogue: Interfaith Leadership. My students and I visit various sites of worship and also invite community members from diverse faith traditions to speak to our campus. My friend Fauzia, a member of the local mosque, comes to our class and shares her faith journey. After class, Fauzia comes up to me with tears glistening her eyes and says, "Because I am Muslim and Concordia is Christian, I never believed I would be welcome here. I can't tell you what today meant to me." I am left wondering:

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How can our college be more intentional about articulating what it means to us to be a Christian college in a religiously pluralistic world? How can we expect people to know they belong unless we tell them so?

Strategies for Loyalty and Reverence

Diana Eck, Director of Harvard's Pluralism Project, explains that diversity is a fact, while pluralism—diverse religious folks coming together and cooperating toward a common good—is an achievement (Eck). Concordia College has publicly committed to working toward achieving pluralism. Our engagement with interfaith work is a clear expression of this desire to reimagine what a Lutheran institutional identity might mean in a world where even the once predominantly Lutheran Fargo-Moorhead area now has over 5000 Muslims, numerous synagogues, and thriving Baha'i and Buddhist communities. As a college, we aim to avoid what I identify as the two extreme pitfalls of the institutional identity-crisis continuum. At one extreme, we are not interested in eschewing who we are, as if heritage and rootedness is a source of shame ("We were once a Lutheran school, but that doesn't mean anything to us now"). At the other extreme, we have no interest in defining our identity in negative or exclusivist terms—in defining ourselves by who we are not or by who is not welcome or included ("We are not a college that hires only Lutheran faculty, teaches exclusively Lutheran students, or seeks to convert all students to Lutheranism"). Who then are we?

"Our engagement with interfaith work is a clear expression of this desire to reimagine what a Lutheran institutional identity might mean in a world where even the once predominantly Lutheran Fargo-Moorhead area now has over 5000 Muslims, numerous synagogues, and thriving Baha'i and Buddhist communities."

Interfaith activist Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel once pithily explained that the challenge we face in a pluralist society is how to simultaneously sustain loyalty to our own religious tradition with a deep reverence for other people's religious traditions. Fortunately, Lutherans are adept at what I call "simul" or both/and thinking. It was Martin Luther who paved the path to resist the either/or mold with his designation of human beings as *simul justus et peccator* (simultaneously righteous and sinner). What specific steps, then, can a Lutheran institution take in order to lay the tracks toward pluralism's *simul* challenge of loyalty and reverence? Three concrete strategies have greatly helped Concordia College and might prove useful to other institutions.

Assess the Campus Climate

First, we forged a productive partnership with Interfaith Youth Core, which recommended we perform an initial baseline assessment of our campus religious climate. As one of 25 schools participating in the Campus Religious and Spiritual Climate Survey national pilot, Concordia discovered numerous unknown strengths as well as areas for growth. We discovered to our delight, for example, that our students place an incredibly high value on learning about diverse religious traditions, with 99 percent of students reporting a medium-to-high pluralism orientation. But we also discovered that not all of our students saw our campus climate as hospitable, with 38 percent of secular and non-religious students reporting that they felt coercion or a lack of acceptance toward their beliefs. This latter data point helped our school establish its first-ever secular student organization, an organization that had always been denied official recognition in the past because it was understood to be at odds with our school's Lutheran identity. Lessons learned? *Don't fear assessment.* Courageous assessment is essential to the reformation tradition of *semper reformanda*, which Martin Luther helped to establish in the sixteenth century. We cannot know what areas in our community life might be in need of reform until we intentionally ask our community members this question. Assessment is akin to using a GPS. As any GPS user knows, heading anywhere new requires an accurate understanding of where we now stand.

Invite Many to Participate

Second, Concordia established an Interfaith Scholars program and a President's Interfaith Advisory Council. The Interfaith Scholars are students who receive a fellowship to serve as liaisons between Fargo-Moorhead's religious communities and the college and engage in interfaith studies research. Concordia's Interfaith Scholars have presented their scholarship at national venues including the National Council on Undergraduate Research. The 22 member President's Interfaith Advisory Council (PIAC) includes interdisciplinary faculty, staff, students, and administrators from across the institution who serve as an advisory board to the president and campus on all matters related to interfaith engagement. One faculty member said he would love to be on the council, but then confessed, "I'm an atheist, so I don't think you want me." I replied, "That's exactly why you need to be on it. Your voice needs to be heard." One of our advancement officers on PIAC became such an articulate advocate for interfaith work that she brought in the college's first gift earmarked for the Interfaith Scholars program. She confided that Concordia's journey toward pluralism allowed her to build relationships with alumni who felt alienated by a narrower understanding of our Lutheran heritage. Additionally, several members of PIAC were recently awarded a competitive grant from the Teagle Foundation to establish an interdisciplinary interfaith studies minor. Lessons learned? *Be intentional about engaging members from all sectors of your community in religious pluralism conversations and efforts.* Many old wounds might be healed and resources unearthed by an explicit invitation to belonging.

Message the Reasons Why

A third and extraordinarily constructive step taken on our journey toward pluralism was the articulation of a succinct thoughtful answer to the question raised in the above anecdotes—"Why does a Lutheran college commit itself to interfaith cooperation, dialogue, and service?" At Concordia, we knew our Better Together Interfaith Alliance students were doing amazing interfaith service projects and winning national awards; we knew our president listed interfaith engagement as a priority in the 5-year strategic plan; we knew that our Office of Ministry had an innovative and well-attended Interfaith Harmony week. We knew that these values and activities somehow expressed who Concordia is in the twenty-first century, but we still had not, in unison and in relation to our mission and Lutheran tradition, answered the simple question of the inquisitive parent in my office: *Why*?

"Consistent messaging really matters, because if you do not know as a community who you are and articulate why you do the things you do, tragic misperceptions fill the gaps."

While some of us across campus had our own individual answers to this query, any business major could easily have diagnosed our woeful lack of consistent messaging. And while some academics—including myself at times—may frown on "messaging" as the for-profit concern of corporations and not colleges, my conversation with Fauzia taught me that consistent messaging really matters, because if you do not know as a community who you are and articulate why you do the things you do, tragic misperceptions fill the gaps the same way that weeds grow in your lawn precisely in those empty spaces where you fail to sufficiently water or feed the grass. This is especially true in the dichotomous, polarized, us-vs.-them culture of our day, in which it is virtually assumed that identity is a polarizing and exclusivist force.

In 1991 in a social statement on ecumenism, the ELCA intentionally disallowed polarization by explicitly stating its relationship to other Christian traditions in this manner: "It is a communion where diversities contribute to fullness and are no longer barriers to unity...The diversities are reconciled and transformed into a legitimate and indispensable multiformity within the one body" (ELCA 4) While the ELCA does not yet have a social statement on interfaith relations, I believe that a key principle—reconciled diversity—can be extracted from this statement on intra-faith relations and applied to interfaith relationships. When I once asked ELCA former Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson about the ELCA's relationship to interfaith work, he eloquently responded, "We are called to be stewards of unity within diversity in a

culture which confuses unity with uniformity" (Hanson). How shall we respond to diversity? The ELCA's answer strikes a chord similar to Eck's: Embrace, not erase, diversity; seek reconciliation in diversity's midst.

Because Lutheran, Interfaith

In keeping with these principles, last year Concordia's PIAC decided to construct an official college statement on interfaith engagement and pluralism. After all the word-smithing, focus groups, and countless meetings, the end result was a sentence we cherish for its connections both to our specific college mission and to the ELCA's values:

> *Concordia College practices interfaith cooperation because of its Lutheran dedication to prepare thoughtful and informed global citizens who foster wholeness and hope, build peace through understanding, and serve the world together.*

We were delighted to discover not only that any group of people in an academic setting could unanimously agree to a one-sentence answer to any question (miraculous!), but also that the process of creating the statement evoked some fascinating (and long overdue) conversations. None of us will ever forget the meeting wherein an extraordinarily lively yet respectful debate broke out over the subordinate clause, "because of its Lutheran dedication…." Several Christian (Lutheran and other Protestant) members of the group argued for the milder subordinate conjunction "guided by," but—perhaps contrary to expectations—an atheist student and a Muslim faculty colleague argued adamantly for the unequivocal phrasing "because of." My Muslim colleague passionately insisted, "I want to know that there will *always* be a place for me here…that I belong here because this place is Lutheran, not because some folks might possibly be 'guided' to create a space for me…or not." In the end, she persuaded everyone in the room. No one has ever thanked me before or since for facilitating a meeting, but that was a meeting for which people openly expressed gratitude. We all sensed that we were part of a conversation in which who we were was in the process of being revealed to us. Lesson learned? *The process of creating a pluralism statement for your institution is as informative and necessary as the actual statement itself.* Let the process surprise you.

"My Muslim colleague passionately insisted, 'I want to know that there will always be a place for me here…that I belong here because this place is Lutheran.'"

Although an official statement like this can be seen as mere words, for mission-driven institutions like ours they are a point of departure, a proclamation that what lies behind the words is a community that understands genuine pluralism as an achievement and commits to the hope-driven goal of reconciled diversity. On Concordia's journey toward pluralism, we have learned that, for institutions as well as individuals, identity results from the wondrous alchemy of continuity and change. Identity and heritage are as much about seeing who we want to become and becoming it, as they are about who we were yesterday. In the words of Eboo Patel, "We need spaces where we can each state that we are proud of where we are from and all point to the place we are going to. I fear the road is long. I rejoice that we travel together" (Patel 182).

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From Our Students

DAVID KAMINS
Muhlenberg College, Class of 2016

This past summer I attended the Interfaith Understanding conference at Augustana College on the eve of the Jewish holiday of Shavuot. While Shavuot does not receive as much attention as the other Jewish holidays, it is in fact the festival that commemorates God's giving of the Torah. It is the holiday where the Jews start their lives in the service of God. Many of us have questioned what it means to be servers of God. We have questioned our faith in search of God when he seems at times unapproachable. I sometimes feel that I am in a state of loneliness when it comes to my faith.

I want to introduce a section of *The Lonely Man of Faith* (Doubleday/Random House, 2006), written by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, where he uses the story of Adam and Eve in his innovative take on Genesis to guide the faithful in today's world:

> It is here that the dialogue between man of faith and the man of culture comes to an end. Modern Adam, the second, as soon as he finished translating religion into the cultural vernacular and begins to talk the "foreign" language of faith, finds himself lonely, forsaken, misunderstood, at times even ridiculed by Adam the first, by himself. When the hour of estrangement strikes, the ordeal of man of faith begins and he starts his withdrawal from society, from Adam the first—be he an outsider, be he himself. He returns, like Moses of old, to his solitary hiding and to the abode of loneliness. Yes, the loneliness of contemporary man of faith is a special kind. He experiences not only ontological loneliness but also social isolation, whenever he dares to deliver the genuine faith—kerygma. This is both the destiny and the human historical situation of the man who keeps a rendezvous with eternity, and who in spite of everything, continues tenaciously to bring the message of faith to majestic man. (100-101)

My journey as a Jew has been a combination of Adam I and Adam II where I am firmly grounded in my faith community while going out and experiencing the world and learning from those around me.

MATTHEW J. MAROHL

What's in a Name?

During the last academic year, Boe Memorial Chapel at St. Olaf College underwent major renovation. The lower level of the chapel had previously housed the religion department, but they had moved to the newly renovated Old Main the previous year. So, we began to envision how this space might become a new hub for student activity. We would call it "The Undercroft." It would house a very large student lounge and study space. There would be rooms for small and large group meetings. There would be new and necessary "church related" spaces: a new sacristy, new offices, rehearsal space for handbells. And, there would be a prayer and meditation room.

We have a mosque, but it is in a residence hall away from the heart of daily campus activity. The chapel is always open, but it is large and public. A Quaker meeting had been held in an unused office. The meditation group had been using a classroom. It was clear that we needed a space that was specifically designed for prayer and meditation.

I met with a number of religious groups on campus, including a meditation group. Together, we discussed possible paint colors, wall hangings, furniture and furnishings. During the early meetings with this group, they called me "Matt." The use of first names is common on campus. So, it was not strange for a group of student to sound so informal and personal in their communication. In fact, I understood this to be a sign that we were working together on a common project.

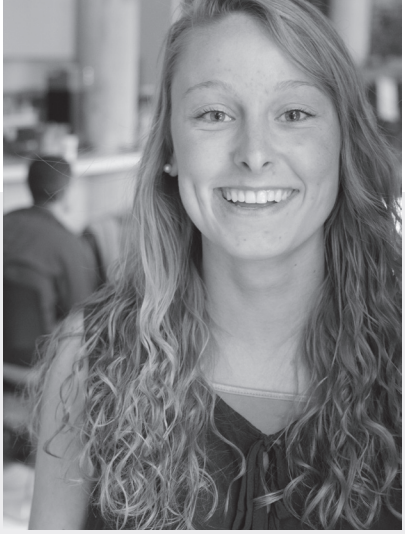
However, as we continued to meet together and as we continued to become closer in our personal relationships, they started to call me "Pastor Matt." Typically, as we become more familiar with one another, we become less formal in our address. So, a move from "Pastor Matt" to "Matt" would have been expected. But, in this case, the move to a more formal address was telling.

There is no doubt that I am a Lutheran Christian. From my black cleric shirts to my "College Pastor" name badge to my preaching and teaching, I am Christian. This identity did not change when I met with the meditation group. I did not change my language, nor did I water down my faith. But I was also deeply intentional about showing this group of students that as a Lutheran Christian college pastor, I was interested in and supportive of their faith stories. I wanted to work together. When they became aware of how much I respected them and their practice of meditation, I believe they began to more fully appreciate my role on campus as the college pastor. I became "Pastor Matt."

One month after the official opening of The Undercroft and the prayer and meditation room, the college hosted an awards event. The Meditation Group won the award for "Emerging Organization of the Year." Dressed in suits and dresses, they came directly from the event to my office to show me their award. They proudly announced, "Pastor Matt, we won!"

It was gratifying to share in their (our?) victory and my work with the meditation group is ongoing. It is our hope that all religious organizations at St. Olaf College would share in the mutual respect that we have enjoyed throughout our experiences together.

Matthew J. Marohl, College Pastor at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota, received his PhD in New Testament from the University of St. Andrews, Scotland. His three books include, most recently, *Unexpected New Life: Reading the Gospel of Matthew.*



From Our Students

ANNIE SCHONE
Augustana College (Rock Island), Class of 2015

On Sunday mornings growing up, I could always be found sitting beside my family, not swaying to music or even tapping my foot to the beat. This was the conservative church I grew up in, in a small town surrounded by cornfields in Central Illinois. I had a graduating class of 26, where our version of "interfaith" included having a Methodist, a Presbyterian, and a Lutheran all in the same room. I had never had a chance to meet a Muslim or a Jew, and I don't think I even knew what Hinduism or agnosticism was. It wasn't until my senior year of high school that I even encountered any sort of instruction on such things.

My pastor was doing a series that year involving different religions beyond Christianity. As I soon came to find out, his series was on why our faith (Christianity) was "right" and why such-and-such religion was wrong. Although I had never heard of the Interfaith Youth Core or Augustana's Interfaith Understanding group, there was something in my gut that told me this was not the way I wanted to learn about these various traditions. So I soon left for college still searching for a way to simply learn.

My freshman year at Augustana, I came across the Interfaith Understanding group and became involved. Interfaith Understanding (AIU) is a student group run by students and strongly supported by faculty and staff. As a group, we work alongside many other campuses—largely through Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC)—with the ultimate goal of eliminating religious intolerance and increasing understanding for those of both religious and non-religious beliefs. For the first time in my life, I had the opportunity to form friendships with students who were Muslim, Unitarian Universalist, and even atheist—something that simply was not possible in my small hometown. The work of AIU and IFYC quickly captured my heart and completely changed the way that I view and interact with those of differing belief systems.

Although I first participated in the interfaith movement as a way to learn about other beliefs, I soon discovered the deeper purpose behind these groups and the need for its work on our campus. One might view Augustana as a non-diverse place or feel that there is no religious intolerance here. Over the years, however, I've found both of these to be inarguably wrong. There is far more diversity at Augustana than may be present on paper and, sadly, intolerance is present as well. Because of this, the work of AIU and IYFC is all the more needed on our campus. I'm proud to be a part of a group that is working towards something bigger, and I hope such work will only continue to spread.

Though I still identify with my conservative church home and still honor that community that was so much a part of my upbringing, I long for them to see the joy that I have found in having friends from outside my own faith. I hope that through my own stories I can bring them at least a little piece of that. Through my work with IFYC, in particular, I've learned that storytelling is a powerful thing, and so whether I'm in the middle of a bustling college campus or back on that old wooden church pew, the power of interfaith relations can still live on.

AMY ZALK LARSON and SHEILA RADFORD-HILL

Journey Conversations

The Journey Conversations Project was founded by Dr. Diane Millis, an educator, consultant, and author of *Conversation-The Sacred Art: Practicing Presence in an Age of Distraction* (SkyLight Paths, 2013). The project, first launched in partnership with Luther College, provides resources and training for campuses, congregations, and community groups. At Luther, Journey Conversations is led by a team from College Ministries and the Luther Diversity Center. In partnership with other faculty and staff, the project is a major part of our interfaith work.

Each conversation moves through four phases: quiet, listen, speak, and respond. In this essay we offer some of our thinking about why we chose a contemplative conversation approach to interfaith dialogue. We also show how these four movements can deepen interfaith engagement. Finally, we provide examples of the importance of this work through the stories of two of our students.

Quiet: We begin a journey conversation by entering into silence through a centering practice. In an age marked by anxiety, relativism, polarization, and extremism, we find that it is important to quiet ourselves before beginning interfaith dialogue. We sit together in silence because this practice is part of many faith traditions and, as such, it can be shared by a diverse group.

Listen: Our time in shared silence prepares us to listen for the sacred within ourselves and with others. We practice *lectio divina* or reading aloud from wisdom literature (scripture, poetry, prose, hymns) from the great spiritual traditions and contemporary sources. We encourage one another through wisdom literature with what St. Benedict described as "the ears of the heart."

Speak: Each journey conversation involves one or more participants sharing their stories of faith and their spiritual journeys. We share our stories using the first person method of theological discourse—speaking only for ourselves and not on behalf of our faith traditions. This practice helps us to articulate our particular, lived truths.

Respond: After each journey story, other participants respond to the storyteller with questions that help the speaker to reflect more deeply on what she or he has shared. These "contemplative questions" encourage the speaker to continue to explore her or his journey. This practice offers participants a way to be present to others and accompany them on their journey without seeking to correct, advise, change, or proselytize them.

These four movements—quiet, listen, speak and respond—now serve as intentions for all our interfaith work. We quiet ourselves enough to truly listen to others, even those we consider extremist, irrelevant, or uninformed. We speak from a place of deeper awareness after

Amy Zalk Larson (pictured back middle) is a Campus Pastor at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa. **Sheila Radford-Hill** (front left) is Executive Director of the Luther Diversity Center. Both are founding partners of the Journey Conversations Project (journeyconversations.org). Luther College students Sukeji Mikaya (front right), Habibullah Rezai (back right), and Gifty Arthur (back left) are quoted in this essay.

listening within and to others. We focus on responding to the needs of others rather than simply reacting.

> "The Journey Conversations process unleashes the power of real conversation. It is harder to hate someone whose story you've heard first hand."

The leaders of Journey Conversations began the project in 2009 as another way to live our Lutheran identity through interfaith work. Our task, as we see it, is to be true to our own faith while being open and welcoming to all faiths or to people with no faith at all. As Lutherans, creating this welcoming presence is a way of *building peace through inclusion*. We've discovered that being welcoming to others from different faith traditions involves listening attentively to how people's faith experiences shape their spiritual identities in everyday life. Our understanding of how our faith traditions intersect with politics, religion, spirituality, and nation-building leads us toward the kind of interfaith dialogue that encompasses the most emphatic forms of sharing.

In Journey Conversations, the stories participants tell and the responses they receive from others of different ages, backgrounds, and life journeys bring a profound sense of hope in the prospects for peace. The Journey Conversations process unleashes the power of real conversation. It is harder to hate someone whose story you've heard first hand; and it's even harder to dismiss or denigrate someone when you've told them your story. We see the fruits of this approach in the lives of our students. They report a greater capacity to reflect on their own lives and a greater sense of empathy towards others. As examples of the kinds of stories offered in a Journey Conversations group, we asked two of our international students to reflect on their faith journeys.

My name is Sukeji Mikaya (International Studies and Management student, class of 2017), and I come from the present day South Sudan. My country was separated from Sudan three years ago due to various reasons, including ethnic and religious conflicts. The northern part of Sudan was predominantly Muslim and the Southern region was predominantly Christian. My family was among the four million Sudanese who were displaced. My family is Christian and we chose to reside in Uganda. The small town we settled in was predominantly Muslim and I observed how my neighbors and friends practiced Islam.

During this time, I learned an important lesson about religion from my grandfather who returned from Lebanon after receiving his degree in theology. He surprised us by reading both the Bible and the Qur'an. One evening, my cousins and I were laughing about how Muslims pray when my grandfather shouted at us and asked us to stop. He was very angry at our lack of respect for others' religious beliefs. He made us understand that we may find Islam to be different but we should remember that our Muslim neighbors could be viewing Christianity in the same way. His words and actions made the difference for me because he was a devoted Christian pastor who also read the Qur'an. Later, I took an Islamic religion class that fostered my interest in the religion. I even admired how my Muslim friends treated the Qur'an with so much respect. This knowledge did not change my beliefs as a Christian, except that it made me want to know the Bible the way my Muslim friends knew the Qur'an. My interactions with Muslims enhanced my understanding of Islam and I stopped associating the religion with all the negative things I heard.

Today, most of my friends back at home are Muslims but religion has never stood in the way of our friendship. For us to live together in peace and harmony, it is important for us to be aware of each other, listen keenly to those we are engaging with, and learn to respond rather than to react to things that we are not in agreement with. It all begins with taking the first step to create that environment of respect like my grandfather created for me.

I am Habibullah Rezai (Management, Economics, and French student, class of 2015) from Afghanistan. I would like to talk about my religious background. I am a Shia Ismaili Muslim which is a sub-sect of Islam. We are the minority of minorities in the Muslim world. There are between fifteen to twenty million Ismailis around the world. I also belong to a minority ethnic group known as Hazaras. Most of the Hazaras are Shia Muslims or the Twelver Shia and we, the Ismailis, are the minorities. When civil war broke out after the defeat of the Soviet Union, ethnic cleansing started in 1989. Diversity became a source of weakness because hatred grew among people from different religious backgrounds. The manipulation of religion was used as a tool to gain political power. For me personally, it meant hiding my religious identity when moving from one place to another. For example, when I had to pass through a Sunni community, I had to introduce myself as a Sunni and when passing through a Shia community, I had to introduce myself as Shia or Twelver Shia and not as a Shia Ismaili Muslim.

What was more difficult for us (the Shias) was the rise of Taliban in 1996. While trying to take control over northern and western Afghanistan, the Taliban committed fifteen massacres against civilians, killing thousands of people between 1996 and 2001. They thought of Hazaras as infidels and consider us as bitter enemies.

When I was leaving Afghanistan for the United States, I was told to present Afghanistan in a positive light but we Afghans cannot hide the atrocities we have committed. Of course, there was improvement after the fall of Taliban. When I returned to Kabul in 2002, I attended school with students from Sunni and Shia backgrounds, which I thought would never happen. School chairs and tables became the platform for me to engage in inter-faith dialogue with other students. Our conversations were very important because we were listening and responding rather than reacting to each other as we had done during the civil war. Although religious tension still remains a problem in societies in Afghanistan, I personally believe that interfaith dialogue is very crucial for promoting peace and replacing sectarian violence.

As compelling as these stories are, we struggle, at times, to connect with international and multicultural students. In general, one of the hardest ways to engage students across their differences is to talk about faith. Students who are in the minority can be especially protective of their religious identities. Fear can shut people down so, in Journey Conversations, we decided that we would work to build an open process where everyone's spiritual experiences could be included in the discussion. We are conscious of the need to intentionally reach out to students from diverse backgrounds. In this way, Journey Conversations creates a safe space for conversations about spiritual identities across multiple differences.

Gifty Arthur, a Luther student from Ghana studying Management and Computer Science (class of 2017), and a member of the Luther Congregation Council, expresses both her faith and the need for the welcoming presence of Journey Conversations in this way:

> For me as a Christian, faith is about knowledge, belief, and behavior but, most importantly, it is about my relationship with God. This relationship reminds us of the everlasting love that God has for his people and the supernatural ways that God reveals himself through various personal encounters.

Journey Conversations offers a personal encounter with God as we engage our many differences and share the many ways that God chooses to be revealed in our lived experience.

From Our Students

TOM NATALINI
Susquehanna University, Class of 2015

I have always known what is essential for Life. I do not mean life as in something you possess, something that is yours, but life as an energy. Life as flow, organic and ever-growing, otherwise known as inner freedom, Tao, Dharma, Spirit, or "the force." You know it when you feel it, whether in the glimmer of a child's eye or in the wisdom of an elder's grin. I have come to know this Life through my religious journey. And every journey is made of both beginnings and endings…

The church service ended and everyone came to greet us. I weaned myself off my coloring book and beamed up at the congregants who smiled back. That last hymn may have stalled my creative project, but at least I got to sing with the world. I just wanted to be a part of that great harmony. Pastor greeted me with, "He is risen," and I looked at him vexingly. My mom whispered, "He is risen Indeed!," and I answered with enthusiasm. He smiled. It was time for my service at home. No time to articulate a sermon; the food was prepared. My invocation rung stridently as I tapped imprecisely on the keys of my piano. But my grandparents grinned gleefully. This wasn't even Easter feast, just another Sunday.

My class ended and I decided to take the long way home. Why did the foreigner cross the road? To get to the other side. I was in India, after all. History class was too human-centric. What about the world beyond us? I had thoughts of Moksha and Samadhi—thoughts of that epic Hindu variety. I looked at the trees and the birds of the lake. I watched the flowers blossom and the sun grow the green of their leaves. Light was Life, inextinguishable, vital. It refreshed me. Last time, I feared the stare of looming peacocks, perched on top of the boulders surrounding an underbelly of brush. This time I was not afraid. The birds and I were one. I laid down on a boulder rising from the high grass. It was infused with the warmth of the sun—it gave me strength, and I sat to meditate. My breathing moved, my mind stopped. Life for Life. I saw my body, and it was the rock.

I was raised Lutheran, went to a Mennonite high school, then back to a Lutheran college. I was a churchgoer, a practicing Christian, a doubting philosopher, a potential Jewish convert, a perceived Buddhist, an assumed Sadhu. I prayed, I meditated. I sang hymns and I chanted mantras. I believed, I doubted. I followed Christ, I bowed before Buddha.

But now I sit, now I sing, now I know. To my Life, I owe my faith; in encouraging growth, the movement of Life which is power. My hope is to ever nurture the imagination, the mind that lets go: freedom. And my love, the great mediator of Life, is to be stillness, peace, presence. Today I stand as neither a Christian, nor a Jew, nor a Buddhist. Not a seeker, nor a "none." I am patient.

ANN BOADEN

Well, Well…Plumbing Our Depths, Telling Our Stories

[Jesus said], "The water that I give them will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said, "Sir, give me this water…" (John 4: 14-15)

They're crowded into my small office: a mother and son on a college visit. They've done this before—he's a straight-A student—so they know the drill. I explain our Creative Writing program, they ask questions. Give them my e-mail address, shake hands, wish them luck.

But today something different happens.

The conversation's winding down, and I ask casually how many children the family includes.

The tone changes. As if the ground had suddenly shifted.

First, there's silence. We hear the chatter and call of students going to class, the slap of their flip-flops because it's spring. Then the mother says, "Well, I did have three. But our daughter passed away."

Recently?

"Two years ago."

I'm sorry, I say. So sorry.

Her eyes rim slowly with shining. The son doesn't say anything, puts a hand on her jeaned knee. He's told me he's interested in music, plays a little guitar, and I see in his fingers, the strong and certain touch, the way he shapes music.

He's not hushing her with that touch, as many seventeen-year-olds would. He's joining her. She was a Down Syndrome child, the mother explains. Had been in the hospital, on life support, comatose. "But then all of a sudden she sat up and held out her arms and then she died. I know she was seeing the Blessed Virgin," the mother says. "I know she was."

A little leery of visions so explicit, especially when they're blessed virgins, I nod.

"She couldn't speak much," the son says. "My sister. But she loved birds, always loved birds. She'd make them with her hands—like this—" Briefly he takes his hand off his mother's knee to illustrate, spreading both hands apart, the fingers winging out. "And I think," he says to her, "that she was making a bird for you—to make you happy." He looks back at me. "People who don't believe in spiritual things don't know very much, do they?"

This story has stayed with me, played with my imagination. It's got all the elements I like in stories: layers, tone shifts, ambiguity, the wonder and pain and inexplicability of

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life. And an opening up of that well of water that will never let anyone go away thirsty. A possibility to be contemplated, to be taken seriously.

"Such an identity enhances our ability to educate self and other, strengthens us in our quest to take our place and so to help students take their places in the world with discernment, confidence, and 'dauntless love.'"

We need to identify, claim, and proclaim our wells of living water, Darrell Jodock insists in his essay "Vocation of the Lutheran College and Religious Diversity" (*Intersections* Spring 2011). Because unless and until we acknowledge those wells that nourish us, we cannot really understand and take seriously the wells from which others draw their nourishment. Blessed Virgins looking down from heaven aren't my spiritual vocabulary. But they were hers. And I know that, as I claim my own tradition, I not only must but can and want to see more clearly, more respectfully, into the depths of hers. Jodock claims that such reciprocal seeing is essential to the kind of education Lutheran colleges can offer. Without it, we can't have authentic diversity. For diversity recognizes, respects, and ultimately celebrates the many wells we visit on our spiritual journeys.

And for me as an educator, it's about more than in-depth interfaith conversations. It's what such conversations can do to create an institutional vision, a bone-deep (or well-deep) identity, one that substitutes a tolerantly dismissive "whatever" for an intentionally engaged "what." I believe that such an identity enhances our ability to educate self and other, strengthens us in our quest to take our place and so to help students take their places in the world with discernment, confidence, and "dauntless love."

Maybe we do this sort of work obliquely—tell the truth but tell it slant, as Emily Dickinson famously said. Certainly for anyone in the arts, this kind of truth-telling is what fills our days and ways. Writers and artists and teachers have given us elegant, eloquent apologia for their disciplines. As Professor Allison Wee's luminous essay "Valuing Poetry" (*Intersections* Spring 2013) asserts, "Poetry [she refers to the specific genre; I extend the term to mean any form of literary art] can help us live, and live well, in the face of death….It can offer much comfort. It can remind us of everything good and beautiful in the world. It can remind us that we are not alone in our pain and suffering, even at times when no one else can be present with us. It can give voice to our voiceless longings; it can give shape to our deepest and most complex feelings and give us means to reach out to others when otherwise we might be left mute and isolate."

And yet, magnificent as is this creedal statement, I find myself wanting more. And I believe that "more" is the water from the wells of my faith tradition. Carla Arnell, English professor at a non-church-related college, suggests in "Don't Eschew the Pew" (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, Oct. 14, 2013) that to focus on the particulars of a religious tradition, to observe its rhythms and rituals, its seasons and stories, can help us understand and share our humanity on a deeper level even than art can provide. Too often "spiritual" detached from "worship" can lead to making ourselves the center of the experience. How can *I* find comfort and beauty? How can *I* find communion in my suffering? How can *I* find words to reach others in their pain? Finally, how can *I* enrich *my* life? These are, of course, questions that religion addresses. But the "spiritual but not religious" perspective can make such questions and answers intensely private. It can also shrink our sense of community. We may reach out, but selectively: to those who share our vision and vocabulary. However, if I see myself as a loved child of a God who gives me everything I need, then I can't help seeing others that way, even those who differ radically from me. And I am enjoined by that seeing to reach out to them where they are.

"If I see myself as a loved child of a God who gives me everything I need, then I can't help seeing others that way, even those who differ radically from me."

To drink from the well of our Lutheran faith produces a curiously paradoxical flavor (to perhaps belabor the metaphor): it shapes experience in the formal ways that poetry does, arranging and ordering the chaotic. Yet it also demands that the chaos be fully admitted, that the messiness and aggravation of our lived-out human story be embraced rather than metaphorized: that quirky and precious and exasperating quotidian, where I kneel at the altar and dip bread into the cup just given to the person beside me whose political views I deplore, but whose generosity rebukes my own stinginess. Only then, on my knees, can I really become part of the vast mystery of God's love for my own flawed self as well as for the other, only then can I become one with the other, only then share *shalom*.

A friend and former student joins a couple of his undergraduate professors for a celebratory dinner: he's just released his debut book of poetry. He's 62. For his entire professional life he's been an attorney practicing corporate law in a firm so wealthy and prestigious that they sent a physician to his home to conduct his annual physical exams. In his mid-fifties he found himself thirsting for something other, something more than the commute, the elegant suburban home—even more than the deeply secure marriage and the successful children. Legalities were arid, the canyoned pavements he walked in the city were like stones to his feet. He felt, perhaps, as alien from himself and his world as that very different alien, the woman who came to the well at noonday to draw the water that would not last.

Would reading poetry have been enough to quench his thirst? Frankly, I don't think so. For what turned him to poetry, to studying with patience and persistence, then to writing with breathtaking authority and beauty, was the living water that welled up, week after week, service after service, story after story, as he observed the rituals of his faith tradition. This is the tradition which we can affirm. Perhaps, if it is ours, we are obliged to affirm it, to open students' eyes to the possibilities of this tradition, not just as an aesthetic or even a generic spiritual experience, but as a power that gives life to art. By doing so, we both strengthen and flex our own understanding of our tradition. And make it more possible to explicate that tradition honestly and helpfully to the people we learn and teach among—however far-flung they may be.

"What turned him to poetry, to studying with patience and persistence, then to writing with breathtaking authority and beauty, was the living water that welled up, week after week, service after service, story after story, as he observed the rituals of his faith tradition."

The two students, past and present, had looked deeply into the wells, dipped deeply, from places of dryness. The water there didn't always necessarily sparkle. Sometimes it was very dark.

But they looked long enough to see the stars at the bottom.

I have no prescriptions for how the sharing and affirming of this vision can occur. That would be presumptuous, I think, and more than a little oxymoronic in a piece about open conversation. Each person who drinks from a well of living water will find her own way of doing so. I like to use stories.

And so here's the final episode in the story I opened with, about the visiting prospective student. As he was leaving my office, he observed, in a kind of wonder, "This is the first time anyone on any of our college visits has talked about faith." And, when he showed up in my class the following year, he reminded me of our conversation. And we shared the story again.

Shared the water from our wells.

Intersections

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