From the Editor

Tom Christenson
Living in God’s amazing grace,

Arne Selbyg
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FROM THE EDITOR

What adjective should we use to talk about this issue? It’s thicker than usual, in case you hadn’t noticed, and it has more pieces than usual. But I hesitate to call it “fat” because that suggests that it has unnecessary overages, which it doesn’t. Should we choose “weighty”? That suggests verbiage both long and dense as well as important. I doubt that’s what we want to say either. Perhaps “muscular”? Someone once referred to my physique as “well-developed.” I appreciated their kind efforts at euphemism. People used to use the word “fleshy.” Incarnationists, particularly Lutherans, should have little quarrel with that. So here we go once again, fleshing out our thoughts for sharing.

This issue contains both some of the papers shared at last summer’s Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference as well as two papers commissioned by INTERSECTIONS from persons who have been at the heart of the ELCA’s efforts at higher education, the two directors of the Division for Higher Education and Schools, Robert Sorenson and Leonard Schulze. We thought it was appropriate to hear from them at this point in time, when the ELCA is considering restructuring and re-prioritizing the offices that oversee higher education in the church.

Arne Selbyg insisted that I use this letter as a kind of valedictory, since I am stepping down as editor of INTERSECTIONS. This is the last issue that I will edit. The editorship will be passed to Bob Haak at Augustana, Rock Island. I wish him well and I’m extremely happy that INTERSECTIONS will continue under his leadership and the support of Augustana College. Our thanks are due to Bob and the leadership at Augustana for picking up the ball and moving it on down the field.

When I first took the idea for this publication to Naomi Linnell and then to Jim Unglaube at DHES in 1994, they were both interested in the prospect but somewhat skeptical about its practicality. I think they figured it was a momentary enthusiasm (I’ve been known to have such) that would soon be replaced by something new. I didn’t quit hounding them about it, and they finally agreed to take a proposal to the council of presidents. The presidents showed some enthusiasm for the idea, even if not for paying for it. And so the project was launched on a shoestring, where it’s been hanging ever since. DHES agreed to pay for the printing, and Josiah Blackmore, then president at Capital University, agreed to pay for everything else. Subsequent presidents here have continued that commitment.

We sent out a “Birth Announcement” in the spring of 1996. Here’s part of what it said:

We are pleased to announce the birth of a new publication. It will be called Intersections: Faith+Life+Learning. ... Why do we need such a publication?

At some recent conferences I’ve had a chance to talk with faculty colleagues from other ELCA colleges. From them I have heard comments such as these: “Many of the faculty at my institution don’t even know we’re church related, to say nothing of knowing what that means.” “Is being church related anything more than a public relations device?” “Most of the faculty at my college are afraid of our church connectedness. They assume it implies another Inquisition and want nothing to do with it.” “I didn’t realize that we had any ‘sister colleges’ or that I had colleagues beyond my institution
who were asking some of the same questions that I do.” “The Lutheran connection at our college is very vague, mostly because no one seems to know exactly what it means.” “Somebody ought to do us the big favor of articulating what it means to be a Lutheran college. The question, at our school, is most often met with a kind of bemused silence.” ... It is in response to this lack of awareness, this vagueness, this sense of disconnection, that Intersections hopes to speak.

Of course people at our colleges and universities still have questions about Lutheran identity and its implications, but now they are aware that they are not asking these questions all by themselves and they have some resources for addressing them, resources provided in some part by the annual Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference and by INTERSECTIONS. Our purpose was to encourage and facilitate such discussion, to create a larger sense of community among the ELCA institutions, and to share the best thinking that we were able to bring to this matter. I think we have succeeded in that enterprise. Just recently I was asked to be of help in completing a bibliography of resources for a university’s Lutheran identity study. It was interesting to see that almost a third of the readings included in the bibliography were pieces that had been published in INTERSECTIONS. Not infrequently I get an e-mail from colleges requesting copies of particular back issues to be used to facilitate campus discussions about vocation, tenure, academic freedom, service learning, etc. I am happy when such things occur. It means that somebody is reading and that a discussion somewhere is being informed by this publication.

There are some things I wish we had been able to do better. I guess I pass this list along to Bob Haak in the hope that he may be able to improve the publication in ways I was not able to. 1) I wish I had been better able to use the board of editors. That group had potential but was under-utilized. That was my fault, not theirs. 2) I wish I had been able to get more offerings of poetry and art from people at other institutions. Very often I had to call on the considerable talents of colleagues here at Capital for art or poems to fill out an issue. 3) The same can be said for essays and homilies and reflections from colleagues around the league. The journal survives not only on financial support but on the gift economy of shared ideas. That being said I do need to boast that over the 21 issues we’ve done so far, we’ve published pieces from persons at 20 of the 28 ELCA colleges and universities as well as from 10 institutions outside that group. I think that’s mighty fine, and I hope it continues. Send your ideas and proposals to Bob Haak. Let’s keep him and his editorial assistants busy.

There are three people in particular whom I wish to thank for their work on INTERSECTIONS. They are the students who have worked as copy editors with me over these years. They are: Jessica Brown, Marissa Cull, and Caitlin McHugh. INTERSECTIONS would have been a mess without their work. Together we learned how to format and edit an issue and get it ready for the printer. My thanks also to the presidents and provosts at Capital University who over the years have supported the publication with money, facilities, and encouragement. And to all others who have been help and support in this process a heartfelt thank you.

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