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Founder's Day Convocation 2004 | Augustana College

"What Would Our Swedish Lutheran Founders Think of Us?"

Welcome to our first Founders' Day convocation at Augustana College in many years. Our college was founded in 1860, on the eve of the Civil War. Today we are restarting a tradition that I hope will last for many years at the college.

The College's records show that Founder's Day was first celebrated on April 27, 1902. (1) The tradition, albeit short-lived, was started by President Gustav Andreen, the fourth president of the college. A glimpse at the first Founders' Day provides an interesting picture of how the college viewed its first 42 years. President Andreen suggested that Founders' Day be celebrated every April 27. He suggested that the "day would be Swedish in nature . . . as the founders of the Synod were Swedish and would help fulfill the mission God has given us as a Swedish-American people in the New World." As part of the convocation, one of the founding fathers of the college, Eric Norelius, had declared that Augustana was founded as a "declaration of independence" that was necessary to "save the faith and the creed and to make the Swedish-American cultural development possible."

As I said, the tradition was short-lived. Perhaps by that time, the campus population was not interested in a distinctly Swedish Founder's Day. Many students were second-generation Swedes, while others weren't Swedish at all.

My topic on this first Founders' Day Convocation in many years is a fitting one: "What Would Our Swedish Lutheran Founders Think of Us Today?" In preparing for my talk, I relied heavily on a book by our fifth president, Dr. Conrad Bergendoff, called *Augustana . . . A Profession of Faith: A History of Augustana College, 1860-1935*. Just as helpful, however, was my review of early college catalogues. Dr. Bergendoff's 1969 history of the college made a good and compelling case that Augustana College is more than an educational institution, but a profession of faith. But a review of the college's bulletins gives a more complex view. By paging through these original source materials, one can see that, to use Dr. Roald Tweet's words at a recent conversation, the college zigged and zagged in finding its place in higher education. It was struggled mightily in living with what Dr. Roald Tweet called the hyphens - being Swedish-American and being church-related. (2)

In its early years, the college was made up almost exclusively of Swedish and Norwegian Americans who were Lutheran. It is striking how much has changed.

To understand the magnitude of the change, one needs to understand a bit more about our founding. I have with me today a cane belonging to one of our founders, the Rev. T.N. Hasselquist. Rev. Hasselquist became the second president of the college three years after it was founded and served from 1863 to 1891. He is the president who set the direction of the college, because his predecessor served for less than three years. His cane is a simple one, over 100 years old. I'd like to pass it around. As you hold it, imagine what it might have been like to be here 120 years ago, when he used the cane to walk around this campus. What do you think his dreams for the college were? What would he think now?

Here is what I found in reading about our history. Augustana College traces its history to the founding of Illinois State University in Springfield. When that institution was founded in 1852, it was a largely Lutheran institution. Two-thirds of the board members of Illinois State were Lutherans. The first president of Augustana, Lars Esbjorn, was a faculty member at Illinois State College who held a Scandinavian professorship. He was also a pastor who planted several Swedish Lutheran churches in Illinois, including the church now known as the Jenny Lind Chapel in Andover and First Lutheran Church in Moline.

During his years at Illinois State, like other recent immigrants from Sweden, Esbjorn became distrustful of the Lutheranism of more established "American Lutherans." He believed that other Lutherans were not loyal to the Augsburg Confession. Esbjorn started to hold separate communion services in Swedish at Illinois State and criticized the teaching of other professors. By 1860, he had had enough. He quit his job at Illinois State and moved to Chicago.

He and other Scandinavian leaders met later that year in Jefferson Prairie, Wisconsin, to organize the Scandinavian Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod in North America. At the same time, they approved the constitution for a school of theology - the Augustana Seminary. From its inception, the school was committed to the liberal arts. This included teaching theology, history, geography, mathematics and the natural sciences, plus six languages: Latin, Hebrew, Greek, English, German, and, of course, Swedish. The college was to have three professors - one Swedish, one Norwegian and one English.

The challenges faced by our country when President Esbjorn founded the college remind me of the challenges facing us today. Like today, America in 1860 was facing an information revolution: April of that year saw the creation of the U.S. Pony Express. There was also a technological revolution on the horizon that would change the face of history and culture: that year saw the invention of an internal-combustion engine, powered by coal gas. In November of 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected president. One month later, South Carolina seceded from the Union - the event that helped start the Civil War. Conrad Bergendoff, the college's fifth president, wrote that "Days of shadow lay before the new institution" from its beginning. (3) But its founders believed that what this country needed in troubled times was a generation of well-educated servant leaders. The founders must have had great hopes for the college - to open doors to the wave of Swedish immigrants to the challenges of a new American world. As evidenced by the diversity of Scandinavian and American professors, the founders had the dual goals of preparing students for the new world and doing so in a way respectful of Swedish religious and social traditions.

Augustana opened in Chicago in 1860. It started with ten Swedish students, ten Norwegian students and one "American" student. The school had financial problems from the outset. Two years after the college started in Chicago, the president of the synod, T.N. Hasselquist, accepted an offer from the Illinois Central railroad to relocate the college to Paxton, Illinois, about a hundred miles south of Chicago. Hasselquist thought moving the college to Paxton would secure its financial future and would create good location for a Swedish colony. Students working on a farm would provide support for the college.

President Esbjorn was opposed to the move. He believed that Chicago would become one of the most important cities in America. He was opposed to a college supported by the manual farm labor of its students. Frustrated with the thought of the move, he found his time as president of the college to be exhausting, both physically and mentally. In 1862, he resigned and returned to Sweden. Undoubtedly, his time in America had

been rough. His twin boys had died on the journey from Sweden, another son lost his life in the Civil War and a daughter died in 1861. He also lost his wife, remarried and lost a second wife within a year.

After Esbjorn's resignation, Hasselquist became president in 1863. Because of the short service of Esbjorn to the college and because of the dominant hand of T.N. Hasselquist, first as president of the Synod then as College President for 28 years, most of Augustana's early identity was crafted by Hasselquist. He was a graduate of the University of Lund who served as a pastor in Galesburg immediately prior to becoming president of the college. Later he would become pastor of the First Lutheran Church in Rock Island.

When Hasselquist arrived in Paxton, he had a home but the classroom building was not completed. Students crowded into the Hasselquist house. He wrote: "Everybody lives in my house, and we are altogether too many."
(4) There were 10 students, three Norwegians and seven Swedes. Hasselquist did most of the teaching.

Immigration from Sweden mushroomed after the Civil War. While this wave of Swedish immigration could have been very good for the college, it turned out that the immigrants did not head south of Chicago. They moved toward Minnesota and west to Nebraska and Kansas. Further, the college was hurt by a growing schism between the Swedish Lutherans and the Norwegian Lutherans. Norwegian students and church leaders were not happy that the Norwegian students were mixing their native language with Swedish. In 1870, the Swedish and Norwegian camps divorced. The Norwegians formed the Conference for the Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. They eventually established a college in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, also known as Augustana College.

To respond to changing demographic trends, the board of directors of the college again decided to move to take advantage of patterns of Swedish immigration. The college decided to move to Geneseo, Illinois, because a favorable land deal was offered. But then Geneseo officials reneged on their offer. A professor from the college learned of a sixteen-acre parcel available in Rock Island for \$10,000. In 1870, many thought Rock Island would be a rival to Chicago for the metropolis of the West. In 1870 there were over 1000 steam ships docked annually at Rock Island. The city stood on the main rail line to the West, and it was home to John Deere and several major lumber companies. The college completed its move to the current campus in 1870 when it had 58 students. That number grew rapidly after the move.

What was student life like in the early days? The Board of Directors adopted these regulations in 1883: (5)

1. All students shall be properly dressed and shall have their rooms properly ventilated at 6:30 a.m.
1. After 9 p.m., all noise of whatever kind is forbidden
1. There shall be no lights in students' rooms between 10:30 p.m. and 5 a.m.
1. All are required to be present at Divine Services, and all who room in the Institution at morning prayers (at 7:40 a.m.)
1. All students are expected to conduct themselves as gentlemen.

Like gentlemen? What about the women in the student body? There were no female graduates for the college's

first 25 years. Innes Rundstrom, class of 1885, was the first woman to graduate from Augustana. Likewise, there were no female faculty members for the first 32 years. Anna Westman, the first woman on the faculty, taught mathematics.

To accommodate the increasing interest of women students, the college established a Lady's Hall. The 1888-89 Augustana College Catalog describes it this way - "For the accommodation of lady students who are really desirous of acquiring a higher education, who will make faithful and conscientious use of the education advantages afforded . . . a Ladies' Hall has been established. Girls . . . who care more for fun and shallow enjoyments than for real knowledge and culture and solid worth are not wanted here . . . The duties of each evening are begun at 7 o'clock with reading of the Scripture, prayer and singing. At these exercises held in the parlor, all of the young ladies are required to be present. . . . Ladies rooming at the Hall will not be allowed to have any company of the opposite sex. These unwilling to comply with this regulation need not apply for rooms."

Women were not the only ones subjected to rules like this. College rules prohibited such vices as card-playing, visiting saloons and going to the theater.

Athletics arrived on the college scene in 1893 in the form of varsity football. That year the team beat both St. Ambrose and the University of Iowa. The faculty was not pleased with the advent of football. Considering it to be unregulated, the faculty decided that no further contests were to be had. A year later the faculty relented, but permitted only play with local teams. But the struggle for athletics was not over. In 1905, the church body intervened and prohibited football, basketball and baseball at all colleges associated with the church. Students petitioned the college's board not to go along with the ban. The board refused the student's plea. That the Synod, the governing board of the church (not the governing board of the college), would intervene in college athletics is extraordinary - and gives a glimpse of the early domination of the college by the church. Football was restored twelve years later in 1917.

What about Greek organizations? Through the first fifty years, the college's rules forbade secret societies. Conrad Bergendoff, in his 1969 history of the college, notes that shortly after the turn of the century, there were "mysterious news items which leads one to suspect that especially among the women there were clandestine elections." In March 1906, seven college women formed the Delta Sigma, though the college did not recognize the organization. The first Greek social organization recognized was Sigma Pi Delta (the Speeds in 1909 and then Kappa Kau in 1901. (6)

It's obvious that the college has undergone significant changes, far more than Swedish no longer being the official language of instruction on campus. Today we don't even know what percentage of our students is Swedish, in part, because most of today's students are of mixed ancestry. Fewer than 25% of our students are Lutheran. The last three presidents, Sorenson, Tredway and Bahls are not pastors; two of the last three have not had significant theological training. Though all presidents of the college to date have been Lutheran, the college's constitution was amended a few years ago to drop that requirement. And what would our founders think about our decidedly ecumenical campus ministry? Augustana College is the only one of the 28 ELCA colleges with a non-Lutheran chaplain on the payroll. In fact, we're blessed with two non-Lutheran chaplains.

What would our first presidents think? It's hard to say, and of course it's speculation. No doubt each of the first

presidents would be surprised, if not shocked. Esbjorn would not be surprised by how much Chicago eclipsed Rock Island, but Hasselquist would be. It would take them some time to get used to the idea of coed dorms and unlimited visitation hours. For a college that once banned football, getting used to the idea of 21 varsity sports - 11 men's and 10 women's, would take some time. And, for a school that did not enroll women for the first 20 years, they would be shocked that the college has more women than men.

I believe our founders would also be pleased, particularly if they could be with us for a term. I'm confident that there were times when our first four presidents, Esbjorn, Hasselquist, Olsson and Andreen, wondered whether the college could keep its doors open. They would be pleased that the college is financially stable and stunned at our buildings. They could hardly imagine that over three thousand high school seniors apply to the school each year.

Were these presidents stuffy and conservative and resistant to change? Particularly, would they be disappointed about how we have interpreted the core mission and how we have interpreted our relationship with the Lutheran Church? Augustana has been decidedly ecumenical in its approach to educating students. Several Lutheran colleges still have a majority of students who are Lutheran and several still have daily chapel. None have a campus pastor on the payroll who is not Lutheran. What would our founders think about our approach? It's hard to say, but the historical record suggests that our founders would not be disappointed in our ecumenical stance.

In opposing the move to Paxton, Esbjorn may have been more interested in establishing a vital college in an urban area than in establishing a separate Swedish settlement in Paxton. He believed in a college that would be not separate from a booming Chicago. He was opposed to what he called a "manual labor college" in a rural region. Perhaps he was more interested in engagement with the world than in separating from the world. If so, he would be pleased to know that Augustana is so engaged.

His successor, President Hasselquist, also recognized that the college must change. In 1874, in apparent frustration with the Synod, Hasselquist wrote, "People who demand that a Christian institution be perfect and well-nigh sinless need to be reminded that students are human." He noted that "openly and honorably we can confess that we cherish a very healthy openheartedness both in relationship to other Christian denominations and to contemporary culture as well as learning in general."

The third president of the college, Olaf Olsson, clearly believed that change was inevitable and not all bad. In 1899, during Olsson's presidency, the college was under attack by the more conservative elements of the church because of the gradual replacement of the Swedish language with English. Morning prayers were now in English. At the Synod meeting, Olsson said, "The times do not wait for us. If we do not follow along we remain behind." (7) He went on the offense in attacking those who stood in the way of change. He said: "Are these Swedish enthusiasts going to succeed in killing the love of our people, our pastors and our congregations, to our common college? . . . The very thought has been so shattering that my whole nervous system has been shaken to pieces by it."

Olsson was so disturbed by the attacks by church members on the college that his health deteriorated. He was given a leave of absence by the college's board and passed away shortly thereafter.

The fourth president of the college, Gustav Andreen, made sure that the college's bulletin reflected the change in the college. Instead of requiring the Swedish language, the Augustana catalogue in 1904 simply urged students with Swedish blood to take Swedish. The catalogue said: "Students of Swedish parentage are urged to devote as much time as possible to the study of the beautiful language of their forefathers." Under Andreen's leadership, the college was explicit in welcoming non-Lutherans. The bulletin said that the college, though Lutheran, is not Sectarian. It went on to say that the college's "original scope, which was that of a school for the education of ministers of the gospel, has from time to time been broadened, until now the institution aims to prepare, directly or indirectly, for all occupations and profession, by giving the general cultural or special training which modern condition require."

I think that our founders knew from early on in our history that the college was a dynamic organization, one that needed to change with the times. I believe that our founders would hope the college would advance and prosper. And if they asked whether the founding values of the college still remain, I believe they'd find those values are alive and well.

Today we are fond of talking about the brand promise of the college. A brand promise is the promise we make to those who consumer our product. Volvo's brand promise is safety. Starbuck's brand promise is a quality cup of coffee in a clean, comfortable, contemporary setting. While the term "brand promises" has only recently become fashionable, Augustana College in effect developed a brand promise in 1890 called "the special advantages of Augustana College." It is found in the college's 1890 catalogue. First and foremost, the college promised "great" departments of instruction, an "excellent" curriculum and "thoroughness of instruction." But it went further. The college promised that faculty members would take a "personal interest . . . in the welfare of students". It promised "free social intercourse," meaning unfettered communication among faculty and students. It promised a beautiful, clean campus, ease of access, great classrooms, modern equipment and comfortable dormitories. Our founders would be pleased to learn that we have kept faith with these promises.

Other promises require a bit more analysis. In 1890, the college also promised "Moderateness of expenses and cheapness of living." Well, our founders would be surprised at tuition rates today, but pleased to learn the amount of need-based financial aid given, as well as the amount of state and federal assistance given to our students.

There were three more promises: "High Christian Character of students and professors, prevalence of a conservative educational and religious sentiment, and "above all" the college is "through and soundly Christian."

What would these founders think of us today? Would they say the college has strayed from its Christian roots? Well, first we must ask what the nature of our Christian roots is. The nature of our roots can be found in the Augsburg Confessions. The Latin name for Augsburg is Augustana. This confession was written at a time when schism plagued the church. Rather than emphasizing exclusivity, it invited reconciliation among divergent views. Our founders recognized that the Lutheran expression of higher education was not for Lutherans alone. Since the early days of our college, the college welcomed individuals of all faiths. The college's founders believed that knowledge informs faith. When the college stated its "Special Advantage" in 1890, it stated that the college was Christian in order "to cultivate the heart as well as the mind of the student, thus furnishing the best preparation for the active duties of life." I believe, then, that the Lutheran expressions of higher education are as follows: that faith and reason strengthen each other and that a college should help students grow in body, mind and

spirit. I believe that our founders would be proud to see that we are making the benefits of the Lutheran expression of higher education available to all - Lutherans, other Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Muslims and even those with no faith. Just as our founders believed that both Americans and Swedes were necessary for the best faculty, they might be proud that Lutherans, Catholic, Jews and others are today members of an Augustana faculty that helps student grow in body, mind and spirit.

I also think that our founders would be pleasantly surprised that we have been able to continue to honor our Swedish roots, even though most students, faculty, administrators and board members are not Swedish. They would be pleased that we are one of the few liberal arts colleges with a Scandinavian department. They would be pleased that our Swenson Center for Immigration Research is an important part of the academic study of immigration trends into the United States. They might be amused that we still have smorgasbords during the holiday, especially if they could see Augustana students struggling to appreciate such delicacies as potato sausage and creamed herring. And they might be pleased that students still kiss their spouses-to-be under the old Swedish bell tower.

If they got to know us a bit better, what suggestions would our founders have for us today? There are two that come to mind:

1. They might encourage defining ourselves by who we are, rather than who we are not. When asked about our religious affiliation, we are too quick to say what we are not, but some of us struggle to say what we are. The college will work over the next year to better define, in a positive way, how the ecumenical commitment of the ELCA traditions of higher education helps students of all faiths to grow in body, mind and spirit. I encourage all here to be involved in that dialog.
2. Our founders were committed to helping a new wave of immigrants realize the American dream by combining their traditional culture with the best of the New World. They understood the barriers faced by recent immigrants and people without the financial resources to realize their dream. What would they think about the need to help the Latino community and others growing up without the advantages of a good education or material resources? Would they say that the college ought to help the current generation of disenfranchised people realize the American dream? I believe they would. I believe they would want us to reach out to ethnic minorities, to those suffering economic and educational disadvantage, and to help them pursue the American dream today, just as they helped Swedish Lutherans to pursue that dream many years ago. They might wonder what our Swenson Center for Immigration Studies could do to help the new wave of Hispanic immigrants hold on to their heritage while at the same time realizing the American dream.

In the end, I believe that Dr. Roald Tweet was correct in his convocation earlier this year. Augustana has always lived with a hyphen. We have Swedish-American roots. We honor our Swedish roots, but have extended the gift of our founders' vision to all Americans (and, increasingly, throughout the world). We are also church-related. We honor and embody the ecumenical values of Lutheran higher education, but are neither owned by the church nor an agent of the church. Dr. Tweet is correct - sometimes living with a hyphen causes tension. Our founders struggled with that tension. They, more than any others, would understand why that struggle continues today.

As I held President Hasslequist's cane earlier this week and thought about my comments today, I thought that if he were walking through the quad today or strolling up the slough path, he would be at once surprised and

proud. Of course he would be perplexed with the cell phones, the many women students, the coed dorms, and the fact that fewer than 25% were Lutheran. But Hasselquist was a realist - he knew that society was changing and that the college needed to change. What I think he would be most surprised with is that the church that founded Augustana College, the Augustana Synod, no longer has a separate existence. Through a series of mergers it is now a part of the ELCA, and in a very real way has lost its separate existence. But as he thought about it, I think he would be pleased that Augustana College is the living legacy of the church. He would be pleased that the college remains committed, in the words of an early college bulletin, to "cultivate the heart as well as the mind of the student, thus furnishing the best preparation for the active duties of life." He would be proud that Augustana continues to give the gift of a quality liberal arts education to all.

In closing, let me quote and reflect upon the words of former Harvard University President Abbot Lawrence Lowell. He said colleges and "universities have outlived every form of government, every change of tradition, of law, and scientific thought, because they minister to one of man's underlying needs. Of his creations none has more endured through the devouring march of time. And those who administer them, or teach therein, are but living links in an every lengthening chain that stretches forward measureless to the unknown." (8)

What president Lowell saw at Harvard, I see at Augustana. We are a college founded on the eve of the Civil War that outlasted not only the Civil War, but two World Wars. We are a college who outlived the Synod that founded us. We are a college that outlived the interests of Swedish-Americans to have a distinctly Swedish education. Those of us who are privileged to be part of Augustana today are part of an every lengthening chain. We have the responsibility to understand where the chain started, but the freedom to set a direction for the college as it continues to evolve. With that freedom comes an obligation - to respect the core values upon which the college was founded.

So when I hold the founder's cane, I do so with very mixed emotions. Humility, in that I am part of Augustana. Awe, in that I am associated with a college with such a long and grand history. Pride, in that Augustana has and seeks to remain authentic by honoring our traditions as a liberal arts college, while meeting the changing needs of today's students. And comfort in knowing that our founders would be proud that Augustana College is the living and dynamic legacy of their efforts.

1 Dag Blanck, *Becoming Swedish American: The Construction of an Ethnic Identity in the Augustana Synod*, 1816-1917, Uppsala, 1997.

2 Roald Tweet, *Five Reflections on Living with a Hyphen*, On and Beyond the Mississippi: Essays Honoring Thomas Tredway (2004).

3 *Bergendoff*, p. 318.

4 *Bergendoff*, p.29.

5 *Bergendoff*, p 73-74

6 *Bergendoff*, pp. 131-132.

7 *Bergendoff*, p. 106.



Accounting	Communication Studies	Geography	Music	Pre-Optometry
Africana Studies	Computer Science	Geology	Music Education	Pre-Pharmacy
Anthropology	Creative Writing	German Studies	Music Performance	Pre-Physical Therapy
Art	Economics	Greek	Neuroscience	Pre-Physician Assistant
Art History	Elementary Education	Graphic Design	Non-Profit Leadership	Pre-Seminary
Asian Studies	Engineering	History	Development	Pre-Veterinary Medicine
Biochemistry	Engineering Physics	International Business	Philosophy	Psychology
Biology	English (Literature)	Japanese	Physics	Religion
Business Administration	English (Writing)	Landscape Architecture	Political Science	Scandinavian Studies
Chemistry	Environmental Management	Latin	Pre-Dentistry	Secondary Education
Chinese	& Forestry	Library and Information	Pre-Law	Sociology
Classics	Environmental Studies	Science	Pre-Medicine	Sociology (Social Welfare)
Communication Sciences	Ethics	Mathematics	Pre-Music Therapy	Spanish
& Disorders	French	Multimedia Journalism	Pre-Nursing	Theatre
		& Mass Communication	Pre-Occupational Therapy	Women's & Gender Studies