

2018

From the Editor

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Mahn, Jason (2018) "From the Editor," *Intersections*: Vol. 2018 : No. 48 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections/vol2018/iss48/4>

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From the Editor

For me, the most compelling and constructive moment at this past summer's Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference was also the most challenging.

Lynn Hunnicut was two-thirds the way through her opening introduction to the organizing theme of vocation within Lutheran higher education and its connections with this year's focus on "civil discourse in a fragmented world." During a pause for comments and questions, one participant pressed her on what she meant by civil discourse. Was it, the participant wanted to know, merely talk that was deemed to be respectful and polite by those whose power is protected by "respectful" and "polite" (read: carefully controlled and conforming) conversations? When do appeals for civility and civil discourse silence voices that are already repeatedly silenced because they are deemed too angry or unreasonable? Was the "fragmented world" in the conference title meant to implicate minority groups who find solidarity in self-segmentation? Did fragmentation's alternate naively imply a kind of white, majoritarian space that many mistake for neutral or unified?

These were tough questions. We returned to them throughout the conference and it made for richer, more difficult, more productive exchanges. Looking back now, I admit that I had not realized that "civil discourse," which had seemed to me a rather innocuous theme, could be spotted by others as un-interrogated and so not-so-innocent after all. I'm learning that one of the most determinative characteristics of the privilege possessed by white, straight, Christian males like me is the inability to see our own privilege, when left to ourselves. I am grateful to the other participants of the conference for enabling me to see how what counts as "civil discourse" can and should be contested—especially by asking who benefits from appeals to it. The no-less contestable title of next summer's conference—"Beyond Privilege:

Engaging Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity" (July 15-17, 2019, see announcement on page 13) promises to pick up where last summer's conference left off.

Most of the essays that follow were first presented at the 2018 Vocation of a Lutheran College conference. Some of them emphasize the need to emphatically listen and find common ground in a polarized culture, complete with partisan politics, social media echo-chambers, and the propaganda of "alternative facts." Others remind us that calls for civility can also become "the sleep-aid of a majority inclined to ignore the violence done in its name" (Newkirk, as cited by Leiseth, below); these authors urge educators to speak truthfully, even when those words sound angry. Together, the essays help us tune up for frank and honest conversations while resisting hateful discourse about divisive issues, as Mark Wilhelm puts it. Even the final essay by Pacific Lutheran University music director Jeffrey Bell-Hanson—which is ostensibly "outside the theme"—might help us get the "pitch" of our discourse right. Hanson, too, connects feelings with facts, passionate performance with responsible truth-telling.

The spring 2019 issue of *Intersections* will be devoted to the foundational document of NECU: "Rooted and Open: The Common Calling of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities." The editorial board invites reflections on the document; essays about its use among educators, administrators, and board members on our campuses; as well as reviews of other recent publications that help us consider our overlapping institutional vocations. Please contact me if you are willing and able to contribute.



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