

2014

## From the Publisher

Mark Wilhelm

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

---

### Augustana Digital Commons Citation

Wilhelm, Mark (2014) "From the Publisher," *Intersections*: Vol. 2014: No. 40, Article 2.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections/vol2014/iss40/2>

This Editorial is brought to you for free and open access by Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Intersections* by an authorized administrator of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@augustana.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@augustana.edu).

# 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 under-emphasized 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.