

4-17-2015

## Five Faith Commitments, Four Years, One Future

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### Recommended Citation

Robbins, Kerry, "Five Faith Commitments, Four Years, One Future" (2015). *Five Faith Commitments*. Paper 3.  
<http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/fivefaith/3>

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## Five Faith Commitments, Four Years, One Future

Kerry Robbins

The religious affiliation of Augustana is found right in the history of the college. Founded in 1860, Augustana College is rooted in the liberal arts and associated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. However, we, as a campus, are so much more than an association—we are a representation of the Lutheran Church and much more.

In contrast to having been drawn to Augustana due to their Lutheran roots, I was drawn to apply, and ultimately attend, based on other appealing attributes—the liberal arts academic focus, travel opportunities, availability and willingness of professors to assist students, and the beautiful nature of campus.

Although I did not choose to attend Augustana due to the college's relationship with the church, it did impact my decision. I remember visiting campus as an extremely indecisive high school senior and asking to see the chapel. I will never forget the light that shined through the beautiful stained glass windows surrounding the chapel. I knew this was a place that I could feel safe, further my relationship with Christ, and grow in ways God had planned.

In all honesty, I was unaware of Augustana's Five Faith Commitments until an email from Sam Schlouch came across my inbox (yes, I open every email I receive! I should calculate the hours spent on this activity!). However, this does not mean these commitments have never crossed my mind. Looking back, they, or a variation of their wording, has influenced my education at Augustana.

Amongst the next pages, I will lay out my interpretation and reflection on how I have perceived Augustana's Five Faith commitments being lived out among our campus. Reflection is a skill I have learned to embrace over my 4 years at Augustana. It is one that I am fortunate to

have been exposed to early on in my career and will continue to fall back on for the rest of my life.

**Commitment One: Augustana College offers every student the opportunity to develop a life-shaping spirituality.**

Having not been raised in a private/parochial school prior to undergraduate, my education did not include a focus on theology or religion. As a component of Augustana's graduation requirements, every student is required, regardless of their background, to pass a course in Christian Traditions. The variety of classes that are encompassed under this title offer a wide range of exposure to ethics, scriptures, theology and American Christianities. Students are exposed to an assortment of beliefs and views as to offer more than one viewpoint to the possibility of developing a life-shaping spiritual journey. I believe this is the key to the first of the five faith commitments: the college is not forcing a way of thinking on any individual. On the contrary, students are given the opportunity to explore an interest with religion as the underlying focus with the possibility of furthering their understanding. It is then up to the student to pursue the topic further or explore other options if they choose to incorporate it into their life.

**Commitment Two: Augustana College encourages our campus community to wrestle with ways in which faith and reason challenge and enrich each other.**

A college degree is so much more than a piece of paper demonstrating one's ability to persevere through four additional years of schooling. Especially found intermingled within a liberal arts education, a college degree represents an opportunity for an individual to find themselves, to explore their values and beliefs, to try out new interests, and to learn from mistakes among a safe environment. As a community, Augustana encourages students to challenge ideologies and decide for themselves, as an adult, what exactly they value and believe. Much of this comes from educational opportunities and conversations in the classroom, however,

another significant amount of growth and exploration is rooted in involvement in extracurricular activities, faculty mentors, and friends. All of these situations and individuals foster environments for students to wrestle with their values and beliefs; further enriching their lives by working through challenging queries throughout a time in life of continual change.

**Commitment Three: Augustana College affirms that work and career - indeed, all human effort - are aspects of an understanding of vocation, which the Lutheran tradition in higher education helps illuminate.**

I am currently enrolled in the sign language class offered at Augustana. One of the most fascinating signs to me is the distinction between home and house. Home is where you eat and sleep (these activities are indicated in the sign) and a house is a structure (again, indicated in the sign). Similarly is the distinction between a job and a vocation. A job is an occupation in which one does day-in-and-day-out to fulfill the societal expectation of earning a living. On the contrary, which resonates with the Lutheran tradition, a vocation is a livelihood in which one identifies where their skill sets meet the needs of a society. There is much more gratification for one's work in a vocation. I was fortunate to work with a former employee of Augustana in identifying my vocation. In doing so, I identified this passion through a combination of recognizing my skills, community needs, religious reflection, and an honest conversation on how I could serve fellow brothers and sisters in Christ will my interests each and every day. Today, we have a similar department to assist every student in identifying their vocation and the steps to further their skill sets in being servant leaders in communities close and worldwide.

**Commitment Four: Augustana College celebrates God's regard for the worth of all persons.**

Prior to my time at Augustana, I had not been exposed to much of a challenge of ecumenism, the aim to promote unity among Christian churches around the world. I grew up in a Presbyterian church with the mindset that we are all one under God. It wasn't until I began at

Augustana that I understood the slight differences recognized between religions; but worked hard to maintain my mindset of being one under God because, after all, He is the one who connects us all. I have not exposed myself to dialogue among people of different faiths and cultures as much as I wish I had to further my understanding. However, such dialogue does not stop when I graduate in a few weeks. Instead, Augustana has helped spur an interest in me to explore religious differences and that interest will drive my own motivation as I seek out opportunities outside of campus to further my education.

**Commitment Five: Augustana College encourages the development of a campus community that seeks justice, loves kindness and acts with love and humility.**

Development of a campus community that seeks the above qualities is just that—a development, high's and low's—not a smooth sail. This aspect of a journey is important to keep in mind because it is easy to become discouraged. However, that is where the rest of the community comes into play as supporters of acts that promote justice, love, kindness, love, and humility. A most recent example I experienced in relation was the vandalism of the life week flags on the quad of Augustana College. Life week is a time to express a viewpoint certain students hold. However, the vandalism demonstrates the intolerance to openly (and safely) express a personal viewpoint. Much like a religious view and belief, the stance on abortion is a personal belief. The issue among this act does not boil down to a difference in views of abortion but the lack of community qualities Augustana strives towards. These qualities must be perpetuated with the students and staff on campus regardless of a viewpoint, to develop a community that upholds such values and ultimately to make our world a more tolerant place to live. This act of intolerance is not a set-back, instead, it is an opportunity to show respect and react in a just manner; much as the reaction those of persecuted religions demonstrate.

I have experienced the five faith commitments that Augustana strives to uphold on campus. As a soon-to-be graduate, I hope to continue identifying similar commitments in communities I find myself a member of. Having such exposure in my young adult years to an institution that is committed to encouraging responsibility of stewardship and values of peace, love, and justice to others, I have been presented ways in which these commitments can be applied on a larger spectrum and hope to be a part of implementing such a commitment in my future.