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## From the Editor

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# From the Editor

The authors first presented these essays as part of the 2011 Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference at Augsburg College. The annual vocation conference provides one of the four legs that sustain our conversation about the mission and identity of ELCA colleges and universities (see Mark Wilhelm's comments above). All who have attended know just how thought-provoking the sessions can be, and just how illuminating and even prayerful our common conversations are. The conference and *Intersections* want to provide the kind of public arena where civil dialogue can happen. But Mark is right, too, to suggest that rich deliberation about our identity for the public good has to extend beyond the pages of a journal or the borders of a campus.

The first two essays here suggest why deliberations within our campuses must turn outward, and why this is so hard to come by. Samuel Torvend vividly describes how a long stretch of the Christian tradition demoted the importance of our public, bodily life to the salvation of individual "souls." Luther turned this gnostic prejudice inside-out by recognizing God as deeply engaged in the civic realm—what Christians call the Incarnation. And yet Lutherans continue to miss the radicalness of a public Christ and the public reforms thereby engendered when they continue to privatize and spiritualize what "being saved" entails. Torvend insists that we must better follow Luther in linking the gospel with public engagement, especially among the hungry poor.

Per Anderson's essay turns toward the pressing needs of the church for civil deliberation and to the ways liberal education can help. In light of difficult discussions about the reach of its social statements, the ELCA's own civic engagement (or at least its understanding thereof) seems to be in holding pattern these days. Anderson notes how our colleges and universities are being called upon to help by forming citizens—not to mention churchgoers—with capacities for deliberation. Doing so would redirect our effort away from what we learn to how we talk with one another, although Anderson also notes that new moral quandaries also call us to ever-expanding bodies of knowledge.

Of course, our students see civil engagement modeled very infrequently. More and more American "consumers" (who used to be "citizens") get their news from private, partisan sources (e.g. from internet feeds, suggested according to search "preferences"). Those who do look for multiple perspectives usually find

them only in the form of televised talking heads talking past one another. Given this culture, small pedagogical acts can seem counter-cultural if not entirely subversive. For example, I sometimes make my students preface their own classroom comments by referencing a prior one ("I want to add to what Lisa said...") so that we learn how to listen and talk with one another rather than develop and defend our "own positions". Such strategies, of course, only start to cultivate the kind of community of moral deliberation that the church and world so desperately need.

The next two shorter essays were presented together at the vocation conference and here retain their oral style. Ann Svennungsen continues to discern why civility and civic engagement are so needful and absent in our dominant culture. She suggests that the civic realm itself is disappearing as citizens retreat to gated communities and niche markets. We thus must invest in the infrastructure for civic renewal. Some might assume that *private* colleges and universities would be the wrong place to look for such renewal, but—as Katherine Tunheim reminds us—much depends on whether we understand higher education as training for prosperity or for service. Our students' most valuable lessons might very well happen while filling sand bags or studying the demographics of local teens.

Paul Pribbenow draws together a number of these themes in recounting the story of Augsburg College. The outward mission of Augsburg—like all of our Lutheran schools in different ways—was founded on the hospitality of the Incarnation, on the fact that the Word became flesh, on God's own civic engagement. But, as Pribbenow reminds us, the world also did and does reject that Word, and so we need to go-out and pursue justice, and not only welcome-in outsiders. Doing so should lead us to recognize the education and liberation that happens "off the main road," whether that be the side streets of the city or the community garden of a small town.

These essays are critical, discerning, and hopeful. May they begin conversations that are civil and engaging—both within our institutions and the communities they serve.

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