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From the Publisher and Editor

Mark Wilhelm

Jason A. Mahn

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From the Publisher and Editor



We write this just a few weeks after a long and difficult presidential election. The task ahead of listening, generating empathy, and working across many different lines of difference remains what it has always been—important and difficult work. It is the work of conservatives, liberals, radicals, and other people of good will. It is the work of Muslims, Jews, Christians, seekers, skeptics, and “nones.” Certainly, as the United States becomes a nation of many faiths and cultures, educated persons need to understand the diversity and importance of religion in America and around

the globe. As future leaders in church and society, persons educated at ELCA colleges and universities will also need to continue to reject religious stereotypes and intolerance that often leads to violence. The Lutheran tradition of higher education compels and challenges schools related to the ELCA to take up this work.

In early June of 2016, faculty, administrators, staff, and students from ELCA colleges and universities met at Augsburg College to participate in the Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference under the theme: “Preparing Global Leaders for a Religiously Diverse Society.” No doubt colleagues on your campus are currently building upon the rich presentations and conversations from this summer. Campus delegations shared present initiatives for interfaith engagement—and ones that were on their “wish list.” The final list spans 7 pages, but here is a small sample: alternative spring break trips, “Faith Zone” training,

chapel service interfaith series, “Better Together” student leaders, living-learning communities devoted to talking through and living with difference, multi-faith prayer rooms, and so on.

The Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU) is deeply committed to supporting and expanding this work. NECU’s Executive Committee (composed of 7 presidents plus the executive director) has endorsed interfaith work as a priority within Lutheran higher education. Reflecting this commitment, NECU has developed an active, collaborative relationship with the Interfaith Youth Core. Many NECU schools have also been active participants and winners of awards in the annual President’s Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge. NECU was welcomed to leadership discussions at the White House and Georgetown University. Finally, the Rev. Mark Hanson, former presiding bishop of the ELCA and current director of the Christensen Center at Augsburg College, will chair a new steering committee to support, share, and advance interfaith initiatives.

The work of interfaith understanding and collaboration at ELCA colleges and universities is undergirded by the ELCA’s churchwide commitments to inter-religious understanding. NECU colleges and universities collaborated with the ELCA office of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations to produce a book on inter-religious relations, *Engaging Others, Knowing Ourselves: A Lutheran Calling in a Multi-Religious World*, published by Lutheran University Press (2016).

Most of the essays of this volume were first delivered at the Vocation conference last summer, and they all were written before election results were in. If they seem especially timely now (we think they do), that is because the work of preparing global leaders for a religiously diverse society has been and will be at the heart of the mission of Lutheran colleges and universities.

Mark Wilhelm (publisher) is Executive Director of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities. **Jason Mahn** (editor) is associate professor and chair of religion at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois.