

**“Heirs of Augustana: Its Influence on Today’s Pastors”  
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### **Introduction**

I have no conscious memory or remembered experience of the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, and yet I see Augustana as the principal source of my pastoral identity. How can this be? This is the question that I wish to explore in this essay. What follows is necessarily a very personal accounting, as fruitful Christian formation is at heart always personal, particular and relational, working in and through incarnate, ordinary, and very specific life experiences, people and places.

So pardon any overstated self-indulgence in the musings to follow as I name names and recount my own life experience. For quite importantly, my reflections serve as a tribute of thanks particularly to the people associated with the Augustana tradition who contributed to my formation and that of so many others. Moreover, approaching the exploration of pastoral identity formation in a personal manner is in keeping with the Augustana ethos itself which many consistently describe as having been close and intimate, if not to say like a family.

### **Pastoral Identity and the Augustana Ethos**

While in my first call to congregational ministry in Pittsburgh, PA, I had occasion to attend the event in 1998 at the Chautauqua Institution near Jamestown, NY that commemorated the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the first Augustana congregation. Prior to this event, my understanding of Augustana was essentially reduced to ethnicity, a focus of pride in my Swedish heritage. However, it was the Chautauqua event that began the shift from my preoccupation with Swedish ethnicity to seeing Augustana primarily in ecclesiological terms, that is to say, as a church with a distinctive ethos within Lutheranism. Indeed, many speakers at the event spoke of and summarized characteristics of the Augustana ethos, notably for me, Bishop Herbert Chilstrom, and Lyman Lundeen, who also included a quotation from Lyle Schaller, the great student of Christian denominationalism, who summarized his assessment of Augustana thusly:

The people of the Augustana Synod knew what church was all about. They balanced doctrine, worship, heritage, celebration, relationships, family, teaching, fellowship, and missions in ideal proportions. (Schaller quoted in Lundeen, in *The Augustana Heritage: Recollections, Perspectives, and Prospects*, page 15)

As I listened to presentations and then subsequently read the essays in the volume produced after the gathering, I could not help but see what was described as the Augustana ethos as a summary of my own pastoral identity. In 1998 I had been a pastor for nine years, long enough for an established and recognizable pastoral identity and patterns of pastoral practice to emerge. Mine was a solo call in Pittsburgh's inner-city, by the way, in a German/Bohemian heritage, former American Lutheran Church (ALC) congregation. Nobody with Augustana background was present mentoring me in pastoral formation. Rather, my identity expressed in patterns of practice and proclivity emerged rather naturally, organically it would seem, from some deeper sources. And the sources appear to have their primary roots in the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Here are the similarities I identify between my pastoral identity and what many consider marks of the Augustana tradition:

- I have a strong devotion to the church's historic liturgy; the Augustana tradition is marked by its respect for and practice of **liturgical worship**.
- I am dogged about Lutheran identity, especially **Lutheran theology rooted in the confessional tradition**; Augustana's very name reveals the centrality of the *Confessio Augustana*, the Augsburg Confession, as the source of this church's theological commitments and the focus of its ecclesial identity (as far as I can tell singular among Lutheran predecessor bodies in demonstrating such commitment in its very name).
- I sought out relationships with the **church beyond the congregation** I served via cooperative ministries among Lutheran congregations in South Pittsburgh and in many and various involvements in synodical and churchwide work (I am in the assessment of some colleagues an odd one, for example, in loving synodical and churchwide assemblies as celebrations of the church); Augustana was known for its churchliness, its expansive view beyond congregationalism.
- I was strong in the resolve to maintain and when possible increase financial **mission support** for the work of synodical and churchwide expressions; Augustana heritage congregations are still known to this day for their generous financial commitments to the wider church.
- I naturally gravitated toward developing various **social ministries** for our struggling inner-city neighborhood, for example, an after school program for children; Augustana was known for its strong social ministries, especially among and for children.
- Quite specifically, I had a passion for health ministry and was quick to seize on an opportunity to participate in a parish nurse program sponsored by a local Roman Catholic hospital; **Granger Westberg**, an Augustana heritage pastor, is recognized as a father of the **parish nurse program** movement -- Mercy Hospital of Pittsburgh specifically wanted Lutheran participation in their program as a way of honoring Westberg's contributions to parish nursing.
- I naturally sought out **ecumenical relationships** in the neighborhood among Roman Catholic, United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal, Church of God in Christ churches and served as the synod's ecumenical representative for a number of years; Augustana had a history of being ecumenically-oriented even before the formal, more popular beginnings of the ecumenical movement.

- There is the special case of Augustana's conversations with the Episcopal Church before the mid-twentieth century; while this did not go very far at the time, I ended up teaching at a seminary of the Episcopal Church and marrying an Episcopal priest.
- More superficially but perhaps not insignificantly, I am one who persists in wearing black clerical shirts, reflecting, I believe, my strong view of the ordained ministry; **Augustana likewise held in high regard its ministerium**, and the Augustana Seminary class photos still on display at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago show graduating seniors for the most part in their black clerical shirts.
- The 1998 Augustana event at Chautauqua occurred a year after I received my Ph.D. in Formative Spirituality from Duquesne University. I believe that my interest in **spirituality is a current-day manifestation of pietism**, with emphasis on personal experience of the divine; Augustana was deeply influenced by historic pietistic movements.
- Though **the pietism of Augustana was churchly**, seeking to locate spiritual experience in the heart of the church, a concern that I share which is a central thrust of my recently published book, *Holy Conversation: Spirituality for Worship* (Fortress Press, 2010), a work that promotes a combination of dignified liturgy, emphasizing the holiness of God, with warm piety, a very Augustana kind of blend and concern.

This involved listing of similarities between my pastoral identity and the ethos of the Augustana churchly tradition suggests a rather deep steeping in the Augustana Church as an extant institution. Yet I was about a year old when Augustana ceased to exist as a church in its own right with its merger into the Lutheran Church in America. So there was no Augustana Seminary at which I could enroll, nor did I benefit from sustained, direct formative contact with Augustana professors (though George Lindbeck team taught one course I had at Yale Divinity School). Nor were there Augustana church conventions for me to attend. I opted not to matriculate at any of the Augustana heritage colleges for undergraduate work (while Gustavus Adolphus was an early interest, non-sectarian Carleton College won out). I read no histories of the Augustana Church until rather recently, and again, any identification I had with Augustana had a primarily Swedish ethnic focus. When my pastoral formation was being undertaken in seminary, there was as yet no Augustana Heritage Association, giving focused attention to remembering if not to say passing on the Augustana tradition.

So how was it that I ended up with a pastoral, ecclesiological identity which I believe is so specifically in keeping with the ethos of Augustana, when my formal theological education and pastoral formation happened long after the Augustana Church ceased to exist? It would be easy to dismiss this coinciding as coincidence, or to conclude that I am making too much of the possible links by way of projection and imagination, or to relegate it all to some kind of magic, theologically providential thinking that does not really allow much sustained reflection on how formation actually occurs. Yet to fail to explore in some greater detail how formation happens is to miss seeing how we can now contribute to passing on our heritage and its concerns to yet future generations. For when it is all said and done, this exploration of identity formation is ultimately about making disciples, how it is we share in the Spirit's work of equipping the saints for ministry, for building up the body of Christ (cf. Ephesians 4:12) -- as crucial a task now as ever.

## **Exploring the Mystery of Identity Formation**

So let me take a stab at understanding how my formation in the ethos of the Augustana tradition may have taken place. Identity formation is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit “in, with and under” the people, places, events, circumstances, and contexts of our lives, in close proximity to the means of grace. Moreover, the kind of formation I am talking about as it involves the whole person takes place primarily outside of classrooms and formal curricula. Parker Palmer, the great teacher of teachers in the ways of spiritual pedagogy, speaks of the “hidden curriculum,” the unstated agendas in communities that have profound effects on human formation, dynamics occurring well beyond published curricula in school catalogues.

Looking at this more expansive and holistic view of formative dynamics, a view that also extends far beyond the chronology of my own life -- as I am fond of saying, “I was Lutheran before I was born” -- one can begin to see the ways in which the Augustana Church indirectly and perhaps remotely contributed to my pastoral formation, especially in tracing the links between persons directly formed in the Augustana Church, who went on after Augustana’s existence to have a direct hand in forming me. Thus, viewing history from the perspective of a wide angle lens, Augustana as an historical ecclesial reality has had an indirect, but palpable formative role in the emergence of my pastoral identity. This view takes very seriously the communion of saints not just as a theological affirmation, but also as an historical and empirically available reality, acknowledging this communion as more than a mystical thing, affirming the fact that who we are today is very much the result of the earthly saints who have gone before, even ones we do not directly know.

Acknowledging that identity formation is far more complex than I can explore here in a brief essay, I want to focus on four areas: God’s call, the Augustana Tradition itself, my home congregation in the Augustana heritage, and some people from the Augustana line who contributed to my formation.

### **God’s Call**

A crucial starting place in the exploration of the specifics of Christian formation is God’s call, affirming that God has had a vocation for me to embrace a lively faith life that would lead to ordained pastoral ministry, even as God has a particular call for each of us. Because of this call, there was fertile soil for receptivity and openness to being rather deeply formed in the faith as it came to me, though again indirectly, in the particularity of the Augustana heritage.

Moreover, faith life and respect for tradition, for heritage were also central to my personality style. For a host of reasons, I was not one to eschew tradition (even growing up in the anti-traditional 1960’s). Rather I embraced tradition and heritage, having as I do a rather conservative bent in seeking the stability and familiarity born of continuity with and connection to precedent, that which has and those who have gone before. In short, God’s call emerges out of the peculiarities of our personalities, and this call blending as it did with features of my character, set the stage for being drawn to the Augustana tradition.

## **The Augustana Tradition**

A significant factor that accounts for the prominence of the Augustana tradition in my pastoral identity is the fact that Augustana was and is a particularly strong tradition, albeit comparatively small numerically, in Lutheranism within North America. Such strong traditions with clearly articulated, coherent identities are perhaps more likely to have formative effect on descendents than less cohesive traditions. This strength is attested to by the fact that this tradition birthed the Augustana Heritage Association (unique in extent as far as I can tell among predecessor bodies of the ELCA), an association of descendents of the tradition that has had the wherewithal to host national gatherings, publish proceedings, raise money to endow a faculty chair at one of our seminaries and likewise to outfit the chapel at that same seminary.

It helps perhaps that I happened to grow up in one of Augustana's centers of gravity in Illinois, proximate to mother churches at Andover and Moline, and near the seminary and college in Rock Island. The fact is, there were so many Augustana congregations in this part of Illinois that when the merger took place to create the Lutheran Church in America, Augustana being so predominant in this area, the merger did little, I have heard it said, to change the ethos of Lutheranism in this part of the state.

Then there were the ways in which Augustana continued to influence Lutheran churchly life in both the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) and ELCA, as explored by Richard E. Koenig in a *Christian Century* article in 1987 at the time of the formation of the ELCA, "The New Lutheran Church: The Gift of Augustana." My experience of the LCA was mediated to me largely by people of Augustana heritage. In short, Augustana was and is a strong tradition that could insinuate itself formatively in my life -- and our lives -- even beyond its institutional existence, because the tradition continued and continues to reverberate in North American Lutheranism, in congregations and in people.

## **My Home Congregation**

I am a son of First Church in Monmouth, Illinois, located about an hour's drive south of Rock Island. This historically had been a larger membership congregation, and while not a mother church, it has not been without its significance in attracting prominent pastors and in producing pastors who called First Church home. C.R.E. Friedstrom left the paradise of sunny Palo Alto, California for the harsh winters of west central Illinois to become pastor of First Church (normally migration patterns had been in a westerly direction -- "go West, young man"). Herbert Ekerberg left Monmouth to serve in Riverside, CA, and later became director of one of Augustana's venerable social ministry organizations, Bethphage Mission in Axtell, Nebraska. Gerald K. Johnson, a pastor of First Church, later became a president of the LCA's Illinois Synod.

At least five sons of First Church became pastors. I was ordained there in 1989. My brother, Jeffrey Linman, is pastor of a congregation he founded, Spirit of Joy Church, in Orlando, FL. Robert Munneke, retired in Minnesota, has been a pastor for fifty years, and is a dear friend of

our family, influential in inspiring both my brother and me in our pastoral vocational aspirations. The late Pastors Robert Dean Johnson and Carl Jacobson also called First Church home.

As a strong congregation with notable and strong pastorates, which also birthed a number of pastors, it is arguable that the presence of the Augustana tradition was deep and palpable, available perhaps in a kind of concentrated form, persisting even beyond the legal existence of the Augustana Church and manifested in the collective personality that has been the congregation's own character and ethos.

### **The People and Mentors**

The Augustana tradition was mediated to me most principally through relationships with people, namely family members, pastors, other members of the church. One who contributed greatly to the centrality of the life of faith in my life and that of my family was my paternal grandfather, Salmer Linman. He knew significant suffering, having lost to death two wives, his first at the birth of my father. He also lost his right arm and part of his left hand in a farming accident when he was over 70 years old. Yet Salmer was a person of deep faith, a lay leader who befriended the pastors of First Church, and took care of widows through the gifts of fruits and vegetables from his garden. Though largely unschooled -- he only completed the eighth grade -- he was a poet who composed inspirational, sacred poetry for various family and church occasions.

My father, Gerald Linman, was interested in going to college and then to seminary after his return from serving in the army air corps during World War II. He chose another route, though, married and worked various clerical jobs in our hometown. Like my grandfather, dad is a person of deep faith who contributed greatly to my faith formation and that of my brother, Jeff. The fact that his two sons are pastors suggests the significance and depth of his faith formational role in our lives.

Rosa Fillman was a parish worker at First Church who served as office secretary, but quite significantly as a lay minister attending to many and various pastoral needs of the congregation. Rosa never married, so she was in our eyes a bit nun-like, a person of deep, abiding, and authentic faith, something of a mystic perhaps. Rosa worked closely with children and youth, and was acolyte trainer, instilling in me a sense of reverence at the altar, carrying in her manner the spirit of the opening of the Augustana liturgy, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory."

Then there are the influential Augustana pastors. I knew Nils Bengtson in his retirement as a supply pastor. On those occasions when he supplied at First Church and I assisted him, I recall his kindly regard and interest in my emerging sense of call to ordained ministry. Gerald Molgren was a Bishop's Assistant in the Illinois Synod of the LCA when I was in candidacy, and a kindly presence in gently challenging my emotional growth. Herb Carlmark, also one of the Assistants to Illinois Synod Bishop Paul Erickson, was one who cared enough about me and about the church to hold my feet to the fire, goading me also toward greater maturity, particularly in the wrenching years after my mother's death to cancer. Herbert Ekerberg, mentioned previously, married my parents when pastor at First Church in Monmouth in 1947. Long after he retired, both my brother and I sought him out as a mentor and father-figure for our ongoing vocational

discernment when we were in seminary. Raymond C. Swanson was the First Church pastor who baptized me. I remember his kindly, quiet presence, his stunning white hair and his and his wife's above-and-beyond-the-call-of-duty pastoral care for our whole family during times of crisis.

But the pastor I need to focus on is Gerald Youngquist, the last person ordained in the Augustana Church, and pastor at First Church during my teen years and into my young adulthood who confirmed me and was a sponsoring pastor for my candidacy and present at my ordination in 1989. Pastor Youngquist was the one educated in the Augustana tradition who had the most direct, formative role in my life for growth in faith and also in my vocational discernment.

I cannot help but wonder how the voices and perspectives of Augustana Seminary professors and text books assigned during his seminary years were subtly but significantly present in the sermons he gave, in his Bible Studies and confirmation instruction. I wonder about the indirect formative presence of professors like G. Everett Arden and A. D. Matson in my life and thinking via the preaching and teaching of Pastor Youngquist. Is my own socially progressive stance, for example, in some measure the fruit of Matson's teaching and presence evident in the teaching and witness of Pastor Youngquist? I know that in my own sermons and lesson plans for teaching I can footnote those occasions when my own seminary teachers are speaking through my voice and words. Surely this was also the case for Pastor Youngquist and the other influential Augustana heritage pastors I have known.

As we inevitably stand on the shoulders of those who have taught us when we engage in our own teaching and preaching ministries, we experience the reverberating formative effects of the voices of the saints echoing throughout the centuries as the apostolic faith is passed on.

### **Ecclesiological DNA and Bringing the Seed to Blossom**

There was enough of the core of the Augustana ethos present and persisting in these sources -- the people, my home congregation, the ongoing reverberations of tradition itself living in them -- for the creation in me of something akin, perhaps, to theological/ecclesiological/spiritual DNA, a DNA in keeping with the Augustana ethos. This DNA I carried with me pre-consciously into the arenas of my more explicit, formal and intended pastoral formation in seminary and internship and then also in my first call. Outside and long before my experience of the seminary classroom, in conversations, in manners of being, in personal relationships, in the cumulative effects of congregational teaching and preaching, in the whole gestalt of incarnate churchly life, seeds were planted in me that rather naturally, organically would result in a tree that looked rather like Augustana and bear fruit in keeping with the Augustana ethos.

Furthermore, this spiritual DNA made for proclivities, and attractions, such that in the course of my explicit formation for ministry, I sought out, again in large measure pre-consciously, people and mentors who would confirm me, as it were, in my nascent, emerging identity and help bring to blossom the seeds planted earlier in my life. Years later, my formation being focused in the seminary classroom, the mentors to which I was drawn were not Augustana folk at all, but their teaching messages and styles in certain crucial respects were in keeping with the Augustana ethos. Augustana cannot claim to have an exclusive corner on the market of the particular

features of its churchly identity; other strands of Lutheranism to be sure also embodied important characteristics of Lutheran identity along with Augustana, though arguably not in the particularity of the constellation of Augustana's ecclesiological charisms.

Some of the mentors whom I would identify as helping to bring to blossom seeds planted earlier: the late Professor Walter Bouman, Bishop Donald McCoid, Dr. Lowell Almen, Pastor John Cochran. Walter Bouman, his own heritage rooted in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, is one mentor I want to draw special attention to and to honor: at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Walter helped to bring to flower my passions for liturgy, Lutheran confessional theology, ecumenism and the wider church, a public theology focused on the benefit of the wider society, a living faith that makes all the difference between life and death. Bishop Donald McCoid, of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod where I served a congregation, taught me loving, holistic, balanced churchmanship; Dr. Lowell Almen, Secretary now retired of the ELCA, has mentored me in the interdependent ecclesiology of the ELCA and in a passion for ecumenism; Pastor John Cochran, a mentor in urban ministry in Pittsburgh, nurtured my pastoral spirituality, introducing me to the Lutheran monastery in Oxford, MI, itself rooted in Church of Sweden heritage.

It is impossible in a brief presentation and in fact even in the most involved scholarly study to trace comprehensively the many and various formative influences that result in a particular pastoral identity. But these musings do allow for greater appreciation for the ways in which the hand of God in the power of the Spirit nurtures the emergence of servant leaders with unique constellations of gifts in keeping with their heritage and faith traditional communities of origin, and this through the means of earthly, ordinary relationships in the communion of saints. As each of us has genetic material in our flesh from previous generations, traceable back centuries through means such as the Human Genome Project, so too each of us arguably and in parallel fashion has inherited personality, cultural, and in this case, ecclesiological traits passed on from one generation to the next. This process transpires with a certain sense of mystery, but it is also the stuff of recognizable, ordinary life, again, the people, places, events that when it is all said and done make us who we are.

### **Implications for Passing on the Heritage**

These musings also inform how it is we might more intentionally pass on the best of our heritage to future generations. Here is some of what I have learned:

- Do not discount the power of ordinary “apostolic succession” evident in a broad understanding of the communion of saints, especially those local saints with whom we have had relationships, the pastors, teachers and family members whom we count as dear who have shared with us the apostolic faith.
- Take seriously the formative effects of the “hidden curricula” extant outside of the classroom, the place where we typically focus our efforts on the passing on of faith. That is to say, we also teach and contribute to formation in friendships and ordinary relationships in the church and elsewhere in what we say and in how we say it in the whole fabric of our lives. This wider arena arguably contributes as much as or more to formation than published curricula, particularly in terms of our initial formation. Hence the importance of mentors, both being mentors to others and seeking out mentors.



- Do not underestimate the formative power of the cumulative and long-term effects of congregational preaching and teaching. We may assume that people are not listening carefully or that it is not soaking in, but then before you realize it, people show up who are coherently formed in the tradition!
- Be clear, articulate about and confident in the charisms, the gifts of our particular identity in the Christian tradition. Such confidence is attractive, and thus formative. Lutherans have a tendency, it seems to me, of not trusting the strengths of our heritage, and then anxiously seek elsewhere for the messages and evangelical styles we would offer in conversation with our wider culture.
- Deep and mature faith speaks for itself. Thus, the first order of business in seeking to pass on the tradition is the cultivation of a vibrant faith life among God's people in our church.
- And we do well to confess with thanksgiving that the Holy Spirit is active in all of this, continuing in the church and among her saints to "call us through the gospel, enlighten us with God's gifts, make us holy, and to keep us in the true faith" (adaptation from Luther's explanation to the third article of the creed, Small Catechism). This formative work is not finished; rather it continues in earnest today as always.

So the Augustana Heritage Association gatherings are not mere occasions to reminisce about bygone days. They are part of the Holy Spirit's ongoing work in continuing to raise up people of faith and leaders for today's church and that of tomorrow through the sharing of what is best in our heritage as an expression of apostolic faith. The gatherings and the publications resulting from them, for example, have certainly helped to confirm, reinforce and solidify my own pastoral and faith identity rooted in the Augustana tradition.

The heritage, the ethos of the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, with its combination of attractive qualities -- firmly rooted confessional theological identity, dignified liturgy emerging from deep spirituality, a sense of our interdependence as a church beyond local preoccupations, social ministry and justice concern, an ecumenical spirit, a willingness to give itself up for wider Christian unity, a global focus, a heart for evangelism, a passion for youth and young adults -- all of this in balanced combination I daresay is most certainly needed, and arguably quite attractive to young adults, in the church today in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century mission field. The Augustana tradition is a great gift worth passing on.

### **After Thought**

I said at the outset that my reflections are deeply personal. At the time of writing this essay for the June 2010 gathering, I have been delighting in being a father of a fifteen month old son, Nathan (after my own name, Jonathan, and the middle name of my paternal grandfather on the Swedish side, Salmer Nathanael, and my favorite biblical prophet, not to mention the Swedish Archbishop, Nathan Soederblom, who made such an impression on the Augustana Synod during his visit to the United States). The delight is in watching Nathan's own unique personality continue to emerge, wondering what he will be drawn to, what his interests will be (the ones with staying power), what God is calling him to be and to do. But part of the wonder, too, is knowing that one way or another, even if Nathan differs radically from me in many respects, the apple does not fall that far from the tree. So I am curious, and we shall see: what features of the Augustana ethos will Nathan show forth in his life in coming years and decades?