

The *Five Faith Commitments of Augustana College*: Proactively Expressing the College's Roots with Today's Students

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The *Five Faith Commitments of Augustana College*, unanimously adopted by the Augustana College Board of Trustees in May of 2004, represent Augustana College's commitment to honor its roots as the college of the Augustana Lutheran Church, but in a way that meets today's students where they are. The *Five Faith Commitments* are more than a sentimental retrospective on the College's relationship with the Church. Instead, it is a proactive document reflecting five fundamental values of the Augustana Lutheran Church, as applied in the 21st Century.

During the process of developing the *Five Faith Commitments*, the College was confronted with the issue of what it means to be a church-related college. Roald Tweet, Professor Emeritus of English, has written and spoken about how Augustana "lives with a hyphen." Part of "living with a hyphen," Dr. Tweet argues, is struggling with the hyphen. He writes:

"Church-related" is even more ambiguous than Swedish-American. Does the phrase imply that Augustana is trying to distance itself from close ties to the church, or does it imply that the College is trying to hold on to that relationship? Grammar texts are no help. One says the hyphen implies separation, another that it unites.¹

Part of "living with a hyphen" is to understand that the relationship is respectful of our history and is, at the same time, dynamic.

Though Augustana, like other church-related schools, will continue to wrestle with the hyphen in the years ahead, the adoption of the *Five Faith Commitments* strengthens the tie between the Church and the College in a way that will enable the College to achieve its mission of helping students grow in spirit as well as mind and body.

Brenda Barnes (then chair of the Augustana College Board of Trustees), upon my appointment as the new president of the College, challenged the College community to be more deliberate in describing its relationship with the church. Consistent with Barnes' request that the College be more deliberate in its description of the relationship with the church, I pledged in my inaugural comments that the College will "cherish" its

¹ Dag Blanck and Michael Nolan, *On and Beyond The Mississippi: Essays Honoring Thomas Tredway* (Rock Island: Augustana Historical Society, 2004), page 4.

relationship the Church “as we engage in a dialog about the nature of our connectedness.”²

Over the years, the College’s relationship with the church had changed. Gone were the days when the majority of students and faculty were Lutheran. Over the past 15 years, several chairs of the College’s Board of Trustees were not Lutheran and the College modified its constitution to eliminate the requirement that the president be Lutheran. The campus ministries paid staff at the College is now decidedly ecumenical. And over the past few years, though the college chaplain has always been a member of the ELCA, the associate chaplains have been Roman Catholic and Disciples of Christ. And though the College once viewed the Church as its endowment, the church’s contribution to the college’s budget had diminished from about 20% of the budget to less than a quarter of 1%.

Despite these changes over the years, the College’s connection with the church remained an important one. Augustana’s own survey found that nearly 70% of the members of the faculty and administration believed the College’s relationship with the church was important. The College’s Strategic Plan, unanimously adopted by the Board of Trustees in January of 2005, explicitly reaffirmed the College’s relationship with the Church when it stated that the College is “enriched” by its relationship with the Church “and the ecumenical traditions of ELCA higher education.”³

The initial work of developing a statement describing the connection with the church was assigned to the College’s Campus Ministry Committee. From the outset, the Committee explored the relationship between the faith of our founders and the values of the College. The Committee wrote:

Augustana’s founders joined scholarship with religious zeal They dreamed of communicating a faith that would renew people’s lives and energize the church. Many dedicated their lives to this dream. And, as scholars from the great Swedish universities of Uppsala and Lund, they brought high intellectual standards to that task. When they established a school for ministers and teachers, they insisted on academic as well as religious training. Bergendoff describes Augustana’s founders this way: Embracing “deep religious faith,” they “believed that there is an inseparable connection between faith and knowledge” and they built that belief into the institution that became Augustana.

After developing an initial draft of the *Five Faith Commitments*, the Campus Ministry Committee sought comments from the College community. Many mistakenly feared that the Five Faith Commitments signaled that non-Lutherans were to have a lesser role in the mission of the College than Lutherans. To address these concerns, the *Five Faith Commitments* document was modified to expressly recognize that the College “welcomes faculty and staff, regardless of creed, who will advance our mission and the College

² Steven C. Bahls, Inaugural Address: Liberal Arts Education and Courageous Servant-Leadership (Oct. 10, 2003)

³ Authentically Augustana: A Strategic Plan for a Premier Liberal Arts College (2005).

celebrates the diverse contributions they make to our mission.” Professor Tom Christenson, of Capital University, observes that non-Lutherans can (and often do) carry the Lutheran yeast into the dough. Dr. Christenson is correct that the task of maintaining Lutheran identity is the responsibility of all – Lutherans and non-Lutherans.⁴

The Campus Ministry Committee, in developing the *Five Faith Commitments*, explored how the heritage of the Augustana Lutheran Church and its relationship with its colleges might guide today’s relationship. In the end, the College explored five primary values of the Church and related those values to its continuing commitment to the church. Those values are:

- Encouragement of personal piety and life-shaping spirituality
- Commitment to higher education as a place where faith and reason challenge and enhance each other
- Understanding that all human efforts are aspects of the understanding of vocation
- Commitment to ecumenism and the worth of all persons
- Commitment to social consciousness, world missions and servant leadership

Each of these values is reflected in the *Five Faith Commitments*.

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

Herbert W. Chilstrom in his essay, “What Was/Is Augustana” identifies the important role of personal piety in the Church.⁵ Lyman T. Lundeen elaborates on what “personal piety” means in his essay, “The Piety and Polity of Augustana.” He writes that while piety does not mean a rejection of formal worship, it does mean a personal religion. He writes:

Augustana’s piety can be called “piety with theological substance.” It consists of a faith in God, or a trust in God, that includes an emotional component and is very personal. . . . God has a will and purpose; God wants to talk to us; God speaks; and God feels with us. These are things that are personal. So the piety of our heritage makes a theological claim about God at the very outset where it is stressing the religion of the heart, expressing its concern for personal holistic religions.⁶

⁴ Tom Christenson, *The Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress 2004), page 14.

⁵ Arland J. Hultgren & Vance L. Eckstrom, *The Augustana Heritage: Recollections, Perspectives, and Prospects* (Chicago: Augustana Heritage Association, 1999), page 3.

⁶ *Ibid*, page 17.

The importance of personal piety has long been recognized at the College. An early catalog of the College, in a rhetorical flourish not typical of catalogs in those days, put it this way:

A decidedly Christian character pervades the whole Institution' – all this furnishes rare influences for religious and moral training. The young mind breathes an atmosphere of piety, the influences of which will hover around him throughout his life.⁷

The first Faith Commitment recommits Augustana to provide a number of vehicles to encourage all students to develop a piety “the influences of which will hover” around our students throughout their lives. This includes strong Campus Ministry programs, with a range of opportunities for worship and spiritual reflection. The College is committed to model behaviors consistent with a life that is faith-filled, ethical and examined.

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

President Conrad Bergendoff, in his October 1, 1936 inaugural address, emphasized that faith and reason are not inconsistent with each other. He said:

“A liberal education does not exclude the scientific method, but it includes methods necessary in the discovery of more profound truths. It includes, if it be a Christian liberal education, the method of faith, for the attainment of the highest of all truths.⁸

The College's seventh President, Dr. Thomas Tredway, wrote about the relationship between faith and reason in the classroom. He wrote that there are no “Christian courses of study, no Christian geology, no Christian literary criticism.” He then noted that Christian faculty members at Augustana enrich student learning by bringing “insights arising from his or her Christian thought and experience to bear upon the discipline being taught and studied.” Nearly twenty-five years ago, Dr. Tredway wrote:

Most of the ideas, issues and events that make our college in Rock Island so interesting do not come simply from either Athens or Jerusalem. They arise in the complex net that is the life of this and any institution, and they are usually subtle and tricky. I hope, though, that it is useful for us to recall that our classical heritage is the source of our commitment to our principal mission: The liberal arts education of thoughtful people; and that it is our Christian heritage that reminds us that even these, our highest ideals, are subject to the judgment of God.⁹

⁷ Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Augustana College and Theological seminary for the 1883-1884 academic year, page 43.

⁸ Conrad Bergendoff, “The Faith of Augustana,” *I Believe in the Church: Confessions and Conviction* (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern) 137-38.

⁹ Augustana Alumni Magazine, 1982.

The second faith commitment solidifies Augustana's commitment to help all students, regardless of denomination, wrestle with the ways in which faith and reason challenge and enrich each other. It does so by providing a faculty committed to helping students lead the "examined life" by exploring their values and beliefs. To do so, Augustana commits to maintaining a strong Religion Department, requiring a course in Christian traditions.

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.

Schools within the Augustana tradition, like most schools within the Lutheran tradition, encourage students to reflect on their vocational calling. Professor Ernst L. Simmons describes Luther's views on the relation of vocation to work as follows:

According to Luther, one relates to God through faith and to one's neighbor with love. What this means then is that vocation belongs exclusively to *this* world. For Luther, we do not exercise our vocation in order to please God or gain entrance into the world to come, but rather, following the Hebraic emphasis, vocation is for this life and done primarily for the neighbor.¹⁰

Professor Simmons explains that an important role for Lutheran colleges is to assist students in seeking their vocational calling. He writes about how colleges should help students explore vocation, recognizing that many "see no connection between faith and their choice of career, major and so forth." He writes:

We do (students) little service in either their vocational or faith understanding if we simply repeat back to them the dualistic answer they seek . . . A more complete understanding of Christian vocation would permit the relating of faith and career in a dialectical fashion, as all faith is related to life. This, in turn, would begin to provide a basis for transcendent critiques of the values of our society and one's place within it.¹¹

The third Faith Commitment reaffirms the importance of offering guidance to students in developing a sense of vocation. Much of the work will be done by the College's Center for Vocational Reflection. In addition, the College recognizes that those who find their vocational calling are often called to be servant leaders. Augustana is committed to help students develop the qualities of servant leaders within the community, church and world.

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

¹⁰ Ernest L. Simmons, *Lutheran Higher Education* (Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 1998), page 40

¹¹ *Ibid.*, page 47 – 48.

Norman A. Hjelm, in his essay, *A Journey toward Unity: Augustana, the Lutheran Communion, and Ecumenism*, aptly describes the commitment of the Augustana Lutheran Church to ecumenism. He believes that Dr. Conrad Bergendoff was one of the church's most prominent leaders in that commitment.¹²

Augustana's faith, of course, is embedded in its name, the Latinized version of the German word, "Augsburg". The Campus Ministry Committee at the College, in its description of the *Five Faith Commitments*, puts it this way:

The Augsburg Confession invited reconciliation among divergent views rather than emphasizing exclusivity. When Swedish immigrants to the United States formed their own national Lutheran church body, they named it the Augustana Synod after the Augsburg Confession. The document's conciliatory approach shaped the strong ecumenical spirit found in the Augustana Synod (which gave its name to the College).

From the early days of Augustana, the College's leaders recognized the need to welcome individuals from beyond the Lutheran faith. Our second president, T.N. Hasselquist, wrote that "openly and honorably we can confess that we cherish a very healthy openheartedness both in relationship to other Christian denominations and to contemporary culture as well as learning in general."¹³

The College's fourth president, Gustav Andreen, expressly welcomed non-Lutherans. During his years, the College Bulletin said that the College, though Lutheran, is not sectarian. It went on to say that the College's "original scope, which was that of a school for the education of ministers of the gospel, has from time to time been broadened, until now the institution . . . aims to prepare, directly or indirectly, for all occupations and professions, by giving the general cultural or special training which modern conditions require."¹⁴

Augustana's fourth Faith Commitment continues the College's historical commitment to ecumenism; in part by expressly celebrating God's regard for the worth of all persons. The College expressly encourages collegial dialogue among people of different faiths and cultures, even in moments of disagreement. Augustana Campus Ministries offers programming that is ecumenical and interfaith, but in a way consistent with the Lutheran traditions in higher education.

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

¹² Arland J. Hultgren & Vance L. Eckstrom, *The Augustana Heritage: Recollections, Perspectives, and Prospects* (Chicago: Augustana Heritage Association, 1999), page 165, 175.

¹³ Conrad Bergendoff, *Augustana . . . A Profession of Faith: A History of Augustana College, 1860 – 1935* (Rock Island: Augustana College Library 1969)

¹⁴ Augustana College Bulletin

The Augustana Lutheran Church, from the moment of its founding, embraced the Biblical injunction of Micah 6:8 to seek justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God. The Augustana Lutheran Church has an early and proud tradition of involvement in global mission, including early mission commitments in China and India.¹⁵

The fifth Faith Commitment continues the Church's and College's shared commitment to global mission, but in a more expansive way. Today, we show our care and commitment to the world by recognizing that it is an evolving global village. The College commits to join with others to make the world a more livable place for all persons. Likewise, the College is committed, through its various offices, to work toward global peace and justice.

But our commitment also needs to be local. The College is committed to encourage everyone to model responsible stewardship of resources and develop policies that embody the ideals of justice, peace, civility and love. This includes what we do in our own institutional practice. We seek to develop fair and just policies as we relate to each other and the surrounding community.

Measuring the Effectiveness of the *Five Faith Commitments*

One of the purposes of the *Five Faith Commitments* was to stimulate a discussion of what it means for Augustana to be a Church-related college, as well as to develop a common language as the College expresses its church-relatedness. The process of creating the *Five Faith Commitments* generated several well-attended discussion sessions and hundreds of written comments. As important, the relationship with the church became a topic of conversation in both faculty lounges and in the board room. During that process, the College learned that it needed to continue to foster an on-going dialog about the importance of the relationship with the Church. A survey of faculty, taken at the time the *Five Faith Commitments* document was under discussion, revealed that only 54% felt that they were knowledgeable about the Lutheran expression of higher education.

Because the relationship between the College and the Church is a dynamic one, the *Five Faith Commitments* serves as a starting point for further discussions. Members of the Augustana community will continue to describe the relationship in different ways, though there will be important common threads in the explanation. The Commitments recognize that each member of the Augustana community possesses different talents and passions, so each will advance the *Five Faith Commitments* in different ways. The College takes pride in the richness and complexity of our self-understanding, and is a good steward of the Lutheran tradition of valuing plurality.

If one examines the *Five Faith Commitments* carefully, one cannot help but see the “fingerprints” of multiple constituencies on the *Commitments*. One could argue that because the *Five Faith Commitments* were subjected to the shared governance process of the College and were a product of consensus, that the *Commitments* were not as

¹⁵ Arland J. Hultgren & Vance L. Eckstrom, *The Augustana Heritage: Recollections, Perspectives, and Prospects* (Chicago: Augustana Heritage Association, 1999), page 193 – 242.

aggressive in strengthening the relationship with the Church as they might have been. I look at it differently. To the extent that the *Five Faith Commitments* will not have a significant impact unless most employees of the College can be persuaded to advance the *Commitments*, it was necessary to develop a consensus in which most members of the community had a personal stake. Through the drafting and redrafting process, 86% percent of faculty members and administrators came to agree that the *Five Faith Commitments* advanced the College. And, when asked about each of the commitments, no more than 8% of faculty and staff disagreed with any of the five individual commitments.

The consensus supporting the *Five Faith Commitments* was not obtained at the price of lack of specificity or low ambitions. When comparing the *Five Faith Commitments* with the ELCA's *Our Calling in Education: A First Draft of a Social Statement*, one can not help but conclude that the *Five Faith Commitments* is a much more specific (and in some ways a more aggressive) statement of the connection between the College and the Church.¹⁶ In most of those areas where the *Five Faith Commitments* are more specific and more aggressive, it is due to the influence of the Augustana Lutheran Church. The *Five Faith Commitments* makes a stronger statement about the importance of ecumenism, social consciousness, world missions and servant leadership than found in the ELCA's *Social Statement*.

The evidence is clear that Augustana, because of how its faculty and staff interpret our mission, has a dramatic impact on the lives of almost all of its students by helping them find their vocation. About 45% of our first-year students think it is important that they develop a meaningful philosophy of life; but upon graduation 80% believe that it is essential. For many, the Lutheran expression of higher education has helped them develop a philosophy of life influenced and enhanced by spirituality. We also know that only 34% of the College's first-year students say it is important to them to influence social values, but by the time they graduate, the percentage increases to 76%. For many of these students, the programs that emanate from Augustana's church-relatedness helped them explore and develop a passion for their vocation. Though Augustana's students are of many faiths and will find different vocations, they will be bound together as persons who have been inspired during their years here to be passionate about justice, love kindness and act with love and humility.

I believe that our founders, if they were to consider the *Five Faith Commitments* within the context of today's students and today's society, would be proud of the College. They would find in the *Five Faith Commitments* strong evidence of Martin Luther's views about vocation. They would recognize the College's mission to help students not just to develop academically, but to grow in mind, spirit and body. Lars Esbjörn, our first president, would be proud to discover from the *Five Faith Commitments* that the College has not separated itself from worldly concerns, but is engaged in the world. President T.N. Hasselquist, the College's second president, would not be surprised to learn that his commitment to ecumenism has flourished at the College. Dr. Bergendoff would see that

¹⁶ ELCA Task Force on Education, Church in Society, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Our Calling in Education: A first Draft of a Social Statement* (Feb. 2006)

Augustana remains a profession of the faith of our founders in a dynamic, and therefore relevant, way. And Dr. Tredway would be pleased to find that the *Five Faith Commitments* support the College's faculty in continuing to encourage students to wrestle with the relationship between Athens and Jerusalem, right here in Rock Island.

The Augustana community has reason to be proud that we are making the benefits of the Lutheran expression of higher education available to all – Lutherans, Catholics, Evangelicals, and other Christians, Jews and Muslims, and even those students with no professed faith. Just as its founders believed that both Americans and Swedes were necessary for the best faculty, they would be proud that today's faculty is religiously diverse, yet is united in a commitment to help students grow in mind, spirit and body.

In the words of President Gustav Andreen: “God has been with our fore bearers and with us their children. Surely He will also direct the footsteps of coming generations so they may walk upon his paths and accomplish His work.” The College believes that the *Five Faith Commitments* will be an important vehicle to help the coming generation develop a life-changing spiritually.

The Five Faith Commitments of Augustana College

1. Augustana College offers every student the opportunity to develop a life-shaping spirituality.

- Augustana funds and staffs a strong Campus Ministries program that encourages members of our campus community to explore spirituality in a variety of ways.
- Campus Ministries offers a variety of weekly opportunities for Christian worship.
- Augustana provides times and spaces for other forms of spiritual reflection by persons and groups, including a weekday time when the whole campus community can reflect and worship together.
- Augustana supports extra-curricular study groups which explore a variety of religious topics with intellectual rigor and honesty.
- Augustana, primarily through Campus Ministries, provides spiritual care and nurture, including counseling and mentoring, to the entire student body.
- Augustana seeks to model behaviors which are consistent with a life that is faith-filled, ethical, and examined. Members of the College community encourage each other to conduct their work, community involvement and interactions with one another in ways that demonstrate the centrality of these values.
- Augustana uses prayer and religious music at many of its central events, such as opening convocation, baccalaureate services, and commencement. This is done as an expression of the college's identity and not exclusion.

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

- Augustana's faculty members help our students lead the "examined life" by exploring their values and beliefs, while at the same time challenging them to act ethically.
- Augustana supports discussions of faith and belief both inside and outside the classroom.

- Augustana maintains a strong Religion Department, which offers courses in which religious beliefs and practices are evaluated in a critical, scholarly way. A course in Christian traditions is required of all students.
- In keeping with the Lutheran tradition of higher education, Augustana stimulates free inquiry and cherishes academic freedom on our campus.
- Augustana provides for ongoing campus conversations about the ways in which our Lutheran heritage and theological tradition shape our approach to faith and learning.
- Augustana's constitution provides that the President of the College be a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America or of a denomination to which the ELCA is related through ecumenical agreements.
- Augustana hires other chief administrators, regardless of creed, who support and will nurture the church-related mission of the College.
- Augustana welcomes faculty and staff, regardless of creed, who will advance our mission and the College celebrates the diverse contributions they make to our mission. Augustana has long recognized that Lutherans and non-Lutherans alike are important to advancing our mission.

3. 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.

- Augustana, with the leadership of its Center for Vocational Reflection, offers guidance to our students in developing a sense of vocation, including ways for students to test their sense of calling.
- Augustana helps our students develop qualities necessary for servant leadership in community, church, and world through incorporating service learning opportunities in the academic curriculum and in student life.
- Campus Ministries, the Center for Vocational Reflection and interested faculty members are resources to students who are discerning a call to active ministry in the church.
- Various offices at Augustana work with congregations and other faith-based organizations to provide learning opportunities for the church and community.

4. Augustana College celebrates God's regard for the worth of all persons.

- Augustana welcomes persons of all ages, genders, sexual orientations, races, colors, creeds, ethnic backgrounds, and individuals with disabilities, to participate fully in all aspects of college life. As such, recognizing that we learn from one another, Augustana encourages collegial dialog among people of different faiths and cultures, even in moments of disagreement.
- Augustana Campus Ministries offers hospitality and programming that is ecumenical and interfaith.
- Augustana works to maintain diversity within the professional and student staff of the College, including Augustana Campus Ministries.
- Augustana recognizes and supports the formation of groups by students from different Christian traditions and from different world religions by providing a welcoming academic community, spiritual advisors, and appropriate space for worship and reflection.

5. Augustana College encourages the development of a campus community which seeks justice, loves kindness, and acts with love and humility.

- Augustana joins various local, national, and global efforts to make the world a more livable place for all persons.
- Augustana, through Campus Ministries, the Center for Vocation Reflection, and the Freistat Center for World Peace, makes students aware of ways to serve with faith organizations and other groups that advocate for justice and peace.
- Augustana seeks to embody the ideals of justice, peace, civility and love in our institutional practices and relationships. To that end, Augustana seeks to develop fair and just policies in how we relate to each other and the surrounding community.
- Augustana models and encourages its faculty, staff and students to model the responsible stewardship of resources.
- Through curricular and extracurricular activities, including its Center for Ethics, Augustana serves as a resource to inspire the community to discuss issues of ethical significance.

