

## 2015 Report to ELCA Synod Assemblies

Augustana, like many colleges, has struggled with what it means to be church-related. Professor Emeritus of English Roald Tweet has described how Augustana “lives with a hyphen” by nature of being “church-related.” Part of living with a hyphen, Dr. Tweet argues, is struggling with the disparate elements of our identity and the ambiguity in their relationship. He writes: *Does the phrase (church-related) 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.*

Part of “living with a hyphen” is to understand that the relationship is respectful of our history and is at the same time dynamic. Ten years ago, I asked our campus ministries to engage the Augustana community in a discussion about what it means to be associated with the ELCA. The Campus Ministry Committee developed a document called Five Faith Commitments, which explore how the heritage of the Augustana Lutheran Church and its relationship with its colleges might inform 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:

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

Each of these values is reflected in the Five Faith Commitments, a document that has served Augustana well, not least in its importance as a foundational element of the college’s strategic planning. Now 10 years old, the Five Faith Commitments soon will undergo a review to find how the document might even better encompass and advance the mission of a church-related college in the 21st century.

At this moment in our history, I believe colleges are well advised to ask how “living with a hyphen” impacts the chaplaincy. At Augustana, there are four important ways it is shaped by campus ministries and our two co-chaplains:

1. The office of chaplain is more central than ever in connecting the campus with the mission of the college.
2. Colleges and universities should look for new ways to integrate the work of the chaplaincy with the life of the college, including career advising.
3. Colleges and universities should meet students where they are—through ecumenical and interfaith outreach.
4. Colleges within a denomination should take the leading role maintaining ties with their denomination, instead of leaving it to the church body.

Admittedly, times of financial leanness—both for denominations and colleges—can put significant stress on the hyphen in church-relatedness. During these times, the role of the chaplain becomes more important than at any time in the last 50 years in leading our colleges forward. A thoughtful chaplain working with the president can help the college go out on a limb to harvest new fruit for our changing student body, and tend to the health of our denominational roots.



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