
Learning From One Another

LSTC Launches a Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice

by Jan Boden

On September 21, LSTC will inaugurate a Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice. The Center will provide cultural and educational opportunities in which Christians, Muslims and people of other faiths will come together for mutual enrichment, understanding, healing and wholeness.

The center's first conference, "Christians and Muslims Together: Owing Our Pasts – Visioning the Future" will be held at LSTC and the Chicago Cultural Center September 21 – 23.

A Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice is the outgrowth of LSTC's efforts to build relationships with the Muslim community in Chicago over the last two decades.

It began during the 1984-85 academic year when Harold Vogelaar, then a visiting professor at LSTC, visited local mosques and initiated conversations and collaborations with other partners about Christian-Muslim relations. His efforts resulted in a conference in February 1985, which brought together members of the two faith communities for several days.

Five years later, when Vogelaar returned to LSTC, he and faculty colleagues David Lindberg and James Scherer started the Conference for Improved Christian-Muslim Relations. It was 1990 and the U.S. was involved in the Gulf War.

"Because everyone was interested in learning more about Muslims," Vogelaar recalled. "Groups sprang up all over Chicago."

Since that time, LSTC has offered courses that examine Christian-Muslim relations. Dr. Ghulam-Haider Aasi, a Muslim scholar, has team-taught courses with Vogelaar and others over the last 20 years. LSTC has also continued to develop good relationships with the Muslim community in Chicago, including the African American Muslim community.

Harold Vogelaar has been the impetus for LSTC's strength in Christian-Muslim studies and relations. As he moved toward retirement, LSTC wanted to find a way to

maintain and continue to develop its strength in interfaith and Christian-Muslim relations. One way to do this was to establish an endowed faculty position in Christian-Muslim studies.

President Echols and members of LSTC's advancement staff were aware of a Lutheran couple who had a strong interest in Christian-Muslim relations. They met Vogelaar when he presented an adult forum on Christianity and Islam to their congregation. When they met him again at an LSTC event, they discussed their interest in interfaith relations with him. They invited Vogelaar to submit a proposal for funding to them.

"They encouraged me to 'be creative and think big,'" Vogelaar said.

"The Center will be a resource for the whole people of God."

—President James Kenneth Echols

He did that, envisioning an endowed faculty chair and program funding for Christian-Muslim studies.

In response, to his proposal, the couple encouraged Vogelaar to consider providing learning opportunities for a wider audience by holding workshops and conferences on Christian-Muslim relations.

The couple, Gerald A. and Karen A. Kolschowsky and the Gerald A. and Karen A. Kolschowsky Foundation have provided gifts to establish a Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice, to support the Center's programming and administrative costs and to establish the Harold S. Vogelaar Chair of Christian-Muslim Studies and Interfaith Relations.

"This is a critically important issue in ministry today," said Mark Van Scharrel, vice president for advancement. "Even in small Midwestern towns we interact daily with people of various faiths. Those doing ministry need to have a place to gain respect, understanding and appreciation of

other faiths. This Center at LSTC has very practical applications.”

A Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice will periodically host guest speakers at LSTC. It will also sponsor conferences and workshops where members of the two faith communities can meet one another in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect to address issues of concern to both groups. LSTC and the Center will work with the ELCA on establishing a consultative panel similar to the ELCA's longstanding panel on Jewish-Lutheran

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–Harold Vogelaar, director of A Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice

relations. As needed, the Center will provide orientation programs for church workers and others who are going to live in primarily Muslim countries.

President Echols commented, “The Center allows LSTC to move with strength in this area – both in the classroom and beyond. It will be a resource for the whole people of God.”

“I hope that what we are trying to do is to move beyond just crisis-to-crisis intervention,” Vogelaar said. “There is no substitute for face-to-face learning. It’s no longer learning about, but learning from.”

Christian-Muslim relations is considered an emerging area in Christian theological education, and LSTC is leading. Vogelaar sees LSTC building on its strengths through the Center. “LSTC is rooted in the gospel, strongly rooted there,” said Vogelaar. “Because we’re rooted we can be open and hospitable to other faiths.”

For more information about the Gala Inauguration of a Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice and details about the opening conference, see sidebar and visit www.lstc.edu.

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Errata: On page 8 of the Winter 2006 *Epistle*, Gordon S. “Tim” Huffman, Jr., a summer session instructor, was incorrectly identified. The name above is correct.

Inaugural Gala and Conference for **A Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice**

Christians and Muslims Together
*Owning Our Pasts –
Visioning the Future*

September 21 – 23, 2006

at the **Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago**
and the Chicago Cultural Center

September 21 Gala

at LSTC

Reception – 4:30 p.m.

Inauguration of A Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice

Welcome of the Harold S. Vogelaar, Professor of Christian-Muslim Studies and Interfaith Relations

Affirmations by ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson

Donors acknowledged, honored and celebrated

September 22 Conference

9:00 a.m. – 12:20 p.m. at LSTC

Presentation by Dr. Willem Bijlefeld with response by Bishop Kenneth Cragg

Workshops led by Drs. Riffat Hassan, Carol LaHurd, Robert Schreiter, Mahmoud Ayoub, Malika Zeghal, Nelly van Doorn-Harder, Ayesha Mustafaa, Mark Swanson, Marcia Hermansen, Roland Miller, Scott Alexander, Ghulam Haider Aasi, Lewis Scudder

5:00- 9:00 p.m. at the Chicago Cultural Center

Maghrib Prayers

Middle East Music Ensemble

Presentation by Dr. Vincent Cornell

September 23 Conference

9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. at LSTC

Workshops

Presentation by Dr. Frederick Denny

Plenary Panel

*All events are free – advance registration is requested.
Reply by phone to 773-256-0755 or ccme@lstc.edu.*

Detailed information available at www.lstc.edu.