Muslim-Christian Conversation in Action

By Daniel Ruem
Staff Writer, The Concord

"Last Thursday, November 8th, the Global Missions Institute and Luther Seminary co-hosted an interfaith dialogue entitled "Muslims and Christians Together in a Time of Crisis: Faiths Seeking Understanding." The event was held in the OCC Chapel of Incarnation and attended by some 300 people. President David Tiede opened the evening by asserting that "this is a conversation that needs to be held with discipline, care, and understanding."

The Rev. Susan E. Tjornehoj was the event moderator. She introduced the panel which consisted of Dr. Mark Swanson, Head of the Islamic Studies Department here at Luther, Karen Jenkins, a longtime student of Islam, Clareen Menzies, a Muslim woman who is Director of Development and Communication, the City, Inc., and Dr. Hamdy El-Sawaf, the head of the Islamic Center of Minnesota. Each spoke briefly and then the time was handed over to audience questions. The audience and panel were aided by a team of students from the Luther Seminary Islamic Studies Program who tirelessly selecting questions from the hundreds submitted.

Dr. Swanson opened with a strong message of unity, saying, "we have always been together and we intend to remain together. We reject the idea of a war between Islam and Christianity. We reject any denigration of one another’s faith. The lies, hatred, and attacks—all of this we reject."

Swanson ended by quoting a verse from the Koran, which stated that God could have made us all one community, but chose not to. Therefore we should strive with one another in doing good "for God you shall all return." (Koran 5:48).

Karen Jenkins said that one of the most impressive things she had learned about Islam is its adherence to community values.

“If you want to know what Paul meant when he preached about community,” Jen-

Continued on page 6

Jazz for JUSTICE!

By Jaimie Wilson
Special to The Concord

“Both jazz and oppressed people are still on the journey toward liberation. Both are constantly growing in depth, adaptability and self-understanding. Both are constantly evolving and adapting, coming to prosper and flourish in a world which would not have them; or have them merely as an amusing alternative. Both are obtaining new heights and winning over even those who would persecute them most.” — Miguel de Jesus, Jazz and Justice

On November 9, 2001, the Lutheran Human Relations Association (LHRA) sponsored Jazz for Justice, a powerful statement about justice in the context of twenty-first century Lutheranism. The event, hosted by Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church of Minneapolis, brought together the innovative jazz of Happy Apple, a local trio, with an awareness of justice issues within the Lutheran community.

The highlight of the evening was the presentation of the "Mind of Christ Award" to Rev. Anita Hill, Pastor at St. Paul-Reformation, a congregation of the ELCA. The award was presented in recognition of Hill’s work in many areas of social justice issues, especially her participation in the struggle against racism and her active role supporting the inclusion of gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender people in the Christian community.

LHRA is an independent organization promoting social justice and integrated diversity within congregations, Lutheran church bodies, and society. Hill, a past president of LHRA (1994-95), served on the organization’s Board of Directors from 1989 to 1995.

Concord On the Inside

On the Web @ www.lutherseminary.edu/Concord

What can we at Luther learn from a prof. at Oral Roberts University? Some thoughts from a student regarding “Living in God”
Letters to the Editor

See, we really do read the comments you submit to us online!

Here's what readers had to say in response to Brad Lindberg's rant about greeters at Wednesday Chapel services here at the sem:

To Greet or Not To Greet
Whoo, Bradley slow down. There are a lot of things out there in the world that are going to cause you consternation, let's not bunch Chapel greeters with them. If you are uncomfortable with someone welcoming you to worship, then perhaps you should spend a little more time on your knees reflecting on your course in life.

RANDALL HAAS
MDiv Junior

Sorry, Bradley, I can't agree with you on this one. Actually, I would like to be greeted every day to any worship service, but I don't expect the student body to furnish greeters every day. I just accept the greeting on Wednesdays and enjoy it for that day. I am thankful to those who have given of themselves to welcome us to our house of worship on the day when we feast at the table together. It's another way of setting that service apart from the other days.

RACHEL MUELLER
MA Senior

And see, some people actually do read the online version of "The Concord!" Here's what one had to say about staff writer Evelyn Weston's report on Heather Brown, the Luther intern at Salaam Arabic Lutheran Church in Brooklyn, New York:

Covering Pastoral Care
What a fabulous article, Evelyn! I'm so glad that Heather and Salaam's story is being told in the Lutheran Seminary community. It's a wide world out there and all of us need to be in touch with its far corners. Thanks!

KRISTIE HENNIG
MDiv Intern

And, finally, some folks had some things to say about managing editor Robert Smith's article on the most recent phenomenon in American cultural Christianity, The Prayer of Jabez:

More Thoughts on Canned Prayer
I can see a positive thing about the prayer. I'd interpret "enlarge my borders" as: increase my understanding, tolerance, perceptions, wisdom, etc. I think it could be a good antidote to the innate self-centeredness, tunnel vision and self-preoccupation of most humans. However, it's my experience and observation that when God begins to do that to us, we don't like it at all.

CAROL JOHNSON
Academic Secretary, Graduate Theological Education

Your title caught my eye as I have been debating whether or not to purchase and read this innocent looking little book. I had read the scripture passage, once I finally found it in my Bible, (Jabez wasn't in my concordance) and became suspicious. It seemed like guaranteed wealth in the commercial sense. I too have struggled through out my life as a Lutheran with prayer. One of my struggles was, if I believe enough in my prayer why didn't I get the car I was praying for? I don't think you are so unusual a Christian to be uncertain about prayer. I have spent much time searching for answers about prayer. I took an undergraduate course, went to workshops, read books, and tried praying using cue words people had given me (i.e. P.R.A.Y.—Praise, Reflect, Ask for others, ask for Yourself) I did find some of this helpful but generally discovered that the more I prayed the more it made sense and the more I received. Of course I didn't always receive in the worldly sense but I learned not to always ask for worldly things. It's strange but the Holy Spirit really does lead you to pray and I don't need a mantra in the form of the Prayer of Jabez.

EUNICE WOODBERRY
MA Junior

Thanks to all of you who submitted your comments. Remember, log on to www.luthersem.edu/concord to access "The Concord" online and find the most convenient way to submit your letters and comments. As always, comments are also accepted in our mailbox in the Olson Campus Center, #702.

The Concord • 2

The Concord
A Journalistic Ministry of Students at Luther Seminary

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MDiv Senior

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MDiv Junior

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Readers are encouraged to interact with The Concord in a variety of ways. Articles and 'Letters to the Editor' are welcomed, as are less formal responses offered through our website. All submissions should include the author's name, telephone number and, if applicable, class standing. Submissions should be received in our mailbox in the Olson Campus Center (703), at our office, Cullixon 10, or by e-mail. The Concord reserves the right to publish, edit, or disregard all submissions.

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www.luthersem.edu/concord
It’s been a couple weeks now, but I still can’t believe it ... I passed my Catechism exam for Lutheran Confessions! Yippee! Maybe it wasn’t such a big deal for you, but this was one of the major points of stress in my poor, senior life these past months. I put it off until late in my Luther career and probably said a secret prayer or two for it to simply go away, but then I did it and it didn’t go nearly as poorly as I expected.

(And, oh yes, thanks to my grace-filled catechist!)

To tell the truth, I thought it was a silly requirement at first. Add to that the fact that I’m not a cradle Lutheran, a mari- nated Lutheran, a crock-potted-soaking-in- Melanchthon’s-juices Lutheran, or, as Charles Amjad-Ali likes to say, a DNA Lutheran.

But now (really) I see the value of the Catechism and the exam. Yes, Juniors, I’m serious.

However, this exam has the potential to symbolize and perhaps epitomize the best and worst tendencies of this school and the denomination the Christian community it intends to serve.

Memorizing the Small Catechism can be an opportunity for a student of the Reformation to be re-introduced to the timeless simplicity of the Gospel as articulated by Martin Luther, soli deo gloria.

As one works over every word and phrase of crystal clear biblical content and Luther’s poetic but concrete explications, one is given new levels of insight into the depth of the Word, the center of Christian proclamation and action.

But, preparation for this exam has the potential to be a time when the tradition is learned and rehearsed by rote, not for the sake of the Gospel, but for the sake of the tradition. As we all know (cognitively, at least) this makes a dead letter of the Gospel. These tendencies are held in similar ten- sion within the ELCA.

In its short life (it is just now entering its adolescence after all), this denomination has always been torn between progressive theo- logical application and pious sentimentality. The former gleefully chases toads all over the yard while the latter sits nicely, playing tea and munching on Saltines.

As hard as we might try, we just can’t seem to get it together. At times, it seems that (maybe, just possibly) our inconsistence- nes go deeper than mere issues of identity.

But get it together we must. A few weeks ago, I was in Oklahoma for a candidacy committee retreat. There was someone there who demonstrated how important it is for us to understand anew the peculiarity of our calling as Lutheran Chris- tians.

Our speaker for the weekend was a pro- fessor of pastoral care and counseling from (and I swear I’m not making this up) Oral Roberts University!

Following in his father’s footsteps, Ed Decker was ordained an Assemblies of God minister. Through a series of personal situations including divorce and clinical depression, Ed became estranged from the evangelical fundamentalist Christian com- munity.

In effect, Ed was told that God would not (could not?) accept him until he made himself acceptable.

During the course of the talks he gave to our group regarding pastoral care in con- gregational settings, he said, in effect, “We have something unique here! There are so many just like me who have been hurt by this kind of Christianity. You have to gather us in!”

Ed’s testimony of being lovingly accepted into a Lutheran Christian community to the point that he is now involved in the pro- grammed ministry of that community got me thinking about the possibilities that now lie before us.

But to realize the potential of the present, we must never allow ourselves to be mired in our past.

As we yearn for the future, we cannot rest on our collective laurels or be bogged down in those things that might be called our Lutheran heritage or tradition.

As we hear again and again, the volumes and volumes of learned discourse on Article IV are so much dried pulp when com- pared to the simple act of one follower of Christ forgiving another’s sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

We Lutherans—idiiosyncratic and cantan- kerous bunch that we are—have a unique perspective on the Gospel that nobody else can proclaim with as much vigor and excite- ment. It is this Gospel alone that is our tradi- tion.

And as Ed reminds us, we have exactly what people need. For Christ’s sake, get out there and give it to them!

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By Clint Schneklloth
Program Assistant, GMI

If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can warm me I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know of.

— Emily Dickinson

This justifiably famous quote of Dickin- son’s I learned first in a high school sopho- more English class. Our teacher, a loony man who loved poetry, would hand out base- ball caps from a box that he kept in his room. The whole class would wear them, and during the hour, if we read a poem that we liked (this “we” included, and usually meant, the teacher) we would “take our hats off” to the poet as a way of echoing what Dickinson had so aptly proclaimed. A good book indeed does something to you inside and out.

Unfortunately, during my reading years in classrooms in various places I have experi- enced a paucity of books that do any such thing. Lots of books are drudgery, simple arguments drug out into an interminable 150 pages in order to meet the book format; books that spend lots of time saying very little at all; books that seem to suck up lots of reading time in a morass of forgetting.

I here want to make a call for our com- munal reading of more great books. A

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By Robert O. Smith
Managing Editor, The Concord

On Reading Great Books

The Concord • 3

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Continued on page 4
The Frugal Seminarian

Looking for a special night out without a high cost? Many live performances are available in the Twin Cities, and students can get some pretty reasonable prices.

Rush Lines and Student Discounts

Many professional arts organizations have a rush line for those living frugally—like students—for tickets still available just prior to performance time. Depending on availability, the seats may not be great, and you may not be able to sit with your companion for the evening.

Below is basic information on some venues. All prices are per ticket. To what your appetite, I have noted some performances with a holiday theme.

• The Guthrie Theater, Minneapolis
guthrietheater.org, 612-377-2224
Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol, Nov. 16 to Dec. 30
Public rush: $12.50, cash or check only, 15 minutes before performance.

• Children's Theatre Company, Minneapolis
childrenstheatre.org, 612-874-0400
Dr. Suess' How the Grinch Stole Christmas, Nov. 14 to Jan. 5
Public rush: $11, cash or check only, 15 minutes before curtain.
• A Prairie Home Companion, Saint Paul
prairiehome.org, 651-290-1221
Garrison Keillor's live radio variety show, select Saturdays, 4:45pm
Public rush: $10, cash only, limit 2 per customer, 4:15pm on the day of show at the Fitzgerald Theater.

• Brave New Workshop, Uptown Minneapolis
bravenewworkshop.com, 612-332-6620
Satirical sketch comedy review, NOG! A Brave New Christmasawanakazukah, opens Nov. 21
Free improv performances: Tuesday 7:30pm, Friday 9:00pm, 2605 Hennepin location; 20-45 minutes of improv after the last evening shows at the Calhoun Square location.

• Minnesota Orchestra, Minneapolis
minnesotaorchestra.org, 612-371-5656

Subscription concerts: discounted $3 with a student ID.
Student rush: $10, limit 2 per student ID, one hour prior to performance.

• Minnesota Opera, Saint Paul
minnesotaopera.org, 612-333-2244
Student discount: 10% off (regular prices are $27 to $86).
Public rush: $20, 15 minutes before performance.

• TC Tix, downtown Minneapolis
tctix.com, 612-288-2060
Tickets to concerts and plays are available for up to 50% off regular prices. Purchase tickets in person at City Center on the day of performance. Performances available will be listed that day on their website.

An Invitation to Fine Reading

Continued from page 3

contemporary of Dickinson, H.D. Thoreau, famously said, "Read the best books first, or you may not have a chance to read them at all." As a seminary, we of course follow this policy as it pertains to Scripture. We read it first and hopefully often. But as Scripture, it stands in a place of primacy, and in a certain sense brooks no comparison. It is the norma normans of our reading.

If this is the case, then as a community centered in Scripture, we can and should read other books not in comparison to Scripture, but rather as a way of doing honor to, giving glory to, God's work in providing us with a book. So here are my positive proposals for how to read great books here in this place, lifted up in a spirit of irenicism by one who wholeheartedly and bodily loves reading.

1) Reading takes time to do well. Often the context of seminary requires that we work our way quickly through a large stack of texts. Although this helps readers into becoming acquainted with a broad range of works, it does not foster healthy reading practice. In fact, what it accomplishes is the exact opposite. The experienced futility of a group people leads to the philosophy that we need not read at all, or if we read, then skim. We should be expected to work hard at what we do, for seminary is indeed hard work, but that hard work should be spent in a worthwhile fashion. Positive proposal: assign what can be realistically read, and read well, and then expect good reading of what has been assigned.

2) Reading is an exercise in meeting the other. Mason Cooley, a famous American aphorist, said, "The privacy of reading frees us to entertain the alien" (City Aphorisms: Sixth Selection, New York, 1989). How absolutely true this is! In the academic context, the library stands at the center of the institution as the place where xenophobia is overcome, and alien works stand cover-to-cover. To truly read, and to read well, is to "entertain" the other's presence in your thought and life. To the extent that we forget this, books become tools in our toolbox rather than children who intrude in and stand in our midst, questioning and pondering. Positive proposal: assign books that truly push us, books that not only say something to the subject, but that turn the world upside down.

By Evelyn J.P. Weston
Staff Writer, The Concord

Public rush line: $15, 30 minutes before concert.
• Orway Center, Saint Paul
orway.org, 651-224-4222
Mark Twain's The Prince and the Pauper, Dec. 19 to Jan. 1
Student and public rush: prices vary ($15 for some), 15 minutes before curtain.
• Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Saint Paul
thespco.org, 651-291-1144

Subscription concerts: discounted $3 with a student ID.
Student rush: $10, limit 2 per student ID, one hour prior to performance.

• Minnesota Opera, Saint Paul
minnesotaopera.org, 612-333-2244
Student discount: 10% off (regular prices are $27 to $86).
Public rush: $20, 15 minutes before performance.

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The Concord • 4

Continued on page 6
Notes from the Parish Nurse

By Lydia Volz
Luther Seminary Parish Nurse
in partnership with Lyngblomsten

On November 15 we observed the Great American Smokeout. If you are still a smoker, think seriously of giving it up. Exposures to tobacco smoke, including second hand smoke, increases your risk of heart disease, stroke, asthma and cancer.

In October we observed National Breast Cancer Prevention month, but it is not too late to help reduce the effects of this disease by following the Screening Guidelines, listed below.

Who is at risk for breast cancer?
One out of eight women will be diagnosed with breast cancer during her lifetime. It is the most common cancer among American women, although more women die of lung cancer.

Women at increased risk are those with a personal history of breast cancer in a mother or sister. The risk increases with age; 77% of breast cancer diagnoses are made after the age of 50. Lifestyle risks that increase the incidence of cancer are: smoking, obesity and high fat diet, and a sedentary lifestyle.

The good news is that breast cancer is often treatable and curable if detected early. Many breast tumors are not cancerous.

Screening Guidelines
Women aged 40 and over should have a screening mammogram every year.

Women between the ages 20-39 should have a clinical breast examination by a health professional every three years. After the age of 40, women should have a breast exam by a health professional every year.

Women aged 20 and over should perform a breast self-exam every month.

What can you do to help?
Schedule a mammogram if indicated under the guidelines. Free or low cost mammograms are available through the Minnesota Breast and Cervical Cancer Program. Call 651-266-1216 and ask for Megan.

Become a Tell-A-Friend coordinator for the American Cancer Society. Call 8-10 women, who will remind 5 others to get the mammogram.

If you have any concerns related to cancer or risk reduction, please come and see me.

Thanks to all of you who stopped by for their flu shot on October 24. 125 persons were immunized.

If you would still like to have a flu shot, they are available at local pharmacies or at your clinic. Call first to find out when they are being offered.

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Living In God

By Chantsy Charles
MDiv Middler

This fall semester goes on as all my semesters have-with too much to do! One thing that has become neon bright and icy clear to me lately is that studying to live in the service of God-including life at seminary-can tempt me to be too busy to maintain my personal relationship with God. Jesus intended that we should live in Him and He in us. If we lose that foundation, we will be living out our agenda without knowing if it is also God's agenda. Unless/until this seminary intentionally facilitates it, you are on your own in this important area.

We are all trying to be faithful disciples when we come to seminary. We are all in a "called" relationship with God. Certainly, that relationship varies greatly from person to person. Almost as certainly, there are unknown techniques and habits that could enrich our current relationships with God. I am befuddled by the fact that only diaconal ministerial candidates are required to participate in spiritual development. I think we could all benefit from such an environment of nurture and accountability.

We are told we will need to be intentional about our spiritual lives to preserve our effectiveness (perhaps even our sanity) when we get into a parish. The same is true about our lives during our time in seminary.

Therefore, I say unto you:

Remember
to schedule time to immerse yourself in "peace and quiet"
so that God can refresh you with His healing Word of love.

Remember
to schedule regular "alone time" so that you will discover, again and again, that you are never alone.

Remember to praise the Lord!
Amen.

The Concord • 5
3) Reading can be the basis for fruitful dialogue. Conversation often stops in our culture if one person says, “Have you seen Titanic?” and the other person says, “No.”

Books provide common ground for conversation. What is more, if they are read well they focus a conversation, for they do not change what they say, and since they do not, dialogue around a book must constantly go back to examining what the book actually said. For an educational context like the seminary, it is imperative that everybody gathered has read the book so that the common basis for dialogue is established. Positive proposal: Assign books, expect that we will in fact read them, and then provide adequate time for the discussion of, and use of, texts in class.

4) Reading, as a practice, requires focus and commitment purely as a reader rather than a learner. Reading is somehow different from learning. It is its own kind of doing and knowing. Virginia Woolf says,

Let us begin by clearing up the old confusion between the man who loves learning and the man who loves reading, and point out that there is no connection whatever between the two. A learned man is a sedentary, concentrated solitary enthusiast, who searches through books to discover some particular grain of truth upon which he has set his heart... A reader, on the other hand, must check the desire for learning at the outset; if knowledge sticks to him well and good, but to go in pursuit of it, to read on a system, to become a specialist or an authority, is very apt to kill what it suits us to consider the more humane passion for pure and disinterested reading (Hours in a Library, vol. 2).

What is striking about Woolf’s comment is how carefully she divides reading from learning. We do not read in order to take something away from the experience, but we read rather in order to read, so that we might become good readers.

If our approach to reading is utterly pragmatic, we lose sight of the artistry involved in reading, the space in which we dwell as readers, the value implicit in simply setting down to live with a text and see where it takes us, rather than what we take from it. Positive proposal: Read books selectively, but value the time spent in them as a valid practice in and of itself.

All of us could add to this list, but I believe, as a reader, in the spirit of a reader’s manifesto, that it is worthwhile to remind ourselves of these things, so that good books are not undeservedly forgotten, and bad books are called for what they are, as distractions and flashes in the pan, “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury— Signifying nothing.”

An Invitation to Fine Reading

Illustration by J. C. Suarès

An Evening of Dialog, Conversation

kinds offered, “watch a Muslim.”

Menzies explained how sad she has been since the attacks: “I’m sick of crying, it has been tear-jerking.”

Another observation was that “there has been a great deal of misinformation for a long time.”

The most compelling figure of the evening was also the most exhausted. After his long hours on the radio, at prayer services and educational seminars just like this one, Dr. Hamdy admitted: “It’s not easy to be in the hot seat all the time.”

In his opening statement he drew upon the analogy of a college course one might take—except this course was in life itself. “Life by itself is a test,” he said. “And God, Allah, is testing us to see who has done their homework for succeeding in this course of life.” He despised about the catch-up game we are playing in terms of knowledge of one another, and hoped for true reflection instead of reactions that lead to rage.

“This would make us plan for the future to fight this evil,” stressed El-Sawaf. “If we’re not good enough to fight this evil, then who will?” Dr. Hamdy clearly desired to stress the similarities of Islam and Christianit y instead of their differences: “Now we must be united. Christians, Jews and Muslims cannot do it alone. We must do it hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder. All are from the same source. Always remember: Unity culminates in humility, faith and life.”

There were several challenging questions from the audience. The panel answered each as a team, gaining support and insight from one another.

During a lighter moment in the discussion, Menzies addressed the question of gender inequality in Islam. “The Equal Rights Amendment is in the Koran,” she asserted. “You know—that thing we’ve been trying to pass here for years?” As one example she explained how she could choose not to work as a Muslim woman. But if she does work she is not required to give that money to her family. If she does then it is called ‘charity to her husband.’ ‘So if there’s trouble, ladies, just give me a call and I’ll tell you what page it’s on!’” she laughed.

When asked about what Islam teaches about “a suffering God,” however, there was a difference of opinion about how to proceed. Dr. Hamdy asked, “Would it benefit us to know this? Would it guide us?” How would it narrow the gaps? Put these questions aside for a while - let us speak of God, and how the prophets came up with the same theme. Why hammer on the differences?” Dr. Swanson opined that it is important to do just that: “It’s probably good to be up front about the differences. There is a logic and integrity to both Muslim and Christian teachings.” He then answered the question and ending by saying “I think we learn from each other about these differences. We should be aware and straightforward about them.”

The evening began at 7:30 and after two hours of soul searching and education the audience seemed ready to depart. Those who did prematurely missed one of the highlights of the evening: the seminar ended at 9:30 with Dr. Hamdy reciting the first chapter of the Koran, al-Fatihah. His voice was strong and clear, causing much of the audience to close their eyes and hold their heads. The seminar did not answer all the questions about our faiths—but the dialogue has been joined in earnest at Luther Seminary. In the words of President Tiede, it has been undertaken “with discipline, care and understanding.”

The Concord • 6