

Faith Task Force Recommendations

Final Report

May 4, 2009

“The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’” (Luke 17:5)

“Faith is not the human notion and dream that some people call faith. . . . Faith . . . is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us altogether different . . . It is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. . . . Faith is a living, daring confidence in God’s grace, so sure and certain that the believer would stake his life on it a thousand times.” (Luther’s Works, Vol. 35, pp. 370–71).

“Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned.” (Paul Tillich)

The Faith Task Force engaged in a rich, deep conversation that has led to the following set of recommendations based on the Gustavus Adolphus College’s Strategic Plan.

The category of faith is an important lens to understand the unique vocation of Gustavus. All have concerns about how faith drives Gustavus. Some fear that Gustavus is losing its connection to the faith tradition that was a part of its creation and the nurturing of Christian faith in its students. For others there is anxiety that the College could become a place where free intellectual inquiry is more difficult because of a narrow definition of faith.

Our conversations lived between both of these concerns. The more we wrestled with this tension, the more we realized this tension is a strength. Gustavus actively seeks a “third way” through these concerns. The “third way” is different than a path to a sectarian future or a secular future for the College. We encourage an ongoing communal conversation about how our Christian, Lutheran, and Augustana-ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) heritage sets Gustavus free for its vocation of being a community of learning and service.

Given this natural tension it is our strong sense that, to engage the category of faith at Gustavus, two moves must happen at the same time. On the one hand, we need to acknowledge and receive the gifts of the Christian tradition that gave rise to this College and whose values continue to inform the work of Gustavus. Secondly, as our world grows more pluralistic, we must engage in the work of deepening our capacity for intra-Christian and inter-religious conversation, while recognizing that many participate in no faith tradition. We hope that our recommendations will attend to both of these dimensions of faith.

Inside our recommendations you will see that we distinguish between the work of the Department of Religion and the work of the Office of Chaplains/Church Relations. They have

different roles. One focuses on the objective study of religion and the Christian tradition. The other seeks to deepen the faith that Christians are called to by their God. Both seek to develop a mature understanding of faith.

Gustavus already has a rich set of assets when it comes to its value of faith. Students, faculty, and staff all bring their faith into the life of this institution. The beautiful chapel in the center of the campus is a reminder of the many places faith is nurtured in retreats, classes, concerts, the arts, solitude, lectures, Bible studies, service projects, engagement with Gustavus's Association of Congregations, communal worship, and one-on-one conversation. For Gustavus to live more deeply in its value of "Faith," the community must continue to discuss how faith has and will impact the unique vocation of Gustavus. The conversation must be sustained for the sake of the mission of Gustavus.

The recommendations are far from perfect or complete, but we hope that they will deepen the conversation about how to live out our value of "Faith."

Strategic Goal #4: Engage Faith to inspire understanding and lives of leadership and service.

Strategic Initiative 4.1: Challenge all students to develop a mature understanding of the Christian faith and a deeper sense of vocation and reflective practice.

Strategic direction plan by Chaplains' Office

Charge the Chaplains' Office to write a comprehensive strategic plan by the end of the 2009–10 academic year that directly addresses, among other areas, how to increase programs to nurture Christian faith among Christian students; that more clearly defines the purpose of daily chapel; that explores the best practices of all campus ministries with respect to forms of Christian expression in worship, including music; and that addresses the support level needed for student-led faith ministries.

We recommend that an increase in staffing and financial resources for the Chaplains' Office that would likely accompany such a comprehensive strategic direction plan be given serious consideration and priority.

Support for student organizations

Charge the Chaplains' Office and Dean of Students/Student Activities to explore the processes for permitting and providing funding for Christian student organizations and interreligious student groups.

National religious organizations

Develop a process and policy for approving the involvement of national campus religious organizations on campus.

Developing church leadership

Create a Church Leadership Program planning team (which could include alumni and local congregations), to be charged with developing a strategic plan by spring 2011 for developing church leaders by offering ongoing opportunities for exploring church vocations, exposing students to a variety of careers and leadership opportunities in the church; helping students explore how to connect their sense of purpose with leadership opportunities at Gustavus; and nurturing and supporting students wrestling with a sense of call.

Declining Christianity baseline of knowledge

Establish a task force by spring of 2012 to identify ways Gustavus can best address the observed pattern of a diminishing baseline of knowledge at the academic level by incoming students, so as to nurture in students a mature understanding of the Christian faith.

The task force could consist of representation from the Religion Department, Chaplains' Office, Office of Church Relations, Association of Congregations clergy, other clergy, and congregation youth leaders. This task force may identify program resources needed at the congregation level to support initiatives to formulate a better basic understanding of a student's own faith heritage and comprehension of the basic tenets of the Christian faith.

Articulation of Lutheran heritage

Charge a collaborative of the Bernhardson Chair, Chaplains' Office, Office of Church Relations, and Religion Department, during the 2009–10 academic year, to utilize existing College documents* to articulate the College's Lutheran heritage.

This would include clearly and succinctly stating what the College understands to be the theological roots that sustain it; the integral relationship between these theological roots and its character as a liberal arts institution; and the particular academic vocation this relationship implies for Gustavus Adolphus College. (*See addendum)

Lutheran heritage communications plan

Implement an ongoing communications strategy to publicize widely the College's understanding of its Lutheran heritage.

Upon completion of the Lutheran heritage articulation collaborative, the communication should be ongoing both within and beyond the campus community.

Orientation/training on Lutheran heritage

Provide orientation and training to empower all faculty, staff, and students to publicly articulate a common understanding of the College's Lutheran heritage tradition and create a campus-wide culture that lives out this understanding of being rooted and inclusive.

The suggested timeline for this recommendation is immediately upon the completion of the writing work by the Lutheran heritage articulation collaborative.

Lutheran heritage opportunities

Develop plans to celebrate and capitalize on upcoming anniversaries to strengthen the College's understanding of its Lutheran heritage.

Upcoming anniversaries: Augustana Synod 150th (2010), Christ Chapel 50th (2011), Gustavus Adolphus College 150th (2012), and Lutheran Reformation 500th (2017). This could be charged to a collaborative of the Bernhardson Chair, Chaplains' Office, Office of Church Relations, Alumni Office, and the President's Office.

Vocational exploration in Gustavus experience

Incorporate more opportunities that intentionally engage students in vocational exploration within the overall Gustavus experience.

A means to accomplish this would be engaging at least one member in each interested discipline/department to be trained by Center for Vocational Reflection staff at incorporating vocational reflection within their coursework or employment experience, and to have this trained faculty/staff member assist in training the other members of their department. A training plan by the Center for Vocational Reflection and identification of faculty/staff members from the interested departments for training should be established before the end of spring 2010. (See addendum.)

Financial sustainability for Center for Vocational Reflection

Establish funding for the Center for Vocational Reflection to ensure that the program eventually would be fully sustained by the College.

Dedicate additional funds toward expanding the Center for Vocational Reflection's work to the larger Gustavus community, especially alumni. During its brief existence, this program has generated scores of dialogues, lectures, and retreats to awaken students to lead meaningful lives. This funding and possible pursuit of an endowment honors the College's commitment made to the Lilly Foundation and should be available by the completion of the current grant period, which may be in 2010.

Collaborative of Center for Vocational Reflection, Church Relations, Chaplains' Office, and President's Office

Establish an official collaborative for faith, vocation, and community engagement by affirming the work being done by the Center for Vocational Reflection, Church Relations, Chaplains' Office, and President's Office.

This planning collaborative will meet regularly to knit together schedules and visions, and to address strategic planning initiatives and systematically enhance/expand faith ministries together.

Servant leadership

Weave the philosophy and practice of servant leadership into the ethos of Gustavus so that it becomes the regional center for servant leadership among colleges and universities.

This builds upon the College's history of developing church leaders and a broader practice of developing servant leaders. A planning team should be created by the end of 2011 academic year to develop an implementation strategy. (See addendum.)

Campus-wide daily sabbath

Reaffirm the practice of campus-wide personal or communal sabbath time from 10 to 10:20 a.m.

As other colleges have moved away from daily chapel and as societal pressures increase from a seemingly never-slowng lifestyle pace, the daily chapel time at Gustavus is an immensely valuable resource for the community by allowing everyone to find time for reflection and renewal no matter their spiritual tradition. This will be successful when the majority of people on campus view this time for reflection and renewal rather than time for eating, having meetings, or completing work. Create a task force in 2009–10 academic year to explore opportunities and communication needed to bolster the idea of a campus-wide daily sabbath.

Engaging men in faith community

Charge the Men's Leadership Team, Center for Vocational Reflection, and Chaplains' Office to explore strategies to intentionally mentor Gustavus men in faith exploration and leadership.

This addresses the disproportionate involvement of men compared to women regarding campus initiatives on faith development. (See addendum.)

Faith programming physical space

Launch a feasibility study to explore a physical location to meet the need for additional on-campus programming, staff office, retreat, and worship space.

As Gustavus seeks to be rooted in its Lutheran heritage and welcoming to all, this has resulted in an ever-increasing demand for a variety of campus faith programming. (See addendum.)

Strategic Initiative 4.2: Develop and sustain an interfaith culture and habits of interfaith dialogue (intra-Christian and interreligious dialogue).

Tenure Line in the Religion Department for World Religions

Create an additional tenure line in the Religion Department for a World Religions position.

Currently 9 of the 10 tenure lines in the department are positions in Christian theology, ethics, and scriptures. The current need for this position has been filled by a series of one-year term appointments. The tenure line would provide a more long-term approach to meet the demand from students for the department to expand course offerings in other traditions and would allow

for the hiring of the best quality candidate who could engage more thoroughly questions of interreligious dialogue. The additional tenure line should be established within the next two years.

Interreligious conversations and experiences

Establish an atmosphere that engages students and faculty in interreligious conversations and experiences.

Measureable goals should be established in collaboration by the Inter-Faith Workgroup, Chaplains' Office, Center for Vocational Reflection, Office of Church Relations, and Religion Department to accomplish this objective over the next two years.

Pastoral care for non-ELCA Christians and non-Christians

Survey self-identified non-ELCA Christian and non-Christian members of the Gustavus community to gain a better understanding of the support needed for these students, and develop a support strategy utilizing on-campus student resources and/or network with off-campus resources.

Responsibility for this effort should be centered in the Chaplains' Office, working in cooperation with the Diversity Center.

Intra-Christian observances

Endorse the ongoing work of the Chaplains' Office to coordinate intra-Christian observances on campus and in Christ Chapel.

Encourage the Diversity Center or student groups to take the lead with consultation (if needed) by the Chaplains' Office for non-Christian religious observances on campus.

Dietary needs

Provide for dietary requirements of various groups on campus during holy days and times of fasting.

Measureable goals should be established in collaboration by the Inter-faith Workgroup, Chaplains' Office, Diversity Center, and Dining Services to accomplish this objective over the next two years.

Theologian fellowships

Create an exchange and fellowship program for Lutheran and non-Lutheran Christian theologians from other countries with Gustavus's Religion Department faculty.

This may include residencies by visiting scholars, hosting specialists in inter-religious dialogue, creating reciprocal relationships with international communities, hosting academic conferences, or inviting speakers to address the issue of religious pluralism at a church-related college. This program will be successful when we have secured funding for no less than one fellowship and one faculty exchange per year.

4.3 Strategic Initiative:

Develop Gustavus's relationship to regional, national, and international Lutheran congregations as centers of faith and lifelong learning and venues for learning, artistic performance, and student recruitment.

International non-curricular exchange program

Create an international exchange program for students and faculty with Lutheran missions, congregations, and schools in other countries.

This program could be specifically targeted toward those countries where the Lutheran Church is experiencing rapid growth. This program would be considered successful when Gustavus faculty and students are teaching and studying in these countries, Gustavus is hosting students and faculty, and Gustavus is graduating students from these countries.

ELCA congregations' needs

Identify the differing needs of ELCA congregations in metro, rural, and out-of-state areas and create a mutually beneficial partnership between the College and the greater church community by having the Office of Church Relations develop appropriate strategies to match resources of Gustavus with congregational needs.

Daily Chapel to broader community

Explore ways to make Daily Chapel more easily accessible to on-campus community members, alumni, and congregations.

This may include podcasts or a DVD series that could be shaped for a target audience with additional guided reflections.

Christ Chapel physical space

Conduct a full assessment of needed upgrades to Christ Chapel, being mindful of all ADA accessibility issues and in keeping with the original architecture of the structure.

In an effort to make Christ Chapel, as a physical space, as welcoming and hospitable to all as possible, this may include expanding the narthex to create space for small receptions, pre- and post-event fellowship, and disability-accessible bathrooms; remodeling or expanding the basement to be more useful for its mission, programs and storage; and assessing the technical needs to include possible updates to dedicated lighting, the sound booth, and sound system.

Performing arts venue

Construct a separate space designed specifically for large music performances and/or speakers who require multi-media technology.

Christ Chapel as a performance space should not be considered a permanent solution to the need for a large scale concert hall/performance space on the campus because using Christ Chapel as public space can create dilemmas for some in the Christian community who hold this to be only sacred space for worship.

Retreat Center accessibility

Remodel the Gustavus Association of Congregations Retreat Center to be disability-accessible so as to be accommodating to all retreat participants.

Retreat staffing and space

Expand staffing and retreat space either on or off campus to continue to grow outreach efforts to engage students, faculty, staff, alumni, congregations, youth, and others as a form of learning and growth.

Currently more than 1,500 high school students and 600 adults use on campus facilities annually for overnight and day retreats coordinated by the Office of Church Relations, and the demand for this resource continues to grow.

Website

Enhance the current Church Relations/Chaplains' Office websites to create more robust opportunities to engage with the faith dimensions on campus.

As the efforts to build a world-class website for the College unfold, incorporate a means to enhance relationships and communication between regional, national, and international Lutheran congregations.

Gustavus prospective student recruitment

Increase opportunities for prospective students to come into contact with Gustavus by increasing the Gustavus presence in ELCA congregations and building stronger partnerships with rostered leaders and alumni in ELCA congregations to actively recruit students to Gustavus.

This will involve an active collaboration with other ELCA institutions to educate the parents and prospective students in ELCA congregations about the benefits of attending an ELCA-affiliated college.

Support of Christian clergy

Develop resources for the ongoing professional development and support of Christian clergy, with special emphasis on resources and support for young clergy, senior pastors, and pastors in transition.

This initiative is successful when the ELCA synods and seminary partners recognize and recommend the Gustavus professional development of Christian clergy resources to pastors in need of such resources and those pastors actively using the provided resources.

Faith conference

Evaluate the proposal for Gustavus to host a large conference on faith for Lutheran congregations and the broader Gustavus community.

This conference could be in conjunction with the Association of Congregations or stand alone. This could provide spiritual growth opportunities for attendees and strengthen ties between the College and the congregations. This conference supports the Board of Trustees' goals for lifelong learning and may enhance student recruitment. Determination of a sponsoring entity/individual should be identified by 2012.

Addendum to Faith Task Force Recommendations:

Better Articulation of Lutheran Heritage

Among the already existing documents from which to draw for this purpose, we suggest the following:

- *Academic Bulletin* of Gustavus Adolphus College (see "Mission and History"; "Requirements for Graduation," esp. "Liberal Arts Perspective Courses," and "2. Biblical and Theological Studies [THEOL]");
- "The Third Path: Gustavus Adolphus College and the Lutheran Tradition," by Darrell Jodock;
- "On Nobel Conferences and Lutheran Higher Education" (excerpt), by Mary Solberg;
- Strategic Plan of Gustavus Adolphus College, April 25, 2008;
- Strategic Initiative 4.2, "Develop and sustain a culture and habit of interfaith dialogue." A Report by the Inter-religious Dialog Working Group, January 12, 2009; and
- *Lutheran Higher Education in North America*, by Richard W. Solberg.

Communication Plan of College's Understanding of Lutheran Heritage

Some ideas we wondered about for a communication strategy included:

- Preparation of written (brochures, flyers, glossy pamphlets, etc.) and audio and/or visual media (CDs, DVDs, Web materials, etc.) for general public, and especially for prospective students, congregations, and potential donors.
- Dissemination through Offices of Admission; Marketing and Communication; Church Relations; and President.
- Preparation of faculty, staff, and students, equipped with materials to disseminate, to speak and/or facilitate conversations about these themes before a variety of audiences, including public and parochial school students and guidance counselors; congregations, Lutheran and other; communities of other religious traditions; junior colleges; conferences and meetings of public and private (including religious) organizations.

Increase Incorporation of Vocational Exploration in Gustavus Experience

Additional ideas we wondered about for incorporating vocational exploration in the Gustavus experience:

- In cooperation with the First-Term Seminar (FTS) program, train, and recommend all FTS faculty to develop monthly reflective practices within their FTS class.
- Develop a required sophomore retreat helping students identify and connect their passions reflecting on connecting these to academics, service, leadership, and vocation. The content of this retreat would include concrete ideas and theories, opportunity to practice reflection, and development of a service plan within their course of study in something they “love.”
- Venues for opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to reflect, focus, and meditate could be Christ Chapel, the Arboretum, a proposed meditation garden, or a designated meditation space.
- The Chapel service itself could offer occasions for silence or meditative worship through Taizé and familiar forms of liturgy.

Embed the Concept of Servant Leadership into Ethos of Gustavus

We would like to suggest the following as relevant ideas for consideration by the Leadership Workgroup:

- Collaborate with organizations such as Greenleaf or the Spears Foundation to become one of their collegiate centers for Servant Leadership.
- Provide opportunities to explore life purpose and meaning and the interconnectedness of who a person is with what a person does. This includes deep reflection and questioning for those with a desire to honor God with their labors.
- Sponsor an annual Servant Leadership conference for practitioners to network, witness, and model best practices.
- Actively participate in the broader dialogue of the ongoing evolution of Servant Leadership as it connects with the needs of the world.

Outcomes for the Gustavus community include but are not limited to:

- Strengthened purpose of the College.
- Promotion of Gustavus as a national Servant Leadership Resource.
- Graduating responsible young people who live with a sense of purpose and an increased interest in honoring God with their labors.
- Enhanced collaborative work with outside institutions to promote increased learning opportunities for students, staff, alumni, and friends of the College.
- Increased alumni interest, connection, and engagement with Gustavus by giving back to an institution that supports life values.

Engaging Men to Increase Involvement in Gustavus Community

We offer the following as relevant ideas for Student Affairs and the Men's Leadership Team to consider:

- Offer annual inter-generational retreat(s) for men's development in areas of leadership, service, vocational reflection, and faith.
- Establish mentorship training for faculty, staff, student, alumni, and/or clergy.
- Develop a mentoring structure resulting from the annual retreat that provides yearlong mentorship opportunities.
- Similar to the Womyn's Awareness Center, provide a physical, dedicated safe space for men to engage in conversation and service relating to issues surrounding men today.
- Expanding servant-leadership initiative could also be used to engage men.
- Hire, within the Student Affairs division, a Gender Issues director to:
 - provide structure, support, and resources for student-led initiatives.
 - advise both Men's Leadership Team and Womyn's Awareness Center.
 - cultivate methods to create a community of learners that includes faculty, staff, and students.

Increase Physical Space for Faith Programming

The following are relevant ideas for the Board of Trustees to consider:

- Combined office space for the Office of Church Relations, Chaplains' Office, and the Center for Vocational Reflection (including space designated for sacristans, apprentices, SLP, organists, vicar/interns, etc.)
- Neutral worship space
- Music practice room (piano, organ, etc.)
- Library for liturgical music
- Offices for student organizations (including, but not limited to Proclaim, Prepare, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Gustavus Youth Outreach, Explore, Newman Center (Catholic student organization), Church Leadership, etc.)
- Lounge area for small-group discussions, Bible studies, learning/discernment circles, etc.
- Retreat Center for large groups (such as confirmation groups, Elderhostel, adult church groups, other non-church groups, etc.)
- Dedicated meditation space
- Small prayer chapel
- Library/computer lab for church leadership, service information, discernment
- Garden and columbarium
- Meeting rooms for on- and off-campus groups
- Kitchen area/café

Increase Interreligious Conversations and Experiences

Below are examples that might help accomplish the goal of interreligious conversations and experiences.

The following ideas had support without disagreement from the Faith Task Force:

- Facilitate discussions and training for new faculty/staff orientation and ongoing development to foster understanding regarding one's faith and that of others in the community
- Develop a "Faith Speaks" forum as an annual interreligious conference, addressing a core human experience from the perspective of different faith traditions. Examples: "Faith Speaks to Violence," "Faith Speaks to Grief."
- Create January Interims that focus on interreligious dialogue
- Create staff support structures to cultivate the habit of interfaith awareness and dialog on and off campus
- Evening seminars and programs, including guest speakers from different faith traditions

The following additional ideas had general support, especially surrounding the general education and understanding of the campus community regarding different religions. Concern from some members of the task force focused on the use of Christ Chapel for non-Christian religious practices and observances.

- Secure funding for off-campus visits to places of worship
- Celebration of non-ELCA Christian and non-Christian events and holidays
- Sponsor periodic Interfaith celebrations in daily Chapel or on campus