



Old Main Chronicle

Division of Humanities, Religion, and Social Sciences

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Division Note

The Liberal Arts, A Cri de Coeur

By: Cole Thompson

Welcome to the inaugural newsletter for the Division of Humanities, Religion, and Social Sciences. With this publication we hope to inform the McMurry community and prospective students of our passionate commitment to McMurry's hundred-year tradition of advancing the Liberal Arts.

Much as the ancient Greeks conceived the Liberal Arts, we believe in educating McMurry students as whole persons. We believe, throughout their lives, our students will need not only career-specific skills but also the knowledge and moral judgement to flourish as friends, spouses, parents, and members of a democracy.

We believe proficiency in written and spoken language enriches a person's life. We believe a knowledge of history, politics, and sociology are essential to thrive in our culture and to counter the current trends of incivility, corruption, and dictatorship. We believe students benefit profoundly from courses of study in God, spirituality, and the meaning of death. Oh, and empathy and compassion, we hold these to be fundamental values, regardless of anyone's corporate alliance or professional achievement.

To be clear, we do not advocate that everyone should major in the Liberal Arts, but we do contend that knowledge of humanities, religion, and social sciences can crucially complement a student's curriculum and prepare them for a more rich and full life.

This newsletter will inform our readers of our faculty's and our students' scholarly interests and accomplishments---and perhaps of their creative work. We hope to publish at least three issues each academic year. Ala Cumba!

Adventure's Call

By: Aubrey Carr

English and Psychology Double Major

Husband, how I love you!
I know your footsteps at the door
And the way you love adventure:
You're always seeking more.

I know you don't act stupid
In the risks you choose to take.
My greatest fear in life
Is choices that might a widow make.

Oh, how you love adventure!
I see it gleaming in your hazel eyes,
At the edge of a cliff,
Over rough waters at sunrise.

It's there when you are speeding,
Down that empty highway
Or when you choose the steep path,
Instead of going my way.

This fear, it must be silent.
You are the man I love.
Oh, how I hope an angel
Protects you from above.

I fear the day there are footsteps,
When I know they are not yours.
I dread looking through the peephole,
To see an officer at our door.

"I regret to inform you"
Are the words I cannot hear,
Because you loved adventure.
Come home to me my dear.



The Parliament of the World's Religions: Not Simply Kumbaya and Warm Fuzzies

Dr. Mark Waters

Professor of Religion

Chair of the Division of Humanities, Religion, and Social Sciences

The Parliament of the World's Religions met August 14-18 in Chicago. Our theme was "A Call to Conscience: Defending Freedom and Human Rights." The first Parliament was held in 1893 and did not reconvene until 1993. Since then, Parliaments have been held in Chicago (1993), Cape Town (1999), Barcelona (2004), Melbourne (2009), Salt Lake City (2015), Toronto (2018), virtually (2021), and again this year in Chicago. Along with students and faculty from McMurry, I've participated in four convenings. Kofi Annan's words, "More than ever before in human history, we share a common destiny. We can master it only if we face it together" reflect a central motive of Parliament meetings and the work that results between gatherings.

This year, over 7000 people from approximately 80 nations representing 200 religious, indigenous, spiritual, humanist, and worldview traditions came together at McCormick Place Lakeside Center with a fantastic view of Lake Michigan. We attended plenary sessions featuring internationally known speakers and break-out sessions on 100's of topics of interest.

McMurry University and the Abilene Interfaith Council (AIC) came together to send a group to the Parliament. Dr. Angela Nicolini Starr, Linda Goolsbee, and I represented the AIC. The Rev. Dr. Philip LeMasters, the Rev. Dr. Russell Miller, Anthony Avina, and I participated in behalf of McMurry. Dr. LeMasters, McMurry religion professor and Orthodox priest at Abilene's St.

Luke Orthodox Church, led a breakout session entitled, "Human Rights and the Quest for Peace in Orthodox Christianity." The three of us from the AIC presented a panel named, "Navigating Obstacles: Interfaith Work in the Buckle of the Bible Belt."

In the interest of the Parliament's "call to conscience," I want to devote this article to clarifying stereotypes and explaining positive motivations of the interfaith movement.

First, a frequent stereotype is that one has to sacrifice or water down one's own religious convictions in order to participate in interfaith cooperation. This is absolutely not the case. The central operating principle of the Abilene Interfaith Council and of interfaith work at McMurry University is what we call "civic pluralism." This philosophy is derived from Interfaith America's working definition of "pluralism" which is "respect, relationships, and cooperation for the common good." We add the modifier "civic" because the term pluralism is easily misunderstood due to multiple usages of the word in religious studies.

Civic pluralism means that any person of good will, holding almost any worldview, can engage in respect, relationships, and cooperation for the common good across lines of religious difference. It boils down to being a good neighbor and cooperating to alleviate social ills. People of most religions, worldviews, and secular perspectives can behave in this constructive way because of their worldview, not by watering it down. People do not have to agree theologically or even have a theology in order to practice the Golden Rule.

A second, almost comical stereotype of interfaith work, is that it is a bunch of old hippie-types gathering for a superficial love fest, pretending that genuine religious differences do not exist, and singing Kumbaya. I have to admit that this phenomenon happens occasionally and happened more frequently in the past. It is a stereotype because there is some truth to it. There is nothing wrong with feel-good, Kumbaya meetings, but they typically involve no real cooperation for the common good outside of their own group. These gatherings usually do not lead to interfaith "work."

Finally, a third stereotype is that interfaith work is confined to academics or professional

practitioners of different faiths engaging in "dialogue." Now, dialogue and mutual understanding are extremely important and can lead to positive outcomes. I value dialogue and teach a course at McMurry called "Dialogue with the Other." However, the stereotype in this case is that the interfaith movement is mostly about dialogue. We earned this stereotype because, historically, this was largely the case. Some well-intended people still refer to the movement as "interfaith dialogue." I used to do the same. I have started being very intentional about using language like "interfaith collaboration," "interfaith work," or "interfaith movement" to emphasize a broader vision. We are not going to accomplish much that is productive if we confine our efforts to dialogue, especially if such dialogue is limited to professional clergy and religious studies professors.

These stereotypes bring us back to the Parliament of the World's religions. All three stereotypes above could be found among some people participating in Parliament events this year and in the past. Nevertheless, the Parliament, as a catalyst of a movement, is seeking to grow past these stereotypes. This year's theme, "A Call to Conscience: Defending Freedom and Human Rights," is a clarion call to positive action. The meeting was definitely not set to the tune of Kumbaya. We learned about and were encouraged to go home to create helpful ways to address troubling issues like the degradation of women around the globe, climate change, the threat of extremist religious nationalism which is gaining steam across the planet, the marginalization of and bigotry toward various people groups, and more.

How can these things happen locally? The Abilene Interfaith Council is working on a strategic plan with intentions of being more active in the community through service and allyship. McMurry's efforts are represented by BRIDGE (our interfaith steering committee) and Better Together, a student organization. These organizations are intended to further McMurry's mission to challenge students [and all of us] "to examine our complex world from multiple perspectives in preparation for lives of leadership, service, and professional success."

Christian Ministry Student Luke Mendez Visits Harvard Divinity School

Luke Mendez is a Christian Ministry major in McMurry's Department of Religion and Philosophy. He is discerning plans for seminary and, afterward, the Episcopal priesthood. The week of September 19, he participated in DivEx, an all expense paid program at Harvard Divinity School (HDS) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. DivEx is a deep-dive into the ethos and offerings of HDS. Here is Luke's story.

My journey through the Diversity and Explorations Program (DivEx) at Harvard Divinity School was an absolutely incredible experience. I had the privilege of meeting 36 remarkable individuals who are undoubtedly the future trailblazers in the field of theological studies and research. Words cannot adequately express the depth of their character and the lasting impression they left on me.

Despite having only three short days to get to know one another, our cohort formed an incredibly tight-knit bond. Initially, I was nervous about the experience, fearing that I might feel out of place among a group of students with privileged backgrounds, far removed from my small-town Texas roots. To my pleasant surprise, the people I encountered, including professors and staff, were not only humble but also remarkably knowledgeable in an astonishing range of subjects. Their brilliance and passion for their respective areas of study were truly inspiring.

What struck me most about this diverse group of individuals was their rich tapestry of backgrounds, spanning race, gender, sexuality, and faith traditions. As

a queer Christian myself, it was refreshing to find kindred spirits who shared my experiences and perspectives. Our collective goal was to create more inclusive and peaceful communities, not only within the Christian faith but across the board.

Within our cohort, we had members from various faiths, including Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, agnostics, atheists, and many more. This diversity served as a constant reminder that, despite our differences, most of us shared a quest for a deeper understanding of the divine and all of us shared a passion for religious studies. It was truly remarkable to witness the power of their voices and stories, and over the course of our time together, these individuals became my second family.

I owe it to Dr. Waters for encouraging me to apply for Harvard Divinity's DivEx program. It has been a life-changing experience, one that has broadened my horizons, enriched my perspective, and connected me with a community of like-minded individuals committed to making the world a more inclusive and spiritually impactful place.



Dr. Stephen Hardin's Speaking Engagements

On Friday, November 3, 2023, I will once again be speaking at "Dobie Dichos" in the historic community of Oakville, Texas. The annual event (always the first Friday in November) celebrates the life and legacy of folklorist J. Frank Dobie (1888-1964), a proud native of Live Oak County. Texas author W. K. Stratton captured the essence of the event:

Being a part of Dobie Dichos was without question a high point in my literary career. There was something at once magical yet very real about gathering with so many good people under a starlit sky in a clearing in the Brush Country to celebrate one of the important voices of Texas literature.

I will be speaking on Dobie's unpublished (and I might add, rather bawdy) "Piss & Vinegar" Collection.

So if you find yourself in South Texas, consider throwin' in. The chili will be well-seasoned, the music spirited, the speakers sprightly, and the fellowship sensational. You could find worst ways to spend a Friday night.



Communication Studies Major Beginning Fall 2022

Mary Anna Kidd Communication Studies Department Head

Communication studies scholars are often asked "what do you teach?" The answer is not as simple as one might think. Communication studies is both an art and a science. Rhetoric and public speaking are often placed under the Humanities umbrella and date back to ancient Greece and Rome. However, many of the modern disciplines such as intercultural communication and organizational communication are social sciences using scientific methods to develop theories and analyze content. The new Communication Studies major here at McMurry University embraces both.

Joel Whittemore and I were tasked with rebuilding a communication major when I started here Fall 2018. We began with a Communication Studies minor in Fall 2019 before the pandemic put the launch of the major on hold. In addition to research conducted by the Hanover group, a survey was sent to McMurry Communication alumni to get their input on the "state of the discipline". The survey results mirrored other articles about the importance and value of a general communication degree. That is what we ultimately developed.

One of the values of a Communication Studies degree is that it can be applied in a variety of different contexts

from social media to speech writing to traditional business roles and more. The focus is on creating messages, and understanding audiences, contexts and communication channels (media). The effective communicator also needs a level of self-awareness, reflected in our program outcome of self-efficacy. The minor was developed with a focus on Rhetoric, intercultural communication, ethical communication, and mediated communication. The major expanded options in those areas and added topics in professional communication.

While the degree is not a mediated communication major, McMurry has classes available in other departments that can provide the skills typically found in a media degree. We are working with Art and English to create a Content Design Minor.

Communication Studies is a discipline that complements many other disciplines. It plays well with others. Rather than try to recreate or replace existing classes, we are looking to partner with other departments to meet the needs and desires of our student body.

As of today, we have six majors and six minors.



LeMasters Travels to Cambridge, & Södertälje; International Theological Conferences

Dr. Philip LeMasters, Professor of Religion and Director of the Honors Program, participated in two international theological conferences in September. His travel to both conferences was funded by McMurry faculty development funds and the Drew-McDougal Endowment in Religion.

LeMasters presented “Resources for Critiquing Racial Injustice and Other Forms of Oppression in Eastern Orthodox Christianity” at the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Christian Ethics in Cambridge, England, on September 8.

The meeting also provided an opportunity to reconnect with friends from his long-ago doctoral program at Duke University: Dr. Steven Long of Southern Methodist University and Dr. John Berkman of the University of the Toronto. (See top photo of LeMasters with his friends from graduate school.)

LeMasters presented “Eucharist, Marriage, and the Vocation of Discipleship: Insights from Orthodoxy for an Ecumenically Christian Audience” at the International Conference on Worship and

Discipleship sponsored by the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative and Sankt Ignatios College in Södertälje, Sweden, on September 12. Also attending the conference was Bishop Suriel of the Coptic Church, who gave lectures at McMurry in 2022 on Christian-Muslim relations in Egypt. Other participants represented Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Ethiopian and Eastern Orthodox traditions. (See bottom photo.)

LeMasters was also elected on November 9 to a three-year term as a member of the Board of Trustees of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Yonkers, NY. He sat previously on the Board from 2008-2020. He served as chair of its Academic Affairs Committee from 2015-2020 and also as corporate secretary of the Board from 2010-2015. LeMasters finds regular involvement in the life of St. Vladimir's Seminary, which is an internationally prominent center of Orthodox theology, to be enriching both intellectually and spiritually. As a longtime McMurry faculty member, he notes that "it is quite interesting to see the challenges faced today by church-affiliated institutions of higher education from the perspective of a Board member."

English Club Friendsgiving

Pictured below: The English Club gathered on the weekend after Thanksgiving for its annual Friendsgiving celebration in Old Main 103.





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