

# **First Fall Christian Media Conference: a report**

## ***"Creativity and Lutheran Theology in Media"***

Sponsored by the Christ in Media Institute at Bethany Lutheran College

November 21-22, 2009

### **Publicity prior to the conference**

In addition to numerous notices on campus by poster, email, daily bulletin, and classroom announcements, the conference was advertised off campus. Key faculty members at all of the WELS high schools and colleges received email invitations as well as brochures sent by US post. Guidance counselors at some 65 public and private high schools in our region received brochures and cover letters. Posters were put up in the Communication Department at Minnesota State University, and at the three Lutheran campus houses (WELS, LC-MS, ELCA) at that school. The Lutheran Sentinel ran an announcement which appeared a few weeks before the conference. While some students responded to a campus-wide email asking for early registrations, we had no idea how many would come, and hoped to reach an attendance of about 50.

### **Attendance and Participation**

Registrants at the conference: 71

Individuals known to be involved but not registered: 28

Total number of people involved in the conference: 99

Number of total from BLC: 67

Number of total from outside BLC: 32

Average attendance at sessions at any given time: about 40

The attendance and participation figures above were higher than anticipated and pleasing. In particular we appreciated the several Bethany alumni who attended, some traveling long distances, as well as the delegations of 5 from Wisconsin Lutheran College, of 11 from Onalaska Lutheran High School, and the one faculty visitor from Martin Luther College. It would have been nice to have a larger participation from Martin Luther College, and from nearby Lutheran High Schools such as Minnesota Valley Lutheran, but we know that the conference was publicized in those and many other places, and that served us well.

### **Classroom visits on the Friday before the conference**

Guest professionals who were able to come on Friday were enlisted to visit a variety of classes, speaking and performing in their areas of specialty. This was the schedule.

**9:00-9:50 am** Jas Lonnquist met with seminary students: cross-cultural outreach

**10:30-11:20** Jas Lonnquist and Sean King met with Prof. Peter Bloedel's scriptwriting class

Jonathon Roberts met with Prof. Mark Harstad's class on Psalms and Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament

**11:30-12:20** Jonathon Roberts, Emily Clare Zempel, Jas Lonnquist and Sean King met with Dr. Tom Kuster's Language, Thought, and Meaning class: "the craft of writing (professionally)"

**1:30-2:20** Jas Lonnquist and Sean King met with Dr. Tom Kuster's Criticism class: "messages in the movies"

Emily Clare Zempel and Jonathon Roberts met with Prof. Matt Caron and a group of theatre majors

**2:30-3:20** Jonathon Roberts met with Prof. Tim Tollefson's Music Theory class

Emily Clare Zempel met with Dr. Jonas Nissen's Shakespeare class

### **The student research component**

Prior to the Friday evening showcase, the following Bethany students set up "Christians on the Screen" displays in the Meyer Hall lobby, and discussed them with conference attendees as they gathered. These were the displays:

*Jamie Sullivan*. By Sarah Doebbeling, Ashlee Marzahn, and Sarah Zander. [3RD PLACE]

*Seventh Heaven's Simon Camden*. By Abbie Lecy and Becky Barlow. [2ND PLACE]

*Simon Birch*. By Rachelle Rude and Dalton Stage. [1ST PLACE]

*Saving Sarah Cain*. Carmen Soledad Huaranga

During the Saturday lunch break, several Bethany students set up displays in the hallway outside the dining center, and discussed with conference attendees their research projects which explored aspects of the conference theme. These were the student research presentations.

Tiffany Casey and Emelia Swanson: "Is the creation of a Net-flix-like Service for ELS Teachers warranted?"

Derek W. Schuettpelz: "The Mysteries of the Island: A Metaphorical Criticism of ABC's Hit Television Drama LOST and the Personifications of the Island"

Kai Kaniess: "How are ultimate spiritual values portrayed in film? An analysis of *What Dreams May Come*" [SECOND PLACE]

Kim Depuydt: "Law and Gospel in Children's Literature: An Analysis of *It's All Mine!*" [FIRST PLACE]

Gina Weckwerth: "Making Order Out of Chaos: a Study of Christian Writers"

Jeff Hendrix: "Lutheran Theology and Creativity in Media: Creating a Genre of Lutheran Media"

Jenna Smith: "Who is Aslan? A Look at How C.S. Lewis Employs the Children's Classic Literature Genre to Teach Christianity" [THIRD PLACE]

### **Friday evening showcase of recent work by guest professionals**

The following was the program for the professional showcase, in which they addressed the general question, "What have you been up to lately?"

**Host: Prof. Chris Johnson** (Communication)

**Jas Lonquist**, screenwriter and producer <http://www.writtenbyjas.com>

Silicon Valley/Los Angeles

Author of nine screenplays, 33 produced episodes of television, six short films, and hundreds of videos, involved in Gospel outreach to Mexican and Hmong communities. Jas had just finished a series of 12 short documentary scripts for the new Computer Museum opening soon in Silicon Valley.

**Sean King**, screenwriter, actor, producer <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1975166>

Los Angeles/ Hollywood

Writer of "Generation Gap" starring Ed Asner (2008), winner 2009 Camie Award for best original screenplay. Sean spoke of this experience, and showed clips of some of his recent film acting.

**Jonathon Roberts**, composer, stage designer, performer <http://www.projectpaul.com>

**Emily Clare Zempel, actor** <http://www.emilyclarezempel.com/live>

New York City

Jonathon created *Project Paul*. Combines biblical texts with experimental music, and crafts performances "with the goal of reaching unlikely audiences with the Gospel." Emily has performed in the Midwest, Baltimore, Washington DC, and New York, and much prefers Shakespeare.

**Steve Zambo**, Salty Earth Pictures <http://www.saltyearthpictures.org>

Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin

Owns and operates production studio "dedicated to using entertainment and the arts to share Christ Jesus with the world." *Fifth Pew from the Front*, and *Movie Critters*. Steve provided a virtual studio tour and described recent and future projects.

## **The Conference on Saturday: "Creativity and Lutheran Theology in Media"**

In the Saturday sessions, each guest presenter had about an hour to discuss the conference theme. Bethany faculty members from various academic divisions introduced the presenters. The opening theological presentation was foundational and set the tone for the day's discussions. Various presenters supplied the audience with materials and handouts, which we hope at some point to make available via the internet.

- 8:45**      **Conference opening and welcome** – Bethany President Dan Bruss
- 8:50**      **"What is the 'Lutheran Theology' of the conference theme?"**  
Prof. Mark Harstad (Religion)
- 9:20**      **"Creating, Producing, and Distributing in the Era of Social Networking"**  
Steve Zambo – introduced by Dr. Janet Moldstad (Business)
- 10:20**     **"Cinema for Nineveh - All Aboard!"**  
Jas Lonquist – introduced by Dr. Jen Wosmek (Psychology)
- 11:20**     Lunch in dining room, Student Research Showcase in OM lobby
- 12:35**     **"Filmmakers and Faith – Changing the Stereotype"**  
Sean King – introduced by Prof. Peter Bloedel (Theatre)
- 1:35**      **"Authenticity in Art: Letting the Gospel Lead"**

Jonathon Roberts & Emily Clare Zempel – introduced by Prof. Tim Tollefson (Music)  
– Prof. Tollefson was unexpectedly called away, and Dr. Tom Kuster substituted.

**2:35 "Road to Emmaus"**

A film by BT Media – introduced by Prof. Mark Harstad

**3:30 Break – tour of new studio**

**4:00 "What's next?"**

Panel of all visiting professionals, moderated by Dr. Tom Kuster (Communication)

**5:15 Awards for student research and displays** - Drs. Kuster and Wosmek

Discussion opportunities were plentiful throughout the day, and the concluding panel of all the presenters was particularly lively. Two themes seemed to emerge from the discussion: first was the essential requirement that any Christian media production be of the highest quality. Second, we have much to learn about appropriate business models for media production and distribution, suggesting a direction for a future Christian Media Conference.

Many people contributed to the success of the conference. In particular, **Thanks to...**

**The Planning Group**

Andy Overn – Graphic Design  
Polly Browne - Education  
Bill Bukowski - Art  
Chris Johnson - Communication  
Eric Woller - Chemistry  
Mark Harstad – Religion  
Janet Moldstad – Business  
Ramona Czer – English  
Steve Reagles – Religion  
Tim Tollefson – Music  
Jen Wosmek – Psychology  
Kurt Paulsen – Communication  
Jonas Nissen – Communication  
Tom Kuster – Communication

Pres. Dan Bruss  
Vice President Ron Younge  
Art Westphal  
Elayne Luiken  
Alta Schaffer

**Special thanks:**

Andy Overn for the CMI logo, Mike Kneprath for the conference poster,  
the Antioch Foundation,  
and all our presenters.