

2022-23 Chester Ronning Centre Annual Report

AUGUST 2023



Contents

Note from the Director	3
Advisory Committee	4
University of Alberta Partnerships	6
Community Needs Assessment, Executive Summary	7
Programming Highlights	8
Distinguished Visiting Fellows	
Programming Details	14
Current Finances	
Publications, Presentations, and Projects	15
Ways to Give	17

Note from the Director



"Our collective dedication and the continued support of our community, the Chester Ronning Centre will continue to thrive as a beacon of understanding, dialogue, and collaboration for many years to come."

As the academic year is coming to a close, I want to express my gratitude for the rewarding experience as Interim Director of the Chester Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public Life.

Over the past year, I have had the opportunity to engage with many individuals and organizations in our community, both religious and secular, to strengthen our mission of promoting understanding, dialogue, and collaboration between different faith traditions.

It has been exciting to bring diverse community members together to discuss shared issues and create a platform for meaningful dialogue and understanding.

We were also thrilled to launch several new initiatives designed to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of religious diversity in our society. I am particularly proud of both the Religion and Politics and the Religion and Popular Culture series, which included public lectures and panel discussions, which have been well-received by our local and regional communities.

I would like to express my gratitude to the dedicated team of the Chester Ronning Centre. Their hard work, enthusiasm, and commitment to ensure that our programming was accessible to all members of our community, regardless of location, faith, or background.

I would also like to thank the members of our advisory board, who have provided valuable guidance and support. Their expertise and insights have helped shape the direction of the Centre and ensured that our initiatives are relevant and impactful.

To our community partners, both religious and secular, I am deeply grateful for your collaboration and engagement. Your willingness to come together, share perspectives, and work towards common goals has been inspiring. It is through these partnerships that we have been able to create a platform for meaningful dialogue and understanding.

Last, I want to express my appreciation to our community. Your active participation, thoughtful questions, and open-mindedness have made our discussions engaging and enlightening. It is your enthusiasm and support that motivate us to continue our efforts in fostering understanding and collaboration.

As the academic year comes to a close, I am filled with gratitude for the rewarding experience as Interim Director of the Chester Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public Life. I am proud of what we have accomplished together and excited about the opportunities that lie ahead.

I am confident that with our collective dedication and the continued support of our community, the Chester Ronning Centre will continue to thrive as a beacon of understanding, dialogue, and collaboration for many years to come.

Thank you all once again, and I look forward to our continuing our work together.

Advisory Committee

The Chester Ronning Centre operates with the support of an active advisory committee. The committee's mandate is to support the work of the Centre and its Director, provide advice and community feedback, and assist in fundraising. Appointments are for a threeyear term, renewable. Members are invited by the Dean of the Faculty in consultation with the Director of the Centre.



Brandon Alakas, PhD – Augustana Faculty (English) – Dr. Alakas teaches courses on classical and medieval literature. His long-standing interest in Latin literature in particular is fueled by his research on monastic culture. He has published on Latin historiography, but his current work examines devotional literature written immediately before the English Reformation. When not reading or writing about monks, Brandon tries to make time for his excessive number of hobbies, which include language learning, cooking, and running.



Geoffrey Dipple, PhD – Augustana Faculty (History) – Dr. Dipple teaches a broad range of courses covering European and world history. His research focuses on the history of the Protestant Reformation, especially in the German-speaking lands of central Europe. Most recently his work has concentrated on the history of the so-called Reformation Radicals, including Anabaptists and Spiritualists. His publications include: Antifraternalism and Anticlericalism in the German Reformation: Johann Eberlin von Günzburg and the Campaign against the Friars (1996), "Just as in the time of the apostles": Uses of History in the Radical Reformation (2005), and The Fifteen Confederates of Johann Eberlin von Günzburg (2014). He is currently completing a volume, co-edited with Kat Hill of the University of London, highlighting new research into the Radical Reformation: Thinking Outside the Cages: New Directions in the Radical Reformation. Serving a one-year term through June 2023.



Paul L. Gareau, PhD – Faculty of Native Studies – Dr. Gareau is Métis and French-Canadian from Bellevue near Batoche Saskatchewan, Canada. He is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Native Studies and past Research Fellow for the Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research at the University of Alberta. His research is grounded in critical theory and methodology relating to the social, political, and cultural impacts of religion on identity formation. His academic publications and community research projects explore the Métis experiences of religion and Métis peoplehood, the influence of Catholicism on early and late modern identity, the legacy of colonial discourses on Indigenous and ethnocultural minorities, and the experiences of rural spaces. His research focuses on the Métis, Indigenous religiosity, youth, gender, la Francophonie, and rural Canada.



Hany Shaltout – Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry – Dr. Shaltout, an Assistant Professor in Psychiatry, is a second-generation psychiatrist who tries to follow in the footsteps of his father Dr. Taher Shaltout, a world-renowned psychiatrist, educator and advocate for mental health in Egypt and the Middle East. Dr. Shaltout's care for the community has continued in his new home here in Camrose, Alberta where he has worked together with key community members that include St. Mary's Hospital, AHS Addictions and Mental Health Clinic, the PCN, Camrose City police and Augustana to expand the mental health services at home and provide world class holistic care to our community.



Gail Stolee is a graduate of the University of Alberta in Arts, Education and Library Science. She worked for the Edmonton Public School Board, Camrose Lutheran College where she was also a member of the Board of Regents, and Augustana University College. Her community involvements include Rotary, Sahakarini (a local international development NGO), the Nordlys Film and Arts Festival, and Messiah Lutheran Church. Gail has been an active participant in the programs of the Chester Ronning Centre since its inception. She has a strong commitment to lifelong learning and service, and to making best research and thinking accessible to the general public. She also especially loves being a grandma, travelling, and reading.



Nakita Valerio is an award-winning writer, researcher, and Muslim community organizer based on Treaty 6 territory, Amiskwacîwâskahikan (Edmonton, Canada). Nakita is honoured to be the Research Director for the Institute for Religious and Socio-Political Studies (I-RSS), serving both Muslim and research communities across Canada. She is a graduate in history and Islamic-Jewish studies from the University of Alberta and has been a research fellow with the Tessellate Institute, I-RSS, the Edmonton Council of Muslim Communities (ECMC) and Mercy Mission Canada (MMC). Nakita also acts as an academic strategist/mentor for graduate students in the disciplines of history, religious studies, sociology, and social work. She has worked as an academic copy-editor in the social sciences and humanities since 2014. Nakita serves as an advisor to the Chester Ronning Center for the Study of Religion and Public Life at the University of Alberta Augustana Campus.



Rev. Markus Wilhelm – Glory Lutheran Church, Sherwood Park – Rev. Wilhelm attended Camrose Lutheran College, has studied in Germany and served Lutheran congregations in British Columbia and in Calgary, Edmonton, and Sherwood Park, Alberta.



UNIVERSITY **Partnerships**

This year, the Centre partnered with faculty and staff from many departments across the University and in the community, to bring a variety of engaging public programming to audiences in Camrose, Edmonton, and beyond. It was our pleasure to work with the Edmonton Council of Muslim Communities and The Green Room as well as the Faculty of Arts, Jeanne & Peter Lougheed Performing Arts Centre, Office of Advancement, and Office of Alumni Relations, Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies and Department of Anthropology.

Community Needs Assessment

Making Space for Religious Voices & Ways of Life: A Needs Assessment of Albertan Religious Communities and an Example for Religious Studies Centers (RSC)

From 2022 to 2023, the Chester Ronning Center (in cooperation with the Institute for Religious and Socio-Political Studies) undertook a community needs assessment which proceeded from a need to contribute to the limited literature about public engagement for Religious Studies Centers (RCS), as well as the need to better understand religious community organizations in Alberta. After a literature review, the needs assessment was developed using a combination of applicable principles from public participation, stakeholder engagement, and Community Engaged Scholarship, termed in the assessment as "public engagement". Further, a secondary analysis of available data on an extensive sample of RSCs was undertaken to determine existing practices for public engagement, areas of priority and service, and primary audiences.

"The Chester Ronning Center (in cooperation with the Institute for Religious and Socio-Political Studies) undertook a community needs assessment"



Institute for Religious and Socio-Political Studies Following this foundational work, a multi-methods approach was used to conduct online/ phone surveys and in-depth conversations with respondents from religious community organizations in Camrose, Edmonton, and surrounding areas. A sample of 346 religious organizations was developed from publicly available data and the population was engaged using adaptable recruitment methods. The needs assessment concluded with a total of 54 survey respondents and 11 in-depth interviews as part of final data collection.

The numerical survey findings (and their corresponding open-ended questions) pertain to matters of people and priorities, including developing an understanding of organizational community connections (through social justice, advocacy, promoting religious literacy, etc) and determining the degree to which their strategic plans and outlooks have factors in common with the Ronning Center mandate. In questions pertaining to people, a clearer picture of employee, volunteer, and patron attraction, retention, and membership developed through the available responses. Organizational understandings about public and religious life, and self-understanding and identity were also developed out of such questions.

In-depth conversations built on the survey responses and aided with determining religious organization impressions of both the University of Alberta and the Ronning Center in the hopes of better understanding ways in which engagement can continue and can inform Ronning Center services, programming, and strategic planning. In general, religious organizations feel grossly misunderstood and misrepresented, and do not find many spaces in which religious voices and ways of life are both welcomed and heard. The challenges of being religious in secular society tended to be consistent across denominational and even interfaith boundaries. Organizations have a general favourable impression of institutions like the University of Alberta and believe more can be done within it, especially in partnership with the Ronning Center, to make space for their views and ways of life to be understood. Suggestions for areas of service that the Ronning Center could expand into abounded, especially about supporting religious students on campus, and opening spaces for meaningful encounter and learning on the topic of religion.

This assessment is an important first step into better understanding religious organizations in northern Alberta for the purposes of developing ongoing engagement with a University-affiliated RSC and addressing both their concerns and their needs. Taking all phases of this assessment into consideration, the final report concludes with a number of recommendations which can inform the strategic planning of RSCs, especially the Ronning Center.

Programming highlights

RONNING CENTRE OPEN HOUSE

The Ronning Centre's interim director, Joe Wiebe welcomed community members back onto campus and into our new space! So much has changed in the past couple of years, and we wanted to give everyone an opportunity to come by and say hello, have some food, and tour our new space in Founder's Hall.

STORIES ABOUT RELIGION IN PUBLIC OFFICE

Can you be religious in office? The Chester Ronning Centre hosted a conversation on the politics of religion and public life. Interim director, Joe Wiebe hosted a conversation with Agnes Hoveland (Camrose City Councillor), Rodrigo Loyola (MLA, Ellerslie), and Jonathan Martin (Chief Federal Prosecutor) about their experiences of religious traditions in their public life.

Open House

It was wonderful to welcome you all into the new Ronning Centre space in Founders' Hall at Augustana. We look forward to doing it again!



Talking about Religion & Politics

Now, more than ever before, the public needs to engage with topics like religious literacy and how it intersects with politics," Wiebe says. "There are precious few spaces for critical discussions around religion and public life, and we are continuing to build one of them, based on the work of my predecessors too."





Augustana Indigenous Speaker Series

NORTHERN CREE

Northern Cree is a GRAMMY nominated and JUNO award-winning powwow and round dance group from Maskwacis, Alberta, Canada. The group was formed in 1982 by Charles Wood Jr., Earl Wood, Randy Wood, and Steve Wood and 2022 marks Northern Cree's 40th anniversary.

TENEIL WHISKEYJACK

Award-winning actor, playwright, dancer, wellness advocate and mother, Teneil Whiskeyjack, discussed the creative process of the making of Ayita, a modern-day creation story meeting Indigenous realities told through text and movement.

GINA STARBLANKET

Gina Starblanket explored the manifestations of settler reason in the prairies, explaining how it functions to privilege the dominance of white, cis-hetero men in relation to other subject positions and functions to legitimize the deployment of racialized, colonial, gendered violence in fraught or shared geographies.

CHEVI RABBIT, LOUISE OMEASOO, KATHERINE SWAMPY

This panel will featured three Indigenous activists who work to raise awareness about, advocate for, and celebrate Indigenous sexual and gender identities in a cisheteropatriarchal and colonized society.

WAHKOHTOWIN LODGE CELEBRATION

We celebrated the seventh anniversary of the wahkohtowin Lodge's grand opening. We gathered in community, ceremony, and feast.

DAVID A. ROBERTSON

National Indigenous Peoples Day 2023 welcomed children and educators onto our campus and members of the public online to celebrate with David A. Robertson. We engaged in Reconciliation in a welcoming and affirming space

Distinguished Visiting Fellows: G. Willow Wilson

Learn more about the <u>Distinguished</u> <u>Visiting Fellows</u> <u>Endowment</u>



ABOUT THE SPEAKER

G. Willow Wilson is a convert to Islam and an award-winning American comics writer, prose author, and essayist. She is most well known for relaunching the Ms. Marvel title for Marvel Comics starring a 16-year-old Muslim superhero named Kamala Khan. Her best-known written works include the novels Alif the Unseen and The Bird King, as well as her memoir of converting to Islam entitled The Butterfly Mosque.

A SUPERHERO FOR GENERATION WHY

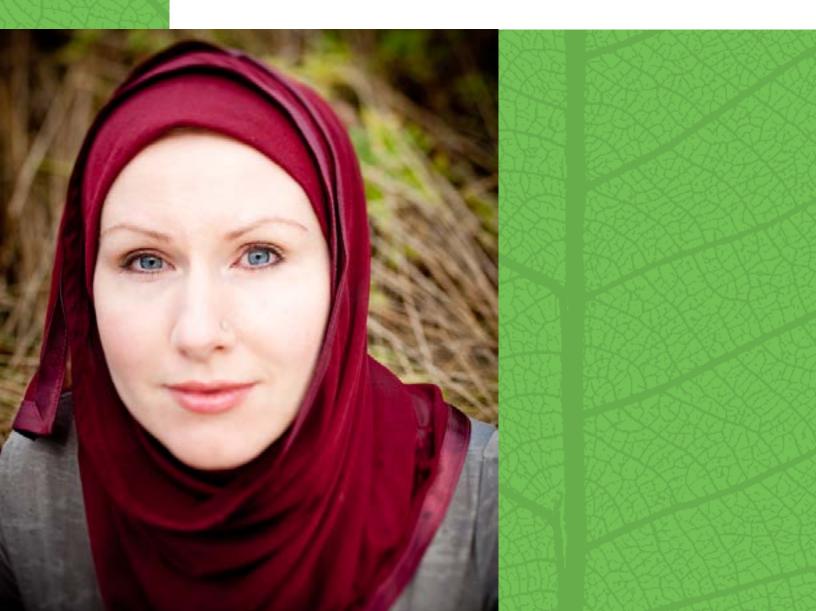
16-year-old Kamala Khan may be the shapeshifting superhero, Ms Marvel, but she also shares many of the challenges faced by millennials – a misunderstood generation. Join G. Willow Wilson, co-creator and writer of the Hugo and Eisner Award-winning Ms Marvel comic series, as she unpacks the character's origins. Explore the author's roots in historical science fiction and fantasy, and what it means to write a superhero for a new audience."

AN EVENING WITH G. WILLOW WILSON

Can you be religious in office? The Chester Ronning Centre hosted a conversation on the politics of religion and public life. Interim director, Joe Wiebe hosted a conversation with Agnes Hoveland (Camrose City Councillor), Rodrigo Loyola (MLA, Ellerslie), and Jonathan Martin (Chief Federal Prosecutor) about their experiences of religious traditions in their public life.

"G. Willow Wilson, the co-creator and original writer for the comic book series, Ms. Marvel, is as unique as her superhero."

Joseph R. Wiebe, Interim Director Chester Ronning Centre



RELIGIOUS REPRESENTATION IN POP CULTURE

Thor, Captain America, Iron Man... Kamala Khan. Writing these names next to each other reminds me of a Sesame Street song: One of things is not like the other. A hulking godman who looks like a "pirate and an angel had a baby," the embodiment of white America bearing "America's ass," a billionaire playboy asserting the unquestioned triumph of STEM, and a 16-year-old Pakistani-American comic fangirl. As one might imagine, when Marvel announced Kamala Khan as Ms. Marvel in 2013 there were predictable complaints from the Internet's gutters. But that whining has been drowned out by critical praise, distinguished awards, and a Disney+ live-action series. The Marvel Cinematic Universe now features a brown teenager from New Jersey next to ripped, white dude-bros.

Truth be told, as a Marvel fan I'm as enamored with the likes of Thor as much as anyone else—I even wear my hair like him. But I was equally impressed and excited when Disney+ started advertising for their Ms. Marvel series. This wasn't just a "token" presence. The comic book series won Hugo and American Book Awards. Both commercial success and the character's uncompromised complexity demonstrate how Ms. Marvel's diversity is more than window-dressing. It's representative of real-life, modern human experience in North America for many.

G. Willow Wilson, the co-creator and original writer for the comic book series, is as unique as her superhero. She's an American convert to Islam who writes both comics and novels. She writes for DC, Marvel, and Vertigo comics, including X-Men, Superman, and Wonder Woman. She's written her memoir (The Butterfly Mosque) about her conversion experience and life in Egypt when she was in her 20s. Her next novel, Alif the Unseen, won awards and her most recent novel, The Bird King, received rave reviews. Like Kamala Khan, Wilson has had her share of push-back from both American and Muslim audiences. She doesn't pretend to represent more than herself and her own experience. She's not an apologist for Islam, trying to convince prejudiced Americans that, hey, Muslims are human too. Wilson is a talented writer appealing to an audience that doesn't subscribe to the American civil religion that dominated after 9/11. And she's able to do that within a space male novelists have dominated.

While she addresses religious intolerance and gender politics, Wilson's writing isn't an education on women's rights or Islam itself. She writes fiction not theology, comics not tracts. In Khan, for example, Wilson imagines one narrative within a particular cultural and historical context, formed through a defined genre. Readers can see themselves in this narrative more than one from another planet, another time, or another tax bracket. Other artists can be inspired to portray their own narratives. In other words, Wilson doesn't use her platform as a mode to communicate ideas or teach people how to get Islam right. She does what good writers do: entertains.

"Wilson doesn't use her platform as a mode to communicate ideas or teach people how to get Islam right. She does what good writers do: entertains."

Joseph R. Wiebe

People enjoy seeing themselves reflected in characters and their stories. Artists are energized by seeing new interpretations of traditional expressions. The significance of Kamala Khan's portrayal of Islam in popular culture is captured in fans' enjoyment. Wilson's achievement isn't boiled down to increasing "diversity" nominally or creating a new box to check. It's rather in her approach to telling Kamala's story as a teenager with common struggles who wrestles with her Pakistani Muslim heritage while learning how to be herself, a loyal friend, and a good family member... and a superhero. Wilson demonstrates that intimidating ideas like "diversity" and "inclusion" can be fun. Its success can be measured in the same way we judge anything else we read or watch: did you like it?

All of this isn't to downplay the seriousness of equity or the problems of structural exclusion. Neither is it to say Wilson's approach is the only—or even best—way to think about religious representation in popular culture. Rather, it is to see how the importance of presence for a marginalized or under-represented community *is* in its contribution to demonstrating the infinite range of human experience. Fiction, especially comics, explores that range publicly, showing us that expanding the imagination through various accounts of growing up in North America is a valued part of our cultural makeup. Seeing how a character like Kamala Khan can make a positive difference can help other authors who take their religion seriously find their voice and explore different ways to express their religious experience in popular culture.

"The significance of Kamala Kahn's portrayal of Islam in popular culture is captured by the fans' enjoyment."

Joseph R. Wiebe, Interim Director Chester Ronning Centre

Programming Details

	Distinguished Visiting Fellows Events Supported by the Distinguished Visiting Fellows Endowment
	Open House, U of A Days September 23, 2022 In Person Attendees: 35
10	Stories about Religion in Public Office November 1, 2022 In Person Attendees: 38
Total Events	A Superhero for Generation Why with G. Willow Wilson March 20, 2023 @ 11 a.m. In Person Attendees: 119 Online Attendees: 822
1 2 / /	An Evening with G. Willow Wilson March 20, 2023 @ 7 p.m. In Person Attendees: 52 Online Attendees: 57
1,344 Total In Person Attendance	Augustana Indigenous Speaker Series
	October 22, 2022 In Person Attendees: 59
	Ayita and the Resurgence of Women's Medicine with Teneil Whiskeyjack November 29, 2022 In Person Attendees: 21
15 206	Online Attendees: 17
15,296 Total In Person Attendance	Settler Reason on the Praries with Gina Starblanket February 15, 2023 In Person Attendees: 53
	Online Attendees: 160
	 Decolonizing Sex & Gender Identities with Katherine Swampy, Louise Omeasoo, Chevy Rabbit March 7, 2023
	In Person Attendees: 39 Online Attendees: 180
	wahkohtowin Lodge Celebration: 7th Anniversary

March 22, 2023

In Person Attendees: 87

Finances as of 2023 Fiscal Year-End

CURRENT FUNDS	
Centre Annual Fund	(\$3,101)
Spirit of the Land Program Funds	\$1,948
International Fellows Fund Supported by the Wendy Cassidy Memorial Foundation	\$191,253
ENDOWMENT BALANCES (MARKET VALUE)	
Distinguished Visiting Fellows Endowment	\$1,058,962
Distinguished visiting renows Endowment	Q1,000,902
Hendrickson Memorial Endowment	\$159,699

Publications, Presentations, & Projects

Joseph R. Wiebe Post Media Op-ed (National Post, Edmonton Journal, Ottawa Citizen, Montreal Gazette)

- "What Canadians are getting wrong about the hijab protests in Iran" October 14, 2022
- "Religion needs to be on Canada's census" November 29, 2022
- "How Morocco's World Cup run goes beyond sports" December 14, 2022
- "Let's Drop the Arguing about a War on Christmas" December 24, 2022
- "How wearing your lucky socks helped even if the Oilers lost" May 18, 2023

Joseph R Wiebe Booster Second Thought

- "Iran, Religion, Human Rights" October 25, 2022
- "Wilson, Ms Marvel, and Representation" March 7, 2023

DIRECTOR & ADVISORY BOARD PUBLICATIONS:

Joseph R. Wiebe

- "Reassessing Mennonite Environmentalism through Settler-colonialism: Political Deficiencies, Historical Omissions, and Indigenous Responses," Mennonite Quarterly Review 96 (July 2022): 355-380.
- "Remembering Revisited," Front Porch Repbulic November 4, 2022. Online
- Symposium on Christiana Zenner's Just Water. Syndicate 9.7 (2022)

Brandon Alakas

- "Delightful Fruits and Bitter Weeds: Textual Consumption and Spiritual Identity" in The Orcherd of Syon." Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures 48.1 (2022): 45-67.
- Betty Ostenrud Award (2023) recognizing faculty member's contribution to student life at Augustana

Geoffrey Dipple

- Geoffrey Dipple and Kat Hill, Eds., New Directions in the Radical Reformation: Thinking outside the Cages (Boston: Brill, 2023)
- Publications: "Spiritualist Anabaptism: Oxymoron or Redundancy?" Mennonite Quarterly Review 96 (2022): 417-24
- Presentations: "Franciscan Observant Reform and the Reformation," presented at the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference, Minneapolis, MN, October 2022

we'd love to **Stay Connected**

The best way to participate in the life of the Ronning Centre is to attend events and engage with us and visiting speakers as part of the conversation. If you have suggestions for topics or themes that the Centre might address, please <u>Contact Us</u>.

We also invite your financial contributions, which enlarge the possibilities for the Centre's work. Below are descriptions of each Ronning Centrerelated fund to give you an understanding of the work each fund supports. While these are established funds, we welcome any and all contributions to these funds and their important work within the Chester Ronning Centre.

Support the Centre

The Chester Ronning Centre Annual Fund

The Annual Fund supports the day-to-day work of the Centre. The Annual Fund allows the Centre to maintain its full schedule of speakers and programming, organize Community Service-Learning student projects, as well as provide online access to publications and audio recordings of events.

The Daniel Yang Endowment

This endowment supports the annual Rev Dr & Mrs Hsi Shao Yang Internship with the Centre, with preference given to a student with East Asian ancestry. Students work directly with the Centre's staff on research projects and program development to expand their knowledge and understanding of the complex themes explored by the Centre.

The Hendrickson Memorial Endowment

This endowment supports the Centre's annual lecture series. Lectures are given by outstanding scholars, who come from within and outside the academy, whose thought and action engage the demanding issues facing our world. The endowment was founded by the family of Magda and George Hendrickson back in 1969. The Hendrickson family has nurtured Augustana and studied with its various teachers and professors for more than 90 years.

The Distinguished Visiting Fellows (DVF) Endowment

This endowment allows the Centre to bring prominent scholars of religion and public intellectuals to Augustana. While in Camrose, DVFs deliver a series of lectures, engage with students, participate in the Centre's activities and work on individual projects. The DVF endowment was founded by alumni Jim and Sonja Hendrickson. The two served 25 years on the Board of Regents at Augustana (then known as Camrose Lutheran College) prior to its merger with the University of Alberta. Recently, the endowment has helped support one quarter of the Centre's events, including the extremely successful and well-attended livestream with NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden. Gifts to this fund support an integral part of the Centre's work.

The International Fellows Program

This endowment aims to connect the work of public intellectuals with the Augustana community, media and non-academics (policy makers, clergy, etc.) on local, national and global levels. The program brings nationally and internationally recognized intellectuals to campus every other year for a conference. The program benefits from the work of a Postdoctoral Fellow, whose primary task is to help organize the International Fellows conference and to work towards publishing research that results from the conference. The program is supported in part by a significant long-term grant from the Wendy Cassady Memorial Fund. Wendy Cassady was Chester Ronning's daughter-in-law and an ardent supporter of the arts and faith-based social justice causes.

Your contributions help ensure our programming remains robust and what you've come to expect from a centre at one of Canada's finest universities.

Make a gift at uab/ronning

Leading with Purpose.



Created by Kim Wiebe

Chester Ronning Centre, Augustana Campus 4901 46 Avenue Camrose, Alberta, Canada

ualberta.ca/chester-ronning-centre