



Chester
Ronning
Centre



UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA



2024-25

Chester Ronning Centre Annual Report

SEPTEMBER 2025



Land Acknowledgement

The University of Alberta, its buildings, labs and research stations are primarily located on the territory of the N hiyaw (Cree), Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), M tis, Nakoda (Stoney), Dene, Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and Anishinaabe (Ojibway/Saulteaux), lands that are now known as part of Treaties 6, 7 and 8 and homeland of the M tis. The University of Alberta respects the sovereignty, lands, histories, languages, knowledge systems and cultures of all First Nations, M tis and Inuit nations.

Contents

Note from the Director	3
Advisory Committee	4
Programming Highlights	6
Distinguished Visiting Fellow	10
Programming Details	12
Current Finances	13
Publications, Presentations, and Projects	14
Support the Centre	17

Note from the Director



“With your continued support, I believe we can grow in both reach and impact while continuing to nurture thoughtful and connected public discourse.”

As we step into a new academic year, I want to take a moment to reflect on the journey we’ve shared and to express my sincere thanks to the vibrant community that surrounds and supports the Chester Ronning Centre

This year marks the start of my second term as Director, and I’m honoured to have accepted a five-year reappointment. It’s a privilege to continue this work—deepening respectful dialogue, engaging in critical inquiry, and exploring how religion shapes our shared public lives.

None of this would be possible without the dedication of our team. Their creativity, professionalism, and care ensure that our work resonates well beyond campus. I’m also grateful to our advisory board for their steady guidance and encouragement, going above and beyond to help shape the Centre’s strategic vision.

To our community partners—religious, secular, academic, and civic—thank you for your trust. It’s through these relationships that we create spaces for shared learning. It’s a testament to the kind of creative collaboration that’s possible, even in the midst of the world’s complexity and difference.

And to our wider community: your engagement remains at the heart of what we do. Whether you’ve attended an event, posed a challenging question, or simply taken time to listen deeply, your presence affirms the importance of our mission.

Looking ahead, I’m excited for what this new chapter will bring. With your continued support, I believe we can grow in both reach and impact while continuing to nurture thoughtful and connected public discourse.

Thank you for walking alongside us. I look forward to another year of rich conversations and transformative learning.

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.

The CRC is deeply grateful for the dedication and service of our outgoing advisory committee members, Gail Stolee and Ian Wilson. Their thoughtful contributions, guidance, and support over the years have been invaluable to the Centre's mission and growth. We are also pleased to extend a warm welcome to Janet Wesselius who brings a wealth of insight and experience



Janet Wesselius, PhD – Augustana Faculty (Ethics and Global Studies) – Janet Wesselius is a philosopher, specializing in feminist philosophy, epistemology, and philosophy of science and the environment. She holds degrees from the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto and the Free University of Amsterdam. She teaches at Augustana.

Janet grew up on a farm in southwest Manitoba and is grateful for her connection to Camrose and the surrounding rural communities.



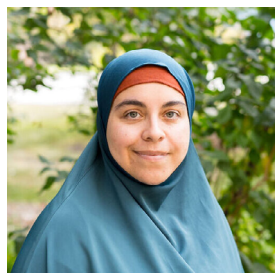
Geoffrey Dipple, PhD – Augustana Faculty (Ethics and Global Studies) – Dr. Dipple teaches a broad range of courses covering European and world history. His research focuses on the history of the Protestant Reformation, especially in the German-speaking lands of central Europe. Most recently his work 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), The Fifteen Confederates of Johann Eberlin von Günzburg (2014), and co-editor with Kat Hill, New Directions in the Radical Reformation: Thinking Outside the Cages (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.



Nakita Valerio is a Vanier Scholar (PhD) in Religious Studies at the University of Alberta, specializing in Muslim women's religious leadership and Qur'anic literacy in Morocco. She is the current Editor of the Religious and Socio-Political Studies Journal and serves as a board member with the Past Imperfect Journal in History, Classics and Religion. Nakita founded The Nusaibah Collective, a Muslim women's study group and is also engaged as a student of traditional Islamic sciences. She advises the Chester Ronning Center and sponsors the Fatima Al-Fihri Graduate Award in African Islamic Studies at UAlberta. She serves as an advisor to the Ronning Center and as the secretary of the Canadian Association for the Study of Islam and Muslims (CASIM). Nakita is also the co-founder of a school in rural Morocco.



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.



Programming Highlights



A JEWISH JESUS: RESTORING JESUS TO JUDAISM

In a thought-provoking talk, Dr. Matthew Thiessen, a leading scholar on early Christianity and Judaism, challenged common misconceptions about Jesus's relationship to Jewish law and customs. While it is now widely accepted that Jesus was a first-century Jew, Gospel interpretations often portray him as being in conflict with Judaism. Dr. Thiessen refuted this narrative, offering a nuanced reexamination of Jesus's Jewish identity within its historical and religious context.

Drawing on his extensive research into ethnicity and identity in ancient religions, Thiessen highlighted how understanding Jesus within the framework of early Judaism sheds new light on his teachings and actions. The discussion also explored themes from Thiessen's broader work on the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, and the letters of Paul, offering attendees a richer, historically grounded perspective on the origins of Christianity.



THE SACRED REMAINS- UNDOING CULTURAL ERASURE THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In a powerful and moving presentation, Dr. Jeremy Maron explored the impact of cultural erasure during the Holocaust through the lens of a single, deeply symbolic object: a wallet crafted from a desecrated Torah scroll. Now housed in the collection of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR), this artifact represents the Nazi regime's systematic efforts to destroy Jewish religious and cultural identity by turning sacred objects into profane commodities.

Dr. Maron discussed how this object exemplifies the broader Nazi strategy of cultural genocide and posed important questions about how such artifacts should be interpreted within a human rights museum context. Central to his talk was the CMHR's ongoing work with Jewish community members to engage with the object respectfully and meaningfully. This collaboration has helped restore a sense of the Torah scroll's sacredness and reaffirm the cultural and spiritual significance that endures despite the violence it endured.

The presentation highlighted the role of community engagement in confronting historical trauma and reclaiming meaning, emphasizing how museums can serve not only as spaces of remembrance but also as sites of ethical responsibility and cultural restoration.

This event offered attendees a compelling example of how museums can approach difficult histories with sensitivity, respect, and a commitment to restorative justice.



CAMPUS CONVERSATIONS ON RELIGION, CONFLICT AND DIALOGUE

In a timely and insightful event, Alexander W. Marcus—newly appointed Belzberg Family and Jewish Federation of Edmonton Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Alberta—joined Director Joseph Wiebe for a thoughtful conversation on engaging with difficult topics, particularly surrounding the Israel-Hamas war and its impact on campus discourse.

Drawing from his academic work and personal experience, Marcus shared strategies for fostering meaningful and respectful dialogue around contentious issues such as Israel-Palestine, religion, and identity. The discussion highlighted the complexities of holding space for diverse perspectives while maintaining constructive engagement in university settings. Attendees left with valuable insights into navigating these important conversations in both academic and broader community contexts.



STORYTELLING AS RITUAL

In celebration of Black History Month, Storytelling As Ritual – Black Art, Faith, Ancestral Ways of Knowing and Systems Change brought together a powerful artist showcase exploring the intersections of Black diasporic storytelling traditions, spirituality, faith practices, and artistic expression.

The evening featured a multidisciplinary performance with solo and collaborative pieces by Kija Lado, Ameley Quaye, Cherelle George, and Timiro Mohamad, along with a visual art installation by Raneece Budan. Through a thoughtfully curated setlist of performances, the artists delivered moving reflections on identity, ancestry, and collective memory. The event also included an engaging artist talkback, offering deeper insight into each creator's process and the broader themes of ritual, resistance, and transformation.



IVAN COYOTE: PLAYLIST

Ivan Coyote took audiences on a deeply personal and resonant journey with *Playlist*, a powerful blend of storytelling and visual art that explored the music that shaped their queer identity and sense of possibility. Through a mix of hilarious, heartbreaking, and tender reflections, Coyote shared how songs from AM kitchen radios, dusty family record collections, and grade school musicals held hidden messages of hope and identity.

Accompanied by the evocative artwork of long-time collaborator Clyde Petersen, *Playlist* invited us to revisit the songs that shaped our own lives. The performance struck a universal chord, prompting many to reflect on the first tune that made them cry, the lyrics they scribbled into journals, and the soundtracks that helped them navigate growing up.

Playlist was more than a performance—it was an invitation to press rewind and listen closely to the music of our past, and the futures it dared us to imagine.



IN SONGS & WORDS, THIS IS: JULLY BLACK

Jully Black lit up the Lougheed Performing Arts Centre with an electrifying performance that was equal parts powerhouse vocals and heartfelt storytelling. Performing some of her most beloved hits, Jully had the audience on their feet, dancing, singing along, and riding a wave of emotion that only she could deliver.

But it wasn't just about the music. Jully opened up in a deeply personal and engaging way, sharing powerful reflections on diversity, equity, and inclusion—both within the music industry and in her broader public life. Her stories were honest, moving, and often rooted in her faith, offering an inspiring look at the values that drive her work and artistry.

With her signature warmth and authenticity, Jully connected effortlessly with the audience, creating a space that felt intimate, uplifting, and transformative. It was an evening full of rhythm, resilience, and revelation—one that left everyone moved, motivated, and humming her songs long after the lights went down.



PHILOSOPHER CAFE'S WITH DAVID GOA

Over the past year, we've continued to gather monthly for the Philosopher's Café series with David Goa—an ongoing exploration of faith, meaning, and the complexities of belief in today's world.

In the fall, our conversations focused on various forms of fundamentalism, examining their roots and expressions across different traditions. As the new year began, our attention turned to how diverse faiths gently take us by the hand and lead us into their rich fields of meaning.

These gatherings expanded our understanding of Alberta as a deeply textured and spiritually diverse landscape. Through the stories and insights David shared, we caught glimpses of the genius within each tradition—seeing not only the beauty and wisdom of different faiths but also coming to better understand how fundamentalism and nationalism can take hold.

Each session reminded us of the power of dialogue and reflection, and the Philosopher's Café continues to be a space where ideas are not only shared, but deeply felt.



THE RONNING CENTRE'S NEXT CHAPTER: DEEPENING DIALOGUE, STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE

Director Joseph Wiebe shared an inspiring and forward-looking vision for the Centre's role in being a gathering point for studying religion and public life. With clarity, passion, and purpose, Wiebe outlined how the Centre will continue to serve as a vital link between the university and the broader community.

Highlighting the Centre's commitment to supporting students, fostering community engagement, and advancing public scholarship, Wiebe emphasized the importance of amplifying diverse voices and creating space for interdisciplinary collaboration. His remarks underscored the value of cultivating meaningful relationships that enrich academic inquiry and public dialogue alike.

Audience members left with a strong sense of the Centre's evolving mission and a renewed appreciation for the role it plays in shaping thoughtful, inclusive conversations about religion in society.

DISTINGUISHED VISITING FELLOW: PETER BEINART



ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Peter Beinart is Professor of Journalism and Political Science at the Newmark School of Journalism at the City University of New York. He is a contributing opinion writer at The New York Times, Editor-at-Large of Jewish Currents, an MSNBC political commentator and a Non-Resident Fellow at the Foundation for Middle East Peace. He writes the Beinart Notebook newsletter on Substack.Com

CONNECTING WITH STUDENTS

Peter visited a Jewish Studies class on North Campus, where he actively engaged with students in a thoughtful and wide-ranging discussion about Judaism in the modern world. The conversation focused on the evolving nature of Jewish identity, exploring how it is shaped by cultural, religious, and generational influences. Together, they examined the diverse practices that define Jewish life today, from traditional rituals to more contemporary expressions of faith and community. Peter also shared insights on Jewish spirituality, inviting students to consider how personal belief, heritage, and modern challenges intersect in shaping one's spiritual experience. The dialogue was both reflective and dynamic, offering students a meaningful opportunity to connect academic study with lived religious and cultural realities.

AN EVENING WITH PETER BEINART

The Ronning Centre hosted a full house for this compelling event, which took the form of a wide-ranging interview between Peter Beinart and Director, Joseph Wiebe. The conversation fostered a deeply engaged and thoughtful environment, as it explored urgent and often polarizing questions with nuance and care. Topics included the contested meanings and political uses of terms like "Zionism" and "antisemitism," the role of public discourse in shaping these definitions, and the narratives surrounding campus protests in North America. The discussion also examined the political divides on both the left and right that simultaneously foster support for Israel and antisemitism. After the formal program ended, he remained for informal conversations, continuing the dialogue with students, faculty, and community members.



Programming Details

15

Total Events

867

Total In Person Attendance

Philosopher Cafe Series

Recurring Monthly (Sept-March)

In Person Avg. Attendees: 30

A Jewish Jesus

September 25, 2024

In Person Attendees: 43

Online Attendees: 5

An Evening with Peter Beinart

October 22, 2024

In Person Attendees: 96

Online Attendees: 44

The Sacred Remains

November 28, 2024

In Person Attendees: 45

Online Attendees: 44

Storytelling as Ritual

February 12, 2025

In Person Attendees: 55

Online Attendees: 147

CRC Vision Talk

February 26, 2025

In Person Attendees: 25

Ivan Coyote

March 4, 2025

In Person Attendees: 127

Alex Marcus

March 10, 2025

In Person Attendees: 25

Jully Black

March 11, 2025

In Person Attendees: 241

Finances

as of 2025 Fiscal Year-End

CHESTER RONNING CENTRE	
Opening Balance	\$305,577
External Funding (Donations)	\$108,018
UofA Funding (Base & Endowment Spending Allocation)	\$112,277
Program Spending (Non-Salary Costs)	\$109,911
General Administration (Salaries & Benefits)	\$124,564
Closing	\$291,397



Publications, Presentations, & Projects

Joseph R. Wiebe

Projects

Awarded SSHRC Insight Grant, "Bridging Indigenous Knowledge and Settler Ethno-religious History: An Anti-colonial Approach to Archival Research" \$155,633

Publications

Review of *Religion and Nature in North America An Introduction* Edited by: Laurel D. Kearns and Whitney Bauman, in *Reading Religion*, February 14, 2025.

Presentations

"Using Critical Indigenous Concepts in Mennonite Studies." Mennonite Studies Conference. Winnipeg, MB October 4, 2024.

Co-presenter, with Paul Gareau and Willow White, "Spilling Tea: Métis and Mennonite Conversations on Making Good Relations" Indigenous Speakers Series, University of Alberta, Augustana, January 29, 2025.

"Beyond Sides: Reframing Complicity, Responsibility, and Being Accountable in Wendell Berry," East Regional Meeting of the Conference on Christianity and Literature Grove City College, Grove City, PA, February 22, 2025.

Co-presenter with Rebecca Purc-Stephenson, Michelle Pavloff, and Briana Hagen, "From Farms to Clinics: Evidence-based Approaches for Engaging Farmers in Medical Practice" April 25, 2025, Rural and Remote Medicine Conference

Geoffrey Dipple

Publications

A. Articles:

"Gab es spiritualistische Täufer?" *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 81 (2024): 143-164.

"Hans Denck's Baptism of Hans Hut," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 99 (2025): 31-36.

"Spiritualism," *Bruniana & Campanelliana: Recherche filosofiche e materiali storico testuali* 30 (2024): 367-79.

B. Books:

co-edited with Sharon Judd and Michael Driedger, *Anabaptism, Radicalism, and the Reformation: Collected Essays of James Stayer* (Hamilton, ON: Pandora Press, 2024)

Geoffrey Dipple (Cont'd)

Presentations

"'But he who was poor remained poor': Images of Community of Goods in Anabaptist Münster," presented at the Sixteenth Century Studies conference, Toronto, Ontario, November 2024.

"A Spiritualist Take on Denck's Baptism of Hut." roundtable discussion presentation at the Sixteenth Century Studies conference, Toronto, Ontario, November 2024.

Nakita Valerio

Publications

"Combating Canadian Islamophobia: Interventions and Gaps" in *Secularism, Race, and the Politics of Islamophobia*, S. Sadequee, ed. UAlberta Press, 2025. (Co-Author)

"Re-Enchanting Islam and Understanding Muslims- Interview with Prof. Joseph Hill, UAlberta," *Canadian Association for the Study of Islam and Muslims*. 2025.

Presentations

"Rituals of Remembering: Narrativizing Qur'anic Memorization with Huffaz in Canada" presented at: HCRGSA Annual Conference, University of Alberta, February 2025

Frucht Memorial Conference in Anthropology, University of Alberta, March 2025

American Academy of Religion Annual Spring Conference, Anthropology of Religion Unit, Online. June 2025

"Combatting Islamophobia in Canada: Muslim Resistance, Interventions and Gaps," Book Talk at Canadian Political Science Association Annual conference, Congress, George Brown College, June 2025.

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 [Contact Us](#).

We also welcome your financial support, which helps expand the reach and impact of the Centre's work. Below, you'll find descriptions of each fund associated with the Ronning Centre, outlining the important initiatives they support. While these are established funds, we gratefully accept contributions of any size to help further the mission and the vital work of the Chester Ronning Centre

Support the Centre

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

The Chester Ronning Centre Annual Fund

The Annual Fund supports the core operations of the Centre, including the Program Coordinator's salary and the Director's stipend. This essential funding enables us to offer a robust schedule of speakers and events, ensuring our work remains consistent, impactful, and inclusive to the broader community.

The Daniel Yang Endowment

This endowment supports the Rev Dr & Mrs Hsi Shao Yang Internship with the Centre, awarded every other year. While there was no recipient for the 2024/25 academic year, we look forward to awarding the next recipient for the 2025/26 academic year.

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. 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. 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 on local, national and global levels. The program's intent is to bring nationally and internationally recognized intellectuals to campus 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.

Leading with Purpose.



**Chester
Ronning
Centre**



**UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA**

Created by Danielle Doel

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

ualberta.ca/chester-ronning-centre