



BOSTON COLLEGE
CENTER FOR CHRISTIAN-JEWISH LEARNING

May 26, 2022

It has been a great privilege to serve as the interim director of our Center for the past two years, carrying our work forward on and off campus during the challenges and opportunities created by this era of pandemic. This will be my last greeting written in this role. Boston College authorized a search for the Center's next director and holder of the Kraft Chair last summer. Although I have been actively involved in the Center since its conception in January 1998, I chose to return to my former role as associate director so that we could rebuild the Center as a place modeling dialogue. It is wonderful to be able to announce that the Rev. Dr. Daniel Joslyn-Siemiakoski will be returning to Boston College as the holder of the Kraft Chair and Center director (see the [official announcement](#)). We have known each other for many years; indeed, the early courses taught through our Center were part of his doctoral work, and Christian-Jewish relations has remained a major focus of his scholarship and teaching ever since. He comes to us with a wealth of exciting ideas and the energy and wisdom to implement them effectively. I very much look forward to resuming an in-person dialogue with him and to seeing where this collaboration will take us both.

Dr. Joslyn-Siemiakoski will be joining the Comparative Theology area of our doctoral faculty, where I also sit, opening even more exciting prospects for developing our doctoral program in Christian-Jewish relations. Directing PhD students continues to be an important part of my life, with four currently at the dissertation stage. Two of these have been appointed to positions at universities for next year even before completing their degrees, an encouraging sign for the future of the field.

I of course continue to teach undergraduates as well. This semester I taught the undergraduate Theology core course, *Judaism and Christianity in Dialogue*, flipping the classroom and consequently introducing a Jewish *beit midrash* (yeshiva study hall) atmosphere, even when studying Christian texts. Engaged dialogue, at least between study partners, was thus part of virtually every class session.

It has also been a privilege to continue working with and supporting the Center's intern from 2020-2021, Dennis Wieboldt, as he continues to develop his research on the interreligious reach of Fr. William J. Kenealy, SJ. Dennis presented his work this spring at an undergraduate conference at Creighton University and *American Catholic Studies* has accepted an initial article. Congratulations are due to Dennis not only on his graduation, but on the long list of honors and accomplishments accompanying it.

During the search for the Center's new director, we also offered a full schedule of programs this semester, increasingly in hybrid mode, combining a local in-person audience with our national and international Zoom community. We were particularly grateful that Jesper Svartvik, our Visiting Corcoran Chair, was finally granted a visa and has been with us for the entirety of the spring semester. This newsletter includes links to the recordings of his numerous talks for us, as well as of the conference he organized and the program with James Carroll that emerged from the course he offered.

Our proximity enabled Dr. Svartvik and me to collaborate on two recorded scholarly presentations as well. The first was for a consultation called by the International Conference of Christians and Jews in February on “The ‘Other’ in Teaching and Preaching.” Our contribution consisted of our two lectures and a conversation between us about them. Participants in the consultation from around the globe watched the lectures in advance and then joined together for discussions with the speakers. The second contributed to an initiative of the Christian Scholars Group in Jewish-Christian Relations to provide Lenten resources on four elements of the Passion narrative that have been sources of anti-Judaism. Dr. Svartvik and I conceived of and created the contribution on “Judas and Betrayal.” This series has found a home on the website of the International Conference of Christians and Jews. It has been a real privilege to learn and work together this semester, and I am only sorry that the pandemic forced the first year plus of his time at Boston College to be virtual!

A very different collaboration has emerged from working together with Fr. Mark Massa, S.J., director of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life. What began two years ago as an interreligious contribution to the Black Lives Matter discussion on campus has evolved over four semesters into our sponsoring Theology department conversations on today’s pedagogical challenges. I hope to continue encouraging this work, not necessarily under the Center’s umbrella, but in my new role as the department’s Director of Graduate Studies.

My other current writing projects focus more on Jewish liturgy, generating the huge stacks of books that surround me when on Zoom from my home study. One project was generated by a question from Christian liturgists. Many have sought to find in Judaism the source of the early Christian turn to liturgical memory. However, the sources identified have not pointed adequately to the actual functioning of memory in post-biblical Jewish liturgy. An initial draft addressing this issue demonstrates that this will be a book-length project, to which I hope to return soon, after fulfilling a number of more immediate obligations, themselves largely about Jewish liturgy for Christian contexts.

Another fruit of the pandemic has been that instead of irregular multi-day in-person gatherings, various dialogue groups have been meeting more frequently for shorter meetings. I participated in such a gathering of Jewish and Christian liturgists in March, in lieu of our canceled gathering in Jerusalem. An American-based Evangelical-Jewish dialogue has met several times this year over Zoom. More locally, I have participated in a taskforce on Anti-Semitism convened by the Boston-area Combined Jewish Philanthropies. And of course, we again split this year’s Corcoran Chair conference over two Sunday afternoons, the first entirely virtual and the second hybrid, thus including an international audience.

This summer too will be very full, especially as Zoom allows us to continue programming even when the university is not in session. Please join us for a lecture by [Dr. Barbara Meyer](#) in June, whose book, *Jesus the Jew in Christian Memory* has already begun to stimulate high-level academic discussions, and for a continuing education program in July offered with Yad Vashem, Israel’s Holocaust museum’s educational staff, on [the experiences of women and children during the Holocaust](#).

In the meantime, let me wish you a healthy and relaxing summer,

Ruth Langer
Interim Director
Center for Christian-Jewish Learning