

## An Interview with Dr. Lucinda Mosher

*Continued*

- 3. The other series is also of special note--- the ‘Faith in the Neighborhood’ series on Belonging, Praying, Loss. How did that series develop?**

The Faith in the Neighborhood series was commissioned by Seabury Books. The editorial team asked me to develop a series that would answer questions Christians asked about their non-Christian neighbors. Together, we brainstormed the themes and research questions. These books are anecdotal and interview-driven. These books do not teach much about what Christians believe and do, but they do focus on the diversity of practice and belief of about a dozen other religions and the diversity within each. They are short and very readable. I have used them successfully with students from ages 11 to 91. So have other people. When Barbara Brown Taylor was writing her very popular *Holy Envy*, her students were reading one of my *Faith in the Neighborhood* volumes for her world religions course.

- 4. How might these series be beneficial to Christian leaders both lay and clergy in our Diocese and local communities?**

The Faith in the Neighborhood series is meant to enhance our multi religious fluency, to improve our ability to understand our neighbors, and to do it in a way that is not overly technical. People will benefit from the stories. Some of the stories are incredibly moving. Over the years, I have made video lectures based on some of the chapters, so that's another way they can be engaged. The Building Bridges series is more technical, but there are parts of each and every one of those books that can be read by a parish book club or an adult forum. These books are designed to facilitate the sort of dialogue where Christians and Muslims study a text together. So, a parish that might like to partner with a group of Muslims from the local mosque or civic organization or school would find these books to be very useful.

- 5. Two of your books really stand out for me. The first one I would mention is *A World of Inequalities: Christian and Muslim Perspectives, 2021* that examines causes of global inequality and explores solutions in dialogue with Christian and Muslim perspectives. What inspired this**

**book? Is it for the specialists to talk to one another or is it intended for a broader audience?**

After many years of dialogue on themes drawn from doctrine or practice, the Building Bridges Seminar decided to take a turn toward political theology. *A World of Inequalities* is one of three consecutive books in that vein. The other two are on Power and Freedom. The essays will appeal to a broad readership.

- 6. The other is *With the Best of Intentions: Interreligious Missteps and Mistakes*, 2023 in which you have invited some three-dozen scholars and practitioners of many faiths to share cases of missteps and failures of interfaith encounters. What inspired this book? Is it intended for the specialist in the field or is it of benefit to all of us attempting to live a faith-led life in the world?**

Thank you for asking about *With the Best of Intentions*. My co-editors and I are very proud of that book. It won first place in the “Ecumenism or Interfaith Relations” category of the 2024 Catholic Media Association Book Awards.

What inspired this book? My colleagues, Rabbi Or Rose of Hebrew College in Massachusetts had been an editor for the hugely successful book *My Neighbor’s Faith*, which told about happy interfaith encounters. Ellie Pierce, of Harvard University’s Pluralism Project, had written numerous case studies for classroom use. Now, each had an idea for a collection of stories of interfaith engagements in which things had not gone so well. They decided to collaborate on a single book, then convinced me to join the project as lead editor. We called ourselves LEO (Lucinda, Ellie, and Or). LEO met weekly via Zoom for about two years. The finished product, which could have been entitled *Oops!*, was published by Orbis.

- 7. A large part of your teaching on the faculty over the years at the Hartford Seminary (founded 1834), now the Hartford International University for Religion and Peace since 2021, involves the formation of chaplains—training students from different faith traditions for ministry as chaplains. Tell us a little about this work and its significance. I think it is a part of your work you have really enjoyed.**

I came back to Hartford Seminary in 2010 as an adjunct professor to teach Christian-Muslim concerns. In 2012, I was hired as a faculty associate, in order to direct programs in leadership and chaplaincy. You're right that much of my work at Hartford has had something to do with the formation of chaplains. Twice I've been tasked with developing a certificate or degree program. Our student body is 40% Muslim and many of them have come to us to prepare to serve as U.S. military chaplains. I have played a role in preparing numerous chaplains for work in federal or state prisons, hospitals, and universities as well. Graduates are serving in a number of institutions around this country. My work has involved analyzing what is needed in a chaplain formation program and helping to develop the necessary courses. I have taught some of them. I do love working with the students themselves. I still teach the required ethics course. However, I am now the director of our MA in Interreligious Studies program.

8. **If a priest or lay leader from one of our churches in the Diocese of Florida came to you and said, "Help us in my church to get involved in the work of ecumenism—or in interfaith relations—where do we start?" how might you advise them?**

Basically, I think the first step is to take a close look at ourselves and how interfaith engagement can be construed as faithfulness. Where do we get the warrant for that as Episcopalians?

I ask parishes to take a close look at the Baptismal Covenant. I think that in the baptismal covenant we have a warrant for interreligious and ecumenical work. In its promises are the very roots of learning how other people establish, maintain and celebrate a meaningful world, which is what I think religion is actually all about. So that's where we start. We might then map the ecumenical and interreligious elements of our own neighborhood. What comes next depends on many factors but is always informed by the desire to be a good neighbor.

9. **Personally, my experience has been the more I experience and learn about other faith communities my own faith, in turn, is deepened and strengthened. Do you find that this is generally the case?**

Yes, I think that learning about other faith communities does serve to deepen and strengthen our own faith. I see this dynamic taking place over and over again every semester that I teach.

Generally, when learning to ask good questions of someone else's beliefs and practices, it helps to have a good grasp of one's own. So, I define religion as worldview, as the constellation of things by which someone establishes, maintains, and celebrates a meaningful world. I don't shy away from complexities like the doctrine of the Trinity. I guide people to make comparisons in a respectful manner—and to be willing to learn new vocabulary. I put the emphasis both on improving the quality of our disagreements and delighting in the differences—even the deepest ones.