

**First Word: Board of Regents**  
**Augsburg College: 11 October 2014**

First Word.

Let's make it God's. These words from the first book of the Hebrew and Christian bibles. It goes quickly: don't blink

A reading from Genesis 3:9:

"But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him:  
"Where are you?""

Hold that thought.

I want the second word to be one of gratitude: Thank you.  
Thanks to the President and the Board for making possible  
these innovation grants for *Augsburg2019*.

They've worked across disciplinary lines, bringing together  
faculty from liberal arts and professional studies;

They've worked across academic class lines as well, bringing  
together with faculty, staff and administration;

They've created experiential learning opportunities for these  
wild and crazy tribes of Augsburgians– as we meet in spaces in  
the city and neighborhood we usually take our students: Mill  
City Museum, the Augsburg Nursing Commons at Central  
Lutheran in downtown Minneapolis.

President Pribbenow will say more about these later. Let me  
say a few words about one I direct with Leif Anderson,  
involving a core team of Rebecca John, Tom Morgan, Hans  
Wiersma exploring **The Vocation App**.

At least that's what we applied for:

Before the first meeting we knew we needed to step back and ask a few prior questions:

What is this app for?

What is this thing we talk about when we talk about **vocation**?

And – Leif kept pressing this one – what's our “logic model?” How do we do it?

**Vocation** means something to the Lutheran tribe, but not outside it – and increasingly Augsburg is a community that redefines “insiders” and “outsiders.”

This community is fluent in more than Lutheran, literally scores of other languages, each of which bears a beauty and weight of its own;

Each of which was developed out of a deep need:  
the need to give voice to those deep longings and unspeakable fears that keep us awake at night.

We called them **The Big Questions**: the ones that wake you at 3 in the morning.

So we walked into the first meeting and asked ourselves:

What are **The Big Questions**?

What are ours?

What are our students?

And we did this over a couple of rounds, each time asking new people in to join the group – and be our visiting experts.

That means: we had to try to explain to the visiting experts what in the world we were doing –

That means: we asked them what they *THEIR* **Big Questions** were.

And what they thought *our students'* **Big Questions** were.

And over the course of the summer, we came to three rather simple conclusions:

1. Auggies Ask Big Questions? Just because of who we are, we don't feel like we have – or have to have all the answers, thanks very much.

We have instead the freedom – and the obligation to ask Big Questions.

And that was the Revelation of June.

2. We had a couple of questions that kept coming up again and again and again both from ourselves and from our visiting experts:

Why am I here? (start with Why – Simon Sinek)

What are my gifts?

How will I use them?

And for whom?

And that was the Revelation of July.

3. We realized that WE ARE THE App!!!!

After a summer of visiting experts and just a great deal of fun  
and fine conversation, we discovered that we had a huge  
investment in asking Big Questions,  
And that investment was not so much not so much  
face-to-screen,  
as screen-to-screen.  
And that was the Revelation of early September.

NOW: I would be remiss if I didn't say: we also, thanks to Hans  
Wiersma, my hyper-tekkie Reformation colleague in the REL  
department

With his permission I share it now: The Vocation App.

Pause: What are your **Big Questions**?  
And let's focus that for a Board of Regents: what are you  
deepest longing for this institution as you think toward 2019.  
TABLE DISCUSSION

Now: here's how I want to close this out.

Let's go back to that First Word from the First Books of the  
Hebrew and Christian Bibles:

Here's what I want to notice:

The most interesting questions are always God's

I've been reading all kinds of scriptures for God's questions:  
You have to search for them sometimes,  
they're not written in BIG PRINT or red letters –  
But they're always pretty interesting

You'll find there are quite a lot of them.

It's often God's way of answering our own Big Questions --  
with a Question of God's own.

Sometimes, it's a question that terrifies –  
as in the questions to Job from the Whirlwind:  
“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?  
Tell me, if you have understanding,  
    who determined its measurements – surely you know –  
    or who stretched the line upon it?  
On what were its bases sunk,  
Or who laid its cornerstone  
    When the morning stars sung together  
    And all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?” (Job 38:2-7)

Sometimes, it's a question that clarifies,  
as Jesus' question to his would-be disciples in John's  
gospel,  
“What are you looking for?” (John 1:38)

God's first question to Adam is a question that opens the door  
into a room that “breathes pure sun” (Lisel Mueller, “For a  
Thirteenth Birthday):  
    as God's question here in Genesis to Adam:  
    “Adam, where are you?”

And Adam's eaten the forbidden fruit –  
and he's hiding because he doesn't know what to do,

But he will in time blame Eve, Satan, and God himself for the  
transgression, as Luther notes in his commentary on this  
passage.

All of this God knows – the blaming, the shame, the nakedness

Because God is all-knowing;

And all of this God could destroy as easily as he created it:  
Because God is all powerful.

And what does God do, given all these options?  
And God stays in the conversation,  
stays in the game,  
stays in the relationship –  
with a question:

“Where are you?”

And the only way to answer a question like that is with the  
response:

“Here I am.” (Cf., Gen. 22:1,7,11; 27:1, 18; 37:13; Ex. 3:4; Num.  
11:21; 1 Sam. 3:4; 22:12; Is. 6:8, 58:9; Heb 10:7-17)

God’s **Big Questions** are always the most interesting.

Let us pray:

Gracious God,

You who created the sun, the moon, and all stars;

You who laid the foundations of the earth

Here we are.

Show us the way forward.

AMEN.

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