NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

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"What we have loved, others will love, and we will teach them how."
(W. Wordsworth, from "The Prelude")

NOTES FROM READERS

>>What you think<<

This begins our eleventh year together with these bi-monthly Notes. I am more and more convinced that William Wordsworth's words printed as the preface to my Notes since their inception are at the heart of our reflective practice. Life is about what we love and how we share our love with others. In other words, life is at its core about philanthropy – loving humankind. Here's to your abiding commitment to reflective practice and to sharing your passions with your fellow travelers.

In that vein, Linda McGurn, a veteran fundraiser from Springfield, MA and long-time subscriber, wrote after the last issue of Notes with these reflections on philanthropy as common work: "I absolutely love your "back to basics" of philanthropy. In my experience, the "basics" are not basic at all to most organizations. I work in a healthcare and social service network of 17 different entities. In the hospital, alone, I struggle, as I did in my last hospital, with buy-in for the concept that we all need a shared vision. It has been a personal battle of mine in two hospitals to help the clinical and administrative staff to understand that philanthropy must belong to all staff. I used some of your work that I read back in 1998 to help describe and define this shared vision and the concept of our common work. I get weary of the battle, but do keep trying and your words or reminder that tell me that someone else understands this concept, is most encouraging.

I will tell you a quick story. At my last hospital, we were doing one of those senior leadership exercises with the 60 managers. At the end of 6 hours of collaborative work, trying to understand each other's roles, we got in a big circle and had to introduce the person standing next to us and tell what we appreciate about them. The nurse administrator next to me, who was part of a very successful local family, said that what she appreciated about me is that I ask people for money, so that nobody else, especially her, had to ask for money. She, and I suspect most of her peers in hospitals throughout the US, had totally missed the concept of "common work belonging to all in the organization." Thanks, Linda – for your good work and for the reminder that the work goes on!

Occasionally, I (or my colleagues) refer to items from previous issues of Notes. If you have not been a subscriber previously, and wish to review our conversations, past issues of Notes are available on-line at www.jgacounsel.com (check out the fine new website!). The website version of Notes also includes helpful hyperlinks to sources for purchasing or subscribing to the various publications mentioned in Notes. I thank my friends at Johnson, Grossnickle & Associates for their many years of abiding support for our reflective practice.

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REFLECT ON THIS

>>Waiting for the translation<<

A couple of recent experiences, including a wonderful trip to Germany in early October to help celebrate the 20-year anniversary of what the Germans call "the change," occasioned this homiletical reflection in our college chapel.

[Matthew 11: 1-6]

A couple of weeks ago I was here in the chapel to greet a remarkable group of visitors to Augsburg, a delegation of Iraqi citizens from Najif, one of Minneapolis' sister cities. I came into the event midway through a several hour discussion between the delegation and a group of Augsburg students and faculty members. My role – as is often the case – was to bring a greeting on behalf of the college.

As I came into the chapel I noticed that the Iraqi responses to audience questions were being translated by a member of the delegation. I was called to the podium when there was a break in the questioning and after shaking the hands of the delegates, I turned to the audience and launched into my brief welcome. About a minute into my remarks, I noticed some snickering in the front row of students – and not having attempted to be humorous, I worried that there was something about me that was making them laugh. You might guess my concerns…was my bow tie crooked, did I have spinach in my teeth, or worse?

Quickly, though, I realized that the translator, who was standing behind me, was having some sort of facial reaction to my not pausing for him to translate. I had forgotten to wait for the translation.

Learning to 'wait for the translation' is the lens through which I want to explore a theme that is on the agenda for our Board of Regents meetings this weekend, that is, the scriptural and theological basis for the role of the Regents in 'welcoming' strangers to Augsburg College.

And I further want explore our gospel assigned for this morning – the message that Jesus asks his disciples to take to the one who had proclaimed his coming, his cousin John, in Herod's prison – to see if we might all learn how waiting for the translation is at the heart of faithful lives in the world.

In other words, what might we learn from my not waiting for the translation about our work in welcoming strangers in our midst and living out the gospel in the world?

Let's begin with what was going on for me in that moment with the Iraqi delegation. Perhaps I was impatient, in a hurry, going through the motions. Or perhaps I was arrogant, forgetting that not everyone speaks my language and is able to understand what I have to say. Or perhaps I was human, selfishly living in my own moment, doing my best and assuming that was good enough. It's probably some combination of all this and more.

Having just returned from a week in Germany I have experienced numerous times the combination of impatience, arrogance and genuine humility of waiting for the translation, of

frustration with those who cannot understand what I am saying, of not knowing how to communicate the simplest of thoughts and needs. But I also have been reminded that my German colleagues share the same feelings and frustrations and humility. None of us is inclined to wait for the translation. But wait we must if we hope to find our way together.

As so we waited – and looked into each others' eyes to find that stories of faith and freedom are worth the wait. And so, too, we all must learn to wait and look into each others' eyes and each others' lives to find our ways together.

I have a sense that there is a lot of impatience and frustration on our campus right now as we learn to wait together for translation, perhaps not so much of our various native languages but especially so of our diverse experiences and perspectives. More and more Augsburg is a community of diverse learners and seekers, seeking ways to be together, to learn from each other and live out our individual and common callings in the world. The question is whether we are patient and humble and courageous enough to encounter each other as strangers who may need to wait for mutual translations, for genuine understanding and for openness to new ways forward as a community.

A few faculty members have begun to engage a most helpful conversation about what they are finding in their own efforts, especially in the classroom, to "wait for the translation," to suspend their own notions of what they mean and intend in their teaching and to have the patience and imagination to put themselves in the minds of their students. Think, for example, about the various idioms and jargon we use in our academic language every day – and then imagine how someone who has not grown up with that language or experience might experience our teaching. One teaching tip offered is what a faculty member calls a personal "idiom filter." Think about what others will hear and understand before you use an idiom or analogy. A good teaching lesson in any situation, but especially as we engage those who come from backgrounds different from our own – as we live with those who are waiting for the translation.

In this way, the issue is whether or not we are able to be faithful to our work as a college community welcoming each other as strangers and negotiating our work together – as those who are not always easily understood, whose several languages and perspectives demand a leap of faith to wait for the translation no matter how uncomfortable and frustrating and anxiety-provoking it may be to do so.

As our gospel story teaches us, this leap of faith is nothing new for those of us who have the gift of grace. Imagine John the Baptist, spending his entire adult life proclaiming the one who would come after him to make the way straight, to lay the mountains low and to lift up redemption for all who believe and are baptized. But what does it look like? John spent his entire life waiting for the translation of the message he proclaimed.

And now in prison, about to lose his life, John sends word to his cousin, asking for the translation. Are you the One who is to come? Will you save me, will you redeem my life's work, will you make it all worthwhile? And now comes the Word, the translation – and it sounds nothing like what John or we expected. The Word means healing the sick, raising the dead, preaching good news to the poor – turning the world's ways on their head. This is what it means, John – blessed are those who take no offense at this good news.

Faith calls us to wait for the translation and then to be open to the radical ways in which that translation teaches us about the strangers in our midst – those who are sick, in jail, in need of compassion and justice, desiring of an education – who are the signs of God's kingdom come, on earth, right here at Augsburg where God calls us to the work of education and service.

And God knows just how hard it is for even the most faithful among us to have the patience, the humility, and the courage to wait for the translation – to listen deeply, to suspend our own notions of what the work of faith looks like, to believe that strangers are sent to us demanding our welcome, our hospitality, our teaching, our love and compassion.

For when we learn to wait for the translation, it will change our lives forever. As when I slowed down enough to hear from our Iraqi colleagues about their remarkable efforts to build healthy and sustainable communities in their war-torn country. And when I learned to admit that I don't know much about what happened in East Germany 20 and 25 years ago when God's faithful and courageous people rose up and said no more oppression, no more captivity, no more fear, leading to a Peaceful Revolution that reunited brothers and sisters. And as we do at this college each and every day with the strangers who come and join us as students and teachers and co-workers and neighbors, longing for the freedom that comes from education and truth-seeking.

And as we do each moment of our lives as God's people in the world, asking along with the prophet John, "Are you the One who is to come?", only to be surprised by a God who loves us so much to come into our history, proclaiming release and healing and justice and compassion. Wait for the translation – a simple lesson for each of us, for our college and for the world – wait and listen and find in each other the way to learn, to love and to live as God's faithful people. Thanks be to God. Amen.

>>Eight Theses on Career and Calling<<

As I've written before, our college has made the theological concept of vocation (or calling) the centerpiece of our academic work – helping our students to discern and live out their callings in the world, whatever they may be. In a recent public gathering, religion professor Mark Tranvik, who leads our Lilly Endowment-funded vocation efforts (and who is a fellow Luther College graduate!), offered these eight theses on career and calling as a further way to understand the more expansive ways in which vocation helps us think differently about the meaning and significance of our lives in the world. We're having a great time exploring the relevance of the concept of vocation in the 21st century.

(1) The roots of the word "career" help us understand both its usefulness and its limitations. The etymology of career leads us to think about the "course" or "racecourse" that is a working life.
(2) A career suggests a deep and serious dedication to a craft.
(3) In our age it has become necessary to widen one's career arc.
(4) Unless guided by a sense of calling, a career is in danger of running off course.
(5) A sense of calling develops when you see yourself under a broader horizon of faith and community.
(6) Careers tend to be limited to the world of work; a calling never ends.
(7) Callings are not only about the future; they involve attention to the messy details of life.

(8) Callings are marked by suffering and joy.

Rich food for thought as we each reflect on our careers and callings.

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PRACTICE THIS

>>The science of giving<<

The July 2009 issue of *The Rotarian* includes an article entitled "The science of giving" which summarizes research findings from an organization with the memorable name: the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love. Led by my graduate school colleague Stephen Post, the institute has funded a variety of research projects during the past decade that have focused on areas such as volunteerism and organ donation.

An example of the research findings that may help us with our philanthropic work is a longitudinal study undertaken at the School of Public Health at the University of California-Berkeley which found that volunteering for at least two organizations was as beneficial as exercising four times a week in reducing mortality rate. In addition, the study found that volunteerism also tends to be connected in a positive way to other sorts of social connections. Post also notes in a helpful way that organizations who use volunteers also should think about how we care for our volunteers, not asking them to work beyond their physical and emotional limits.

Maybe all of this seems like common sense to those of us who volunteer and work with volunteers, but the fact that science may be catching up with our experience bodes well for making an even stronger case for people to be philanthropic.

>>Faith communities<<

Our congregation here in Minneapolis has a new pastor and her arrival has occasioned some reflection about why we belong to a particular faith community. Martin Marty writes in the September 2009 issue of *Context* about the recent work of Robert Putnam (of *Bowling Alone* fame) and David Campbell, whose new book, *American Grace: How Religion is Reshaping Our Civic and Political Lives* offers some helpful insights about the role of faith communities in motivating giving and volunteering. Here is an intriguing passage from Marty's comment on Putnam and Campbell's work:

"In my observation health local faith communities derive their power largely from what looks like a mere byproduct of their message but is in fact central to it: their reliability. One can depend on dozens of people of good will to make the effort to gather in the same room at the same hour on the same day of every week, regardless of weather or season. Those who are (and have been) active members of a healthy local faith community know about that power, of course, but it's not something that can be readily explained to someone who has never been a sustained participant in such a community. The roots of that power (i.e., weekly gatherings at which participants are literally reaching out to each other and operating on others' terms instead of solely on their own) concisely circumscribe the limits to online faith communities, which can partially augment but never truly replace in-person gatherings."

The power of being together, engaged with each other, on terms that are not solely our own – sounds like common work.

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PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I've had a lot of time in airplanes this fall and have recently finished several fascinating books which I commend to you, including:

- *Ethical Leadership: The Quest for Character, Civility, and Community*, by Walter Earl Fluker (Fortress Press, 2009)
- *How the Mighty Fall and Why Some Companies Never Give In* by Jim Collins (HarperCollins, 2009)
- *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* by Phyllis Tickle (Baker Books, 2008)

>>I carry your heart with me<<

e.e. cummings says it so elegantly…

I carry your heart with me

i carry your heart with me (i carry it in
my heart) i am never without it(anywhere
i go you go, my dear; and whatever is done
by only me is your doing, my darling)
                                        i fear
no fate(for you are my fate, my sweet) i want
no world(for beautiful you are my world, my true)
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant
and whatever a sun will always sing is you

here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars a party
i carry your heart with me (i carry it in my heart)

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>>Topics for the next issue (December 2009)<<

- Asking the right questions
- On innovation