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<<

Spring greetings from Minnesota, where we are in the midst of our commencement week – always a meaningful, if crazy, time!

A nice note from long-time friend, colleague and Notes subscriber Jim Greenfield, commenting on my February Notes:

"I was struck by your question: "Do you love what you do?" and wonder if you might expand on this in a future NOTES. How might fundraisers answer? Some may believe we have achieved professional status. I suspect we only have defined a profession and are growing into becoming one.

I continue to reflect on Bob Payton's seminal question: "Are you working for philanthropy or are you working off philanthropy?" Some fundraisers may see their role as just a job; others believe they are pursuing a career of quality service through professional practice. To sustain a commitment to do the best you can under challenging and imperfect conditions asks for more than just "showing up"." Thanks, Jim – a good idea for a future reflection. Any other thoughts out there on this topic?

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. 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

>>Hearts broken open<<

I gave the following address at our Honors Convocation in mid-April.

"This is a fine and important occasion – and we've all gathered and dressed up to mark our pride in your many achievements, in the quality of your minds and hearts, in the passion and courage you have shown in your journeys here at Augsburg, in the ways you have made Augsburg and the world better, and in the promise you offer all of us in your leadership. We honor you – lift you up – set you apart with accolades and cords and congratulations. You are among the best and brightest, we are proud of you, and it is a privilege for me to offer some brief thoughts this afternoon that might

help frame our common understanding of how an Augsburg education – honorably pursued – has aimed to break your hearts open.

So perhaps a few words about your hearts to begin.

University of Virginia English professor Mark Edmundson has recently opined in *The New York Times* (4/1/2012) that the students who truly succeed in college are those who show up with what (borrowing from the Boss, Bruce Springsteen) he calls "a hungry heart." Edmundson argues that students with a "hungry heart" are those who have a love for learning and openness to experience; the courage and curiosity to stare into the Abyss of human experience and get excited; and the willingness to risk beliefs and values because you have confident beliefs and values to risk. Edmundson goes on to say that "Not all students have a hungry heart. Some do, some don't, and having a hungry heart (or not) is what makes all the difference for a young person seeking an education."

There are ways in which Edmundson's opinion extends a long-standing fascination in America about the role of the heart as a metaphor for integrating intellect, values and character. Alexis de Tocqueville, the French journalist and chronicler of mid-19th century America, observed in his two volume *Democracy in America* (1835 and 1840) that the vitality of the American democracy was not so much about a political or legal structure as it was about our *mores*, defined variously as "notions, opinions and ideas that shape mental habits"; or again, as the sum of moral and intellectual dispositions of men (*sic*) in society; or habitual practices with respect to such things as religion, political participation, and economic life; or, on point for our topic here, as "habits of the heart."

In their mid-1980s book entitled *Habits of the Heart*, sociologist Robert Bellah and his colleagues borrowed Tocqueville's concept to argue that the renewal of our democracy relied on recovering these habits of the heart as a means to navigate between our private and public lives, between individualism of various stripes and a commitment to the wider public good. The genius of our democracy depends, they argued, on a healthy balance between private and public, a balance that is only possible when we cultivate in our citizenry the civic virtues that Tocqueville called habits of the heart.

The problem is, of course, that much too often for too many people our hearts are neither hungry nor habitual. And therein lies the stuff of a pretty dismal diagnosis of our common life.

For those of us who have the privilege to be part of an academic community like Augsburg, dedicated at its core to the liberal arts academic tradition, there is much to celebrate about the promise of our education. At its best and most faithful, the liberal arts tradition claims that genuine learning, grounded in humility and openness, must embrace the experience of difference and otherness, must seek to hold the tension of opposites and conflicting perspectives without falling apart. In fact, I might argue that we are most learned and faithful when we give up attempting to control our world, when we recognize that the gifts and ideas and experiences of others are at the heart of a community that is healthy and just and compassionate, and when we lift up the ways in which our learning and lives are enhanced by living in the tension of opposites – by seeking to comprehend all sides of an issue, to be comfortable with complexity and ambiguity, to honor paradox in thought, speech and action. For those educated in the liberal arts, the ideal outcome is that our hearts – the intersection of mind and spirit and community – are formed by living in the tensions that define human experience.

That said, we are not always at our best in our academic communities. How easy it is once we have been educated to believe that we have learned enough, that we have found the right way to the truth, that our ways of seeing the world and acting in it give us a leg up on those who do not share our superior learning. And when we do engage with those who do not share our beliefs and education, those we count as less learned, our behavior often leans toward finding ways to help "correct" their deficiencies at best or marginalizing and ignoring them at worst.

This, then, is the abiding tension in our lives – the tension between our aspirations to embrace the other, the stranger, in our educational journeys and the arrogance that too often creeps in when we believe that our education privileges us and allows us to stigmatize and ignore the other. And it is in our ability to navigate this tension that our hearts are forged.

Recently, educator (and honorary Augsburg alumnus) Parker Palmer has written compellingly of this challenge for our hearts in his *Healing the Heart of Democracy*. Palmer, who is a student of Tocqueville and Bellah, has firmly in mind this idea of habits of the heart when he suggests that "we are at a heartbreaking moment in American history…the conflicts and contradictions of twenty-first-century life are breaking the American heart and threatening to compromise our democratic values." He argues that this heartbreak is both a personal and a political condition, and that our ability to navigate the tensions of our lives in a life-giving (and not death-dealing) way is at the core of the future of democracy.

Palmer describes two ways in which our heart can respond in the midst of this heartbreak. The conventional image of a broken heart is that the tension grows unbearable because of stress and divisiveness and hardness, and there is no outcome possible except that our hearts break into a thousand shards, falling apart and spreading pain in ourselves and to those around us. In this scenario, the broken heart becomes an unresolved wound, inflicted on ourselves and others. All we can do is try and pick up the pieces.

The second image of a broken heart imagines the "small clenched fist of a heart broken open into largeness of life, into greater capacity to hold one's own and the world's pain and joy." This heart broken open is in evidence all around us, Palmer argues, in the examples of those who have learned compassion and grace as the fruits of suffering. "Here, heartbreak becomes a source of healing, enlarging our empathy and extending our ability to reach out."

Two ways in which our hearts are forged in our world. The first – the heart broken apart – shaped by our impatient and control-obsessed culture, does not allow us to hold social and political tensions in ways that open us to the world. Our hearts are hardened, shut down, either withdrawn from the world or lashing out at the other whom we see as threat and never as (even potential) friend.

The second – the heart broken open – doesn't deny the realities and tensions of the world, but doesn't allow those realities and tensions to define what is possible. In fact, the heart broken open holds the tensions creatively – living in love, seeking the balance between private and public goods, believing that peace – even a glimpse of peace – is possible between peoples and nations.

And here, Palmer claims, is the choice we all must face: "Will we hold our hearts open and keep trying to love, even as love makes us more vulnerable to the losses that break our hearts? Or will we shut down or lash out, refusing to risk love again and seeking refuge in withdrawal or hostility?"

So, back to your hearts, your hungry and broken hearts. What habits of the heart will you seek to cultivate as you continue your education and follow your calls in the world? I, of course, have more

than a passing interest in this question, for you and your hearts are the reason I – and I would venture to guess, all of my faculty colleagues – come to work each day, why we commit ourselves to this calling as educators in this place called Augsburg College. We come to teach and learn, to cajole and inspire, to puzzle and rejoice, to live with and through you, with the wild hope that your hearts will break open to love the world. We come to live out the call powerfully articulated by the poet William Wordsworth when he wrote: "What you have loved, others will love, and you will teach them how."

At the same time, though, we are not naïve to believe that simply being educated in this college, with our deep commitment to the liberal arts, will cultivate in you hearts that love the world. You must make that choice. You must decide whether this education that seeks to embrace the tensions, to welcome the strangers, that believes in the promise of human significance and community, will form your hearts to choose life-giving instead of death-dealing ways in the world. You must choose whether your hearts will harden and break into pieces useless to you and the world – or break open to offer a way of healing and grace that serves the needs of the world and your fellow travelers therein.

I have been privileged during your time here at Augsburg to witness countless examples of hearts broken open to the world. Allow me to share some that seem particularly relevant to our hopes for you, our honorable students and graduates.

Professor Tim Pippert from the sociology department and I are co-teaching the Senior Honors Seminar this spring on the broad topic of income inequality in America. The course offers a multi-disciplinary perspective on the realities of income disparity by focusing on two extremes: the homeless and the wealthy. Through a variety of readings and experiences (including volunteering at two shelters and tours of private clubs and museums), we are all being challenged as educated people to struggle with our own perceptions of those who are different than we are. And those perceptions often begin with the stigma we attach to those at both ends of the wealth spectrum. We do wonder why the homeless live the way they do. We jump to conclusions about their level of education, about their drug and alcohol abuse, about their mental competency, about the decisions they made in their lives. At the same time, we also wonder about the greedy 1%, those who occupy private clubs, those who control wealth and corporate power, those who are not accountable for their riches.

For me, the inspiring thing happening in our course is witnessing students admit these stigmas and then seek to listen to the experiences of others – homeless or wealthy. So, for example, a student volunteering at Peace House on Franklin Avenue sits next to a long-time homeless man at lunch and learns his story, recognizing the common needs and aspirations they share. Or, on another night, students hear from a thoughtful member of the 1% who worries about her children and how they will live responsibly in a world marked by injustice and scarcity. Come to find out, we can learn from those different from us about how we live in the world. We can welcome the stranger – even when that stranger scares us or makes us angry – and therein find our way together. We have no easy answers, but we are willing to live in the tensions. Our hearts have been broken open.

For those of you who will graduate this spring, you have seen and been a part of a remarkable transformation in the profile of Augsburg College. As you entered the college, our commitment to diversity – especially ethnic diversity – remained a firm, but unrealized, hope in our mission statement. When you joined our community, that began to change and through the past four years, our student body has grown more and more diverse – we are now the most diverse private college in

the Upper Midwest – a fact that has had profound effects on many aspects of our lives together. Making our way together has not been easy. The diversity of our community means that there are tensions abundant – tensions of culture and religion and expectations, tensions of privilege and racism and our many fears. I recall meeting with a group of faculty members shortly before you commenced your Augsburg career and there was real anxiety about how we would teach and serve this more diverse student body.

And I remember vividly the wise words of a colleague in that gathering who said quietly, "I know we are fear what this will mean for us, but I think we will do what we have always done in this college. We will meet our students as they come to us, we will welcome them in and then challenge them to stretch their minds and imaginations. And, if we are at our best, we will allow our students to change us, to make us better teachers and a stronger college. It is our character as a college committed to access and excellence, to hospitality and justice, to the liberal arts and service in the world." And so we have, in partnership with you. You have been changed and you have changed us. That is only possible because our hearts have been broken open to see our educational and vocational aspirations as paths forward together.

It has not been easy – no one said it would be easy. We have made mistakes, we struggle with the social ills from which we are not exempt, and we are fallible and vulnerable. Two incidents from the past few years are vivid in my memory. The first is a post on the college's faculty message board back in the fall of 2008 from communications professor David Lapakko, telling his own story of being in the classroom with a more diverse student population and recognizing that the idioms he was using were not connecting with his students, i.e., they didn't have a clue what he was talking about! But instead of blaming his students for "not getting it," Professor Lapakko reflected on his role as teacher and his responsibility to rethink how he taught and the words he used. Here was a heart broken open.

My second example is a bit more generic, but is nonetheless true. On several occasions during the past couple of years, I have had students in my office sharing the difficulties they are having as a person of color in this majority-biased institution. And as I listened, my heart was breaking for them and for the painful experiences they were having in the classroom, in the residence halls, in local businesses – experiences of racism and bias. And in the end, I of course could say how sorry I was for their experience, but that wasn't all, because I then would thank them for being pioneers in our midst, showing us the way, setting a foundation for those who will come after them. Tensions lived into. Hearts broken open. Thank you all for being pioneers in Augsburg's mission-based journey to be a place of genuine hospitality and justice.

Finally, I leave you with a reminder that it was during the fall of 2008 when many of you were first year students that your fellow student Nur Ali was murdered in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. It was a distressing time for all of us, surely the stuff of hearts shattered. Nur was struck down as he came out of the Brian Coyle Center, where he was tutoring local children. It was a time of great fear and anxiety, a time that called into question Augsburg's deep commitment to being in the neighborhood and with our neighbors.

But I saw first-hand the contrast between hearts broken apart and hearts broken open at a neighborhood meeting after the murder to address safety concerns in the aftermath of the shooting. At the meeting, we all experienced the wrenching emotional impact of this shooting on our lives together. Though we intended to talk about security cameras and safety patrols, instead we listened to urgent longing for community. When an Imam (a Muslim religious leader) stood to speak, his

first words were "God is good," and though we were a room of people of very different faith traditions, we could whisper, "Yes, God is good, and this is not what our God wants for us." In that spirit, our community came together to rededicate itself to the well-being of our neighbors – yes, to more security cameras and personnel, but even more urgently to finding common purpose in the health, safety and well-being of our neighbors and neighborhood. We are a stronger – and safer – neighborhood today because we lived in the tensions of that painful moment and found our way forward together. That is what it means to have your hearts broken open.

What a privilege it is for all of us to be here with all of you, our distinguished students, this afternoon. We are so very proud of you. Thank you for sharing your gifts with us these past several years. We look forward with great joy to watching how you make the education you have received here – a liberal education, a civic education, a vocational education – the substance and inspiration for the lives you will lead in the world. May the habits of your hearts – the ways in which your education here shapes your service to the world – find strength and inspiration in the tensions that are at the heart of your Augsburg education. May your hearts be broken open again and again."

PRACTICE THIS

>>Vocational renewal<<

Someone (I can't remember who…) sent me a link to a fascinating essay by Patricia Thompson entitled "Being the Change We Want: A Conversation about Vocational Renewal for Nonprofit Leaders" (Metcalf Foundation, May 2009), which I commend to you for its thoughtful approach to engaging colleagues on important vocational questions related to their lives and work.

Ms. Thompson, based in Toronto, posts four ideas that will be familiar to Notes readers:

- Vocation – the gift of a call.
- Renewal – the challenge, risk and opportunity to make "old things new and relevant again"
- Narrative – the stories of our lives, with all of their twists and turns
- Reflection – dialogue and discernment as a source of sustenance and creativity

Thompson draws out of these ideas three questions for nonprofit leaders:

- Is there a connection between vocational, organizational and civic renewal?
- Is vocational renewal a missing link in our strategies to release latent organizational and community capacity?
- Can the concepts and practices related to Parker Palmer's "Courage to Teach" program give shape and direction to a more general focus on vocational renewal, especially the focus on "working in the gap" and the ideas of a "trusted cohort"?

Finally, Thompson proposed a series of action steps (primarily aimed at her Canadian context) that basically make three claims:

- Everyone can benefit from conversation about why they do the work they do – this is the beginning of vocational renewal;

- Investments in the vocational vitality of individuals inoculate workplaces prone to stress and even burnout, and stimulate trust, creativity and innovation;
- Vocational renewal is inextricably tied to organizational and civic renewal.

I find Thompson's work persuasive and resonant with what we are doing here at Augsburg to create a culture in which vocational discernment and renewal are at the heart of our relationships with each other. For example, we've added language in our employee handbook about our commitment to helping staff members discern and live out their vocations. We then consider the various ways in which we informally and formally support that commitment, through mentoring, professional development programs and so forth. Infusing vocation is the goal!

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PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

A friend brought me a copy of David A. Robinson's *The Poised Century: On Living Today As If Tomorrow Mattered* (St. Paul, MN: Tower Press, 2011), which includes ten insightful "remedies" for the poised century!

Many have recommended *Abundance: The Future Is Better Than You Think* by Peter H. Diamandis and Steven Kotler (NY: Free Press, 2012), which has been widely reviewed and continues the important conversation about the power of a perspective of abundance (as opposed to scarcity) in our personal and common lives.

Colleague Harry Boyte (director of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at Augsburg) has an important essay in *Democratizing Deliberation: A Political Theory Anthology*, edited by Derek Barker, Noelle McAfee and David McIvor (Kettering Foundation Press, 2012), which also includes several other significant essays on deliberative dialogue – perhaps one of the most important trends percolating out there at the moment.

>>This has not been inevitable<<

Wendell Berry – perhaps the most frequent voice over the years in my Notes – recently gave the Jefferson Lecture, commissioned by the National Endowment for the Humanities. You can find his entire lecture on-line at www.neh.gov. The lecture is a *tour de force* summary of Berry's decades of clear-eyed and principled perspectives on life in contemporary America. I leave you with these compelling final two paragraphs from the lecture:

"Even so, the land and people have suffered together, as invariably they must. Under the rule of industrial economics, the land, our country, has been pillaged for the enrichment, supposedly, of those humans who have claimed the right to own or exploit it without limit. Of the land-community much has been consumed, much has been wasted, almost nothing has flourished.

But this has not been inevitable. We do not need to live as if we are alone."

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Reinventing governance
- Breakfast with Jesus
- Hospitality is not enough