

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<<

Happy summer, friends. I've had a busy couple of months since my last Notes, including travel to Norway, Israel and just this past weekend to China, where I had the privilege of receiving an honorary degree from our partner institution, United International College in Zhuhai – the first liberal arts college in mainland China. Here is a photo from the ceremony. The tradition is that they make you an academic robe and hat, which you see me wearing. The citation for the degree is being read by Professor M.W. Sung, Dean of Arts and Humanities at UIC. It was a most meaningful honor and a reminder of how the liberal arts transcend boundaries of all sorts.



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. I thank my friends at Johnson, Grossnickle & Associates for their many years of abiding support for our reflective practice.

REFLECT ON THIS

>>The next big thing<<

What follows is the text of my column for the next issue of our Augsburg magazine. It points to an important theme at the heart of our work as a college as we plan for our future.

“A college that is student ready

The 2014-15 academic year—the 146th in Augsburg’s history—was a very good year for Augsburg. National honors for students. Awards for faculty teaching, research, and advising. The successful completion of the \$50 million campaign for the Center for Science, Business, and Religion, and the early preparation work on construction site. Important conversations on and off campus about interfaith living, race relations, demographic trends, and diversity. Remarkable outreach programs like the Minnesota Urban Debate League and Campus Kitchen receiving major support for their important work. A national wrestling championship! And so much, much more.

Reflecting on these accomplishments, I am so grateful for all our faculty and staff does for this special college and its students.

But I also realize that these achievements are made possible by an increasingly clear vision of our future that says we will be “a new kind of student-centered urban university, small to our students and big for the world.” And the fruit of our labors is made possible by our common efforts to live into this vision and our shared commitment to an Augsburg education that equips our students for lives of meaning, purpose, and significance in and for the world. That is what truly excites me about Augsburg’s future—a persuasive vision that proclaims our desire to be a college that is student ready!

What do I mean by student ready? I mean that we are turning 21st century higher education on its head by not focusing on whether students are “college-ready.” You’ve probably read and heard that phrase many times. Demanding that students are college ready allows lots of smart people to claim that the responsibility belongs elsewhere when it comes to ensuring that students show up on our campuses prepared by someone else for what we think a higher education should look like. If students aren’t able to read or speak English as well as we would like, if their math skills are lacking, if they don’t participate in class like we once did, if they demand more of us because of difficult personal circumstances or diverse learning and leading styles, then they are not ready for college. In other words, if they don’t learn and behave like us, they are not college ready.

So here comes Augsburg offering a different—even counter-cultural—vision of what higher education is all about today. And it is a vision grounded in our faith and academic heritage. It is a vision that claims we are called to be ready for students with the diverse gifts and experiences they bring to our campus, gifts and experiences that demand changes in how we engage them, teach

them, and learn from them. It doesn't mean that we lower our standards—that is the too easy retort to our vision. It means that we define and claim even higher standards of academic excellence and achievement, of teaching and learning, of civic engagement and community life—standards shaped not by measures imposed from without, but by a collaborative and democratic measure borne of our shared experience and engagement.

And, come to find out, when you take the path of being student ready, when you quit measuring by someone else's standards, you begin to witness to a way of being in the world as educated people that others want to embrace. And students and faculty win major recognition, your campaigns are successful, and you are positioned to lead in the 21st century.

Wow, that is exciting and inspiring. I give thanks every day for a community that embraces this vision of a college that is student ready and student-centered. A college that is faithful and relevant. Our college—Augsburg College!”

>>Generous and faithful: a meditation on why place matters in higher education<<

The following essay will appear in the next issue of the Journal of Higher Education and Outreach Engagement (JHEOE). You'll recognize the themes, presented here for an audience of civic engagement professionals in colleges and universities.

“The intrepid Norwegian-American immigrants who founded Augsburg Theological Seminary (now Augsburg College) almost 150 years ago chose as the institution's founding motto a simple claim from the New Testament Gospel of John: “And the Word became flesh” (John 1:14, NRSV). And that has made all the difference for Augsburg's abiding commitment to place at the center of its academic mission and public purposes.

Allow me to explain why. First is the theological claim in that simple passage. The Gospel writer points to an incarnational proclamation: God came into human history, lived among us and loved the world. In theological terms, this incarnation is the ultimate act of generosity and fulfills a covenant promise first made in the Hebrew scriptures. In other words, in this passage from John, we proclaim that God is generous and faithful on the ground, in our midst and in the places we inhabit.

Enough theology. There follows from this theological claim a very real practical guide to life in the world for God's people. If God has been generous and faithful to us, the only fitting response is for us to be generous and faithful wherever we are found. In this way, John 1:14 stands the test of time as a guide to Augsburg's deep commitment to place as a source of its mission and identity. Place matters for Augsburg as it lives out its academic mission in service to the public good. Augsburg believes that it is called to be generous and faithful in its place.

My teacher, Martin E. Marty, taught me that colleges are indigenous communities. That is, they are native to a particular place. They are native to a particular environment, and a particular set of values and practices that define the institution. And that means something for the way they live their lives, it means something for the ways in which they understand what it means to be faithful and generous with their place and values and presence.

As an indigenous community, Augsburg lives out its faithfulness and generosity in a particular place – a neighborhood called Cedar-Riverside in the heart of Minneapolis, Minnesota – that has been its

home for 145 years. It is a neighborhood of Native peoples and immigrants – currently, primarily Somalis and Ethiopians, but over the years Scandinavians (our founders), Vietnamese, Korean and others. And with these native and immigrant neighbors we share in what I call the saga of our life as an urban settlement.

What is a saga? My understanding of the concept of saga comes from research done by Burton Clark on what it is that creates a distinctive character and identity for colleges and universities. A saga is more than a story – all of us have stories. A saga is more of a mythology – a sense of history and purpose and direction told in vocabulary and narrative that accounts for a community's DNA, its essence, even. A saga abides in the sort of people, programs and values that define an institution.

Clark contends that not every institution has a saga. Sometimes that is a function of not being true to founding values; at other times it can be occasioned by a change of location or core mission; still other institutions have not found a way to link their pasts, presents, and futures in a coherent narrative.

Augsburg College's saga runs deep in the culture and meaning of our work together. An exploration of Augsburg's history surfaces several themes that are central to our saga: an immigrant sensibility shaped in an urban neighborhood, freedom through faith to ask tough questions and engage otherness, a moral commitment to access to quality education for all, and the vocational aspiration to be neighbor to and with each other. Together these themes inform Augsburg's identity and its abiding commitment to faithfulness and generosity in its place.

These themes also provide the foundation for seeing Augsburg as a 21st century urban settlement, a place-based institution, settled in a particular neighborhood, seeking to serve its neighbors and neighborhood in mutually beneficial ways. In fact, we have articulated our calling as a college in this way: "We believe we are called to serve our neighbor." In that simple formula, we name our commitment to the inextricable links between faith, education, place, and service to and with neighbors.

The novelist Wallace Stegner once wrote that the American psyche is in tension between what he calls "the boomers," those who go into a place, use it up and then leave – and "the stickers," those who settle in a place and work to renew it and make it better. Augsburg is committed to "sticking," to staying and settling in. At Augsburg, we accompany and settle alongside our neighbors. We pursue education in our place, equipping each other for lives of meaning and purpose. We welcome each other in our place, sustaining a community of hospitality and mutual respect. We love and are faithful to the place that has been our home for almost 145 years.

How do we live out this commitment to "sticking" in and with our place?

We begin with the wise words of poet and essayist, Wendell Berry, whose work I return to often for guidance, in his prose poem, "Damage":

"No expert knows everything about every place, not even everything about any place. If one's knowledge of one's whereabouts is insufficient, if one's judgment is unsound, then expert advice is of little use."

I sometimes think about this quote when talking with all the experts who are happy to offer their advice (for free and for a fee!) about running a college. Our responsibility as "stickers" is to have

knowledge of our whereabouts; otherwise all the experts in the world will be of little use. If we don't know our place, our mission, our history, how can we expect to enlist others in pursuit of our aspirations? We know and care about our whereabouts so that we can be generous and faithful.

There are three simple aspects of our whereabouts, three ways in which place matters, and in which faithfulness and generosity are practiced, that are at the heart of Augsburg's mission and identity.

Perhaps the central focus of our whereabouts is that wherever Augsburg College is found – in our neighborhood, in the city, or around the world – *our most authentic work is learning and teaching*. And the wonder of learning is that it involves acts of generosity and faithfulness in its every detail – from teachers who teach what they love, to students who seek to learn out of curiosity and passion, to texts that bear the wisdom of the ages for our reflection, to conversations that help us pay attention to the Word, to each other, and to the world.

One of the joys of my life at Augsburg is teaching the senior honors seminar each spring. In the classroom I witness the generosity of what educator Parker Palmer has called "the grace of great things," the gathering of a community around important issues and problems - great things! I think about a recent course I taught on homelessness and affluence - on income inequality - and how students wrestled with issues of justice and compassion and the social realities of inequity and people living with both too little and too much. These issues were both studied in the classroom and experienced in the neighborhood. And around these difficult issues, we found the grace of great things, the generosity of learning from and with each other, and the connection to our place in the world.

For the Augsburg community, the commitment to teaching and learning and the connection to place are grounded in our mission statement, wherein we say that "...an Augsburg education is shaped by our urban and global settings." That mission is part of a historic narrative that led the college in the 1960s to view its urban location as an extended classroom and to choose not simply to be located "in the city" but to embrace what it means to be "of the city." This important distinction sets a foundation for curricular and co-curricular programs that see our place as central to our academic mission and experience.

A second aspect of our whereabouts is the way in which our neighborhood and city is *a place that demands our presence as neighbor*. This particular neighborhood – much different now than in 1869, when the Scandinavian founders of Augsburg lived nearby – now calls for us to be neighbor to those of very different backgrounds. And democracy still is practiced in this place with our neighbors. Education still happens in this place with learners and teachers all around us. Engagement and service still are at the center of our lives with each other in this place. Sustaining this urban place, this urban environment, is an act of generosity and faithfulness – for our diverse neighbors, for our diverse selves, for the whole of creation, now and into the future.

One of my favorite programs at Augsburg is our Campus Kitchen. Campus Kitchen's core work is led by students who collect leftover foodstuffs from our cafeteria and area restaurants, prepare and then deliver more than 2,000 meals a month to our neighbors. It is good and important work. What I have seen in the past several years, though, is that our students have not been content simply to stay the course. They have focused our attention on the important role that food plays in our lives – as sustenance for our bodies, as fellowship for our community, as politics and economics in our neighborhood and world. And the results are staggering – yes, thousands of meals prepared and delivered, but also community gardens on the edge of campus that bring together neighbors and

students and children; a Farmer's Market on campus, which involves relationships with organic farmers from across the region; composting of leftover everything in the cafeteria, and most recently the opening of a food pantry on campus for students who go hungry. Here is an example of generosity and faithfulness in our place, attention and respect and concern for all of us who inhabit this neighborhood.

Our presence here cannot be passive or defensive. It must embrace the challenge of an indigenous place, loving and caring for the land, the river, the environment, and the people. Our Augsburg colleague, Jay Walljasper, a senior fellow in the Sabo Center for Democracy and Citizenship, quotes Mexican novelist, Carlos Fuentes, who says "The citizen takes his (sic) city for granted too often. He (sic) forgets to marvel." We are generous and faithful in our place when we don't forget to marvel at all that is being done in our midst and all that we are called to do in return!

A final aspect of our whereabouts I want to lift up is our commitment to our broader role in what I call our "*public work*," positioning the work of the college community in the context of claims for social justice and community-building. Higher education institutions long have privileged their academic missions and often have found ways to care for their immediate environs through student service and civic engagement programs. But I want to argue that a commitment to generosity and faithfulness in place demands more of us. It demands bringing our many resources – intellectual, moral and human resources – to bear in addressing the strengthening of democratic institutions and civic life.

Our public work at Augsburg is best exemplified by our leadership in the "anchor institution" movement in the Twin Cities of Minnesota. Augsburg has come together with sister higher education institutions, with major health care organizations, and with regional public agencies to understand how our self-interests as institutions can combine to create shared value for the neighborhoods along a new light rail transit line. We now are engaged together in shared purchasing, supporting local businesses; workforce development, encouraging the hiring of local companies and individuals; and place-making, helping to create healthier and more sustainable neighborhoods. The results thus far illustrate positive economic impact on the region, but perhaps more importantly they show intentionality about how the place we share can be strengthened through our collective efforts. This is not charity; this is a network business model that serves all of us and at the same time creates a more robust and vital civic life.

This is about paying attention to our place in ever more sophisticated and effective ways, recognizing that our ability to scale these sorts of place-based initiatives means that our underlying commitment to our place can be extended and made even more central to our work as a college. As Rutgers University-Newark Chancellor Nancy Cantor pointedly challenges us: Colleges and universities must be "citizens of a place, not on the side lines studying it."

I'll end with another brief quote from Wendell Berry, who, a few years after writing "Damage" – when he clearly was skeptical of our abilities to care adequately for our places in the world – wrote "Healing" to point to a more promising way:

"The teachings of unsuspecting teachers belong to the task and are its hope. The love and work of friends and lovers belong to the task, and are its health. Rest and rejoicing belong to the task, and are its grace. Let tomorrow come tomorrow. Not by your will is the house carried through the night. Order is the only possibility of rest."

"The Word became flesh" thus is both a theological and a practical claim for Augsburg College. In response to the many gifts we have been given, we ask how we can be even more generous and faithful in our whereabouts and place. We accompany and settle alongside our neighbors, even when we come from very different cultures and religions and experiences. And together we are creating and sustaining a safer, healthier, more vibrant place where generosity and faithfulness abounds. I think our founders would be proud.

PRACTICE THIS

>>Education off the main road<<

My trip to Israel included conversations with a partner college in Bethlehem about establishing an Augsburg center there. As you may recall, our international centers are all designed to offer academic and experiential programming grounded in the "pedagogy of the oppressed." I was struck by the opportunities available in Bethlehem to offer students what I have called "an education off the main road." I wrote the following thoughts about that sort of education after a trip to our campus site in Namibia a few years back – it seems relevant to our potential presence in Bethlehem.

"The sparkling lights of the city of Windhoek, Namibia were shining below as I looked out from my perch in an ultra-modern restaurant high above the city. All was well, it seemed, as I waited with my colleague, Orv Gingerich, head of Augsburg's international programs, for our dinner companions to arrive. We are in Windhoek visiting Augsburg's 16 year old Center for Global Education (CGE) site, where US students come for semester long programs focused on Namibia's post-colonial experience.

But the view from our perch high above the city, nestled in an obviously affluent subdivision of the burgeoning city, belied our experiences earlier in the day. We had witnessed the remnants of an apartheid system. Formerly separate cemeteries for the whites, colored and blacks. Housing that was clearly demarcated by tribal class. Primary and secondary schools stratified by social class. A sprawling tin village – the so-called "informal settlements – in which tens of thousands of Namibians lived in squalor, unable to find work after they arrived in the city and left to their own devices to survive without means. Health clinics with waiting rooms full of women seeking both pre-natal care and HIV tests. Non-governmental organizations struggling to serve the needs of indigenous people whose rights were neglected. The stark contrasts of our day were mind-bending.

Our dinner companions arrived – a labor activist and a teacher working to improve education for indigenous people – and as we described our day in Windhoek, one of them commented that he was grateful that we had witnessed these contrasts because too many outsiders came to Namibia and traveled only "the main road," from which all seemed well. We had left that main road and experienced the real Namibia.

And so we had – just as the students who come to our CGE site do each semester as they participate in a variety of intense experiences that open their eyes to the mind-bending and life-transforming dynamics of life in a developing country. Through extended home stays in both urban and rural areas, internships with organizations doing important social and educational work, classes that feature speakers who have firsthand experience of the tensions in Namibia's life, and opportunities for significant interaction with Namibian people and culture, our students experience life off the main road in this remarkable country, just 22 years after its declared independence.

And when they return home to the US, we know that they carry with them knowledge and experience of this developing country and its good people that will shape the decisions they make about their own lives and what they might be called to do in the world. Some may return here to Africa, perhaps as medical workers or teachers. But most will not and, for them, we trust and know that their experiences off the main road in Namibia will help them understand their own privilege in an increasingly complex world, privilege that must be named and then put to responsible use in the search for equity and justice, both in their personal lives and in the systems they inhabit.

Off the main road in Namibia, I'm only beginning to understand how critical our work as a college in this place is to transforming the lives of students and contributing to a different vision of our common future as global citizens.

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I'm reading lots of books on higher education this summer. Here's a sampling, the titles of which will give you a sense of their themes and my interest in them.

Lani Guinier, *The Tyranny of the Meritocracy: Democratizing Higher Education in America* (Beacon Press, 2015)

Frank Bruni, *Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be: An Antidote to the College Admissions Mania* (Grand Central Publishing, 2015)

Tim Clydesdale, *The Purposeful Graduate: Why Colleges Must Talk to Students about Vocation* (U. of Chicago, 2015)

>>God defends God's city and people<<

Following the themes of my various international travels, my time in Jerusalem occasioned much reflection on the arc of the Biblical narrative. In particular, our hotel across from the Old City in Jerusalem reminded me of the remarkable role Jerusalem plays in sacred history. Psalm 46 names the tensions of that role most powerfully...

¹*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*

²*Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;*

³*though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. Selah*

⁴*There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.*

⁵*God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns.*

⁶*The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.*

⁷*The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah*

⁸*Come, behold the works of the Lord; see what desolations he has brought on the earth.*

⁹*He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.*

¹⁰*“Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.”*

¹¹*The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah*

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Citizenship and work
- College presidents as public intellectuals

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