

NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Sixteen, Number One (October 2014)

"What we have loved, others will love, and we will teach them how."

(W. Wordsworth, from "The Prelude")

NOTES FROM READERS

>>What you think<<

My, how time flies – here we are on the cusp of our sixteenth year sharing these Notes! Thanks to you all for your encouragement and support, and more importantly for your lives of reflective practice. I heard from several of you after my last Notes, including...

“Thanks for your good work which keeps you “young” and those of us who receive your reflections, blessed and informed! “ from the Rev. Dr. William Enright, who heads the Lake Institute of Faith and Giving in Indianapolis.

And this from long-time partner, Dave Therkelsen, here in the Twin Cities:

“I especially appreciated your lead-off article on ethical fundraising. I know you are one of the few college presidents in US who is also a credentialed fundraiser, enjoys it, believes it is central to the work, and not just yet another task loaded on top academic leaders.

As you may recall, I was CEO of four nonprofits - two field units in American Red Cross, Crisis Connection, and later, a national association. In two of those four entities (only two, because the other two were supported by user fees, not philanthropy), I experienced the all-too-common problem of needing board members and other volunteer leaders to be involved in fundraising, yet needing to overcome their reluctance or apprehension - often driven by the dilemma you articulated: they did not want to be perceived, especially by their friends, as either used-car salesmen or pickpockets.

But somewhere along the line I came to a different solution than those of many of my counterparts in other organizations. I told board members and other volunteer leaders that they didn't need to ask anyone for anything. All they needed to do was make occasional visits with me or our fundraising staff, and simply share their passion for the mission - in their own words, through their own personality. Any volunteer leader can do this, very comfortably. If they didn't have passion for the mission, they wouldn't have become volunteer leaders.”

And finally from Pamela Smith, who has recently retired from a distinguished fundraising career for a remarkable organization, who inspires all of us with these words:

“My career is my vocation, my calling, and one must have a true passion for the missions and people one represents. Donors, funders, volunteers, prospects, and colleagues – all will know if one has a true passion and is sincere. I have been told that by my donors and others many times, and it

warmed my heart to know that the connection was made. It goes to integrity. One may be “successful” in raising funds without such a passion – but it is not the same, and in the end those connections will not be as strong and resources will be less than what could have been.”

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.

REFLECT ON THIS

>>Generosity and hope: place matters<<

I preached this homily in the Augsburg College chapel earlier this fall, recounting some of the central values of our common life and specifically reflecting on the generosity of our place.

Scripture assigned: John 1: 1-14

Eight years ago this month, we celebrated my inauguration as Augsburg's 10th president (only 10 in 146 years!) with a week-long celebration that focused on four key values that I saw as core to Augsburg's identity and daily life as a teaching and learning community. The four values were abundance, generosity, engagement and service - the first letters of which created the acronym, AGES. We spoke of the Ages of Imagination that would propel Augsburg into the future. The hymn we sang this morning was written for my inauguration with music by alum David Cherwien, the music director at Mount Olive Lutheran Church in Minneapolis and conductor of the National Lutheran Choir, and words by alum Gracia Grindal, who recently retired from the Luther Seminary faculty. You might note that the beginning letters of each of the four verses spell "AGES" - you couldn't get away from it that week!

I have returned to those four values of abundance, generosity, engagement and service time and again during my tenure here, because I genuinely believe that they not only reflect our legacy as a college, but even more powerfully, our future vitality and success. Today, I turn to one of those values - generosity - by dwelling in the gospel word as found in John, with its stirring philosophical and theological claims – “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...All things came into being through Him...”

The final verse from our Gospel reading this morning is the original motto for Augsburg Theological Seminary and College: “And the Word became flesh” (originally in Norwegian, of course!) – and so it does, here, in our midst, God with us. Can you imagine any more generous act? Augsburg College practices generosity most authentically when it lives as the Word made flesh – present, rooted, of service, faithful.

My teacher, Martin Marty, taught me that colleges are indigenous communities – that is, they are native to a particular place, a particular environment, 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 we understand the generosity of place and values and presence... What does it mean to think about Augsburg College as an indigenous community? What does it mean that the Word has become flesh and lives among us here?

That is a question much on my mind these days as we continue to explore the relevance of our historical commitments as a college, especially as it has to do with our "place" here in Cedar-Riverside, the neighborhood we have called home for almost 145 years. It is a question that, it seems to me, we need to ask each and every day of our lives here at this special college. What does it mean to be generous in this place, to be the Word made flesh in this neighborhood, this community, this place?

The poet and essayist, Wendell Berry, whose work I return to often for guidance, writes these wise words in his prose poem, "Damage" –

- o "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 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? If we don't know and care about our whereabouts, how can we be generous?

My point is, of course, that we must know our whereabouts, our history, our values, our place in the community and in the culture, before we can seek solutions to the issues we face as individuals and as a community - before we can be generous with each other, with God's creation, with the world... And it is the generosity of our whereabouts that we celebrate today. It is our nature and identity and character that we lift up. Our links to this particular place and culture and set of values and practices that make us Augsburg – as we have been known since 1869.

So today I lift up for our attention three simple aspects of our whereabouts – three ways in which the Word becomes flesh here, in which generosity is practiced here - that I hope we might continue to explore in the days and months and years ahead:

Perhaps the central focus of our whereabouts is that wherever Augsburg College is found – here in this neighborhood, in the city, in Rochester, or around the world – our most authentic work is learning and teaching. And the wonder of learning is that it involves acts of generosity 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 last spring's course 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. Around those difficult issues, we found the grace of great things, the generosity of learning from each other.

A second aspect of our whereabouts is the way in which this city, a particular place – much different now than in 1869 – is still a place that demands our attention and respect and concern. 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 – for our diverse neighbors, for our diverse selves, for the whole of creation, now and into the future. 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, the people – God’s creation in this place. Our good colleague, Jay Walljasper, a senior fellow in the Sabo Center, quotes Mexican novelist, Carlos Fuentes, who says, "The citizen takes his/her city for granted too often. He and she forget to marvel." We are generous in our place when we don't forget to marvel at all that God is doing here in our midst and all that we are called to do in return!

The final aspect of our whereabouts I want to lift up is our firm grounding in the Lutheran Christian faith – a confident faith that frees us to learn, to live, to practice hospitality with all of our neighbors, to be a force for good in the world, to affirm our calling as people of faith and a college of the church to be God’s people in this place and to know that grace and truth abound where the Word becomes flesh. This indigenous place we call Augsburg College is a college of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a faith community called to live in the world as people of God, to proclaim God’s love, to seek the truth, to pray for God’s good creation, to know that our call is not to be God but to do God’s work. The Word is flesh here – day in, day out – is there any greater generosity than that?

I'll end with another brief quote from Wendell Berry, who, a couple of years after writing “Damage” wrote “Healing” to point the way:

- o “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" is both a theological and a practical claim. Here at Augsburg, we ask how we can be even more generous in our whereabouts and place as the body of Christ here and now, as the Word made flesh in this place, as Augsburg College here in Cedar-Riverside (and wherever else we might settle). 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 abounds. This morning, let us recall the concluding words of John 1:14 that remind us that the Word made flesh is “full of grace and truth.” Oh, how the world needs a Word of grace and truth. And here it is! Thanks be to God. Amen.

PRACTICE THIS

>>Innovation redux<<

Here are some brief reflections that I wrote for my column in our college magazine that connect back to the innovation themes I lifted up in my last Notes. This shows how I seek to translate these more overarching ideas into the various contexts for addressing our community.

“I am writing these notes on Reformation Day - October 31 - the occasion on which we celebrate the legacy of our Lutheran Christian tradition and the ways in which that legacy has shaped the sort of college Augsburg has become. There are many gifts of our Lutheran heritage that are worth noting - the concept of vocation, our commitment to serve the neighbor, the call to critical and humble inquiry - but these days I'm especially focused on the gift of *semper reformanda*, the reminder that we must always be open to change, to reform and to imagining better ways to do God's work in the world.

A year ago, the Augsburg Board of Regents affirmed our strategic plan, *Augsburg2019*, with its bold vision that we will be "a new kind of student-centered urban university, small to our students and big for the world." (To review the plan, go to www.augsburg.edu/president/college-initiatives/). And then they charged the Augsburg community - faculty, staff, students and alumni - with the work of making our vision a reality. That is the meaningful and urgent work we are now pursuing on campus and in the world.

As we undertake this important work, we are keeping the gift of *semper reformanda* firmly in mind as a lens for deciding how we will achieve our vision. Across campus and beyond, we are thinking about how we can be innovative and entrepreneurial. Three simple ideas are guiding our thinking and action:

- * We innovate out of abundance, the belief that we can do more together than we can do alone. We share our individual gifts so that the good of all might be served.
- * We innovate in community, the sense that there is wisdom and experience within our community that needs to be engaged to ensure a vibrant future for Augsburg.
- * We innovate for the world, affirming that what we do as a college ultimately serves our call to serve the neighbor.

In these three ideas - innovation out of abundance, in community and for the world - we have the markers of our daily life at Augsburg.”

>>Interfaith living<<

Augsburg has recently been honored by the White House as one of five colleges and universities in the country doing exemplary work around interfaith dialogue and service. I am proud of the recognition but am reminded of the first time I reflected on this work, which is not an option for a college located in a neighborhood where interfaith is not simply about talking together, it is about living together. Here is what I wrote back in 2011:

“Connecting colleges to communities is a core value shared by many higher education administrators. As an urban college in one of the most diverse ZIP codes between Chicago and Los Angeles, Augsburg College understands that the connection to community is critical to our institution’s success and to the experience of our students.

Today, more and more communities look more and more like our neighborhood. This diversity is reflected in our student body. More than 40 percent of our last two incoming freshman classes were students of color. This diverse learning community also includes a large portion of first-generation college students and students representing a full spectrum of faith traditions.

The changing face of America, and of our campuses, makes President Barack Obama's new Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge an important – and even critical – call to service. Colleges must seek ways to become better neighbors, to lead by example, to learn from our communities.

Augsburg College started on this path a number of years ago, and rededicated ourselves to this work in 2008 following a neighborhood tragedy.

That tragedy involved an Augsburg student who was fatally shot outside a community center in our Cedar-Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis. The student, a young man who was Somali-American and Muslim, had been at the center for a work-study shift to tutor neighborhood children.

As the campus community – grounded in the Lutheran Christian faith – faced this horrific incident, we wrestled with our grief and fear and sought solace in the familiar rituals of our faith. At the same time, we sought to understand our student's faith traditions, and create space for his family and community to mourn.

Shortly after this event, we gathered to address safety concerns of the community. We intended to talk about security cameras and safety patrols that day. Instead, here's what happened: An Imam stood to speak. His first words were "God is good." Though we were a room of people of very different faith traditions, we together could whisper: "Yes, God is good, and this is not what our God wants for us."

In that spirit, our community came together. We rededicated ourselves to the well being of our neighbors and to interfaith conversation – to talking and living together. Yes, we also have more security cameras and personnel. But the urgency expressed wasn't about the material. The urgency was to find common purpose in the health, safety and well being of our neighbors and neighborhood.

This desire for community is the same desire with which President Obama during early March invited American colleges and universities to participate in his Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge. This year-long project will engage students in interfaith dialogue and community service. This is an important effort as we seek to educate students, not only for professions and careers, but also (and perhaps even more so) for lives of meaning and purpose in a world marked by more urgent attention to the diversity of religions and cultures.

At Augsburg College, we are enthusiastic about supporting the President's initiative. It helps us lift up work already underway on our campus and in the rich and diverse urban neighborhood that has been our home for nearly 140 years. This presidential initiative is timely in many ways, not the least of which is in recognizing the growing demographic changes to our state. Minnesota ranks 17th in the United States for its rate of immigration. Our new neighbors have come to this state to join their

families, to work, or as refugees. They bring with them a diversity of faiths, which are reflected on our campus.

As we consider our interfaith work, we are convinced that dialogue and service must be interwoven in all we do. We believe that what we learned through recent efforts to encourage interfaith dialogue with our neighbors is something we must do each day. We must seek to live side-by-side, day-by-day, within our neighborhood. Interfaith living is what we must – and do – aspire to teach our students.

Our work at Augsburg College is guided by the 20th century political philosopher and theologian John Courtney Murray, SJ, who wrote in his book, *We Hold These Truths* (Sheed and Ward, 1960):

“Barbarism...is the lack of reasonable conversation according to reasonable laws. Here the word ‘conversation’ has its twofold Latin sense. It means living together and talking together. Barbarism threatens when men cease to live together according to reason, embodied in law and custom, and incorporated in a web of institutions that sufficiently reveal rational influences.... Barbarism likewise strikes when men cease to talk together... when dialogue gives way to a series of monologues; when parties to the conversation cease to listen to one another...”

Murray’s challenge is clear: How shall we recover our capacity for conversation – both genuine living *and* talking together?

I find inspiration for this important work in the example of the late Henri Nouwen, a Roman Catholic priest who wrote a moving challenge in his *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Doubleday, 1975). His challenge illumines for me what we are called to be and do in our interfaith living:

Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place.

It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines.

It is not to lead our neighbor into a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment.

It is not an educated intimidation of good books, good stories, and good works, but the liberation of fearful hearts so that words can find root and bear ample fruit.

It is not a method of making our God and our way into the criteria of happiness, but the opening of an opportunity for others to find their God and their way.

The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness—not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free also to leave and follow their own vocations.

This is a vision of faithful living and learning that shapes the sort of education we seek to offer at Augsburg College. We must prepare our students for lives in an interfaith world.

We are pleased to see that our nation's leader, President Obama, is calling upon colleges and universities to commit to interfaith cooperation and community service. The ability of today's students to successfully navigate their futures depends upon being able to navigate a world brimming with diverse people with diverse beliefs."

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

Lots of new books coming my way these days...

I'm preparing to teach the senior honors course on "Chicago" again in the spring semester and am exploring new sources of insight into Chicago's history. I'm enjoying *The Plan of Chicago: Daniel Burnham and the Remaking of the American City* (University of Chicago Press, 2006) by Carl Smith, which sets the stage for the last century of progress in Chicago.

Augsburg alums Herbert Chilstrom and E. Corinne Chilstrom (he was the first presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) continue to partner in inspiring projects like *Every Morning New* (Augustana Heritage Association, 2012), daily devotions to mark out our lives of faith.

Augsburg English faculty member, Stephan Eirik Clark, had quite the late summer and early fall after his first novel, *Sweetness #9: A Novel* (Little, Brown & Co., 2014) received a "Colbert bump" on late night television and then took off in attention and sales. Fun for a little college!

Finally, as part of the ongoing conversation about the future of higher education in America, an important contribution comes from Hamilton College profs Daniel F. Chambliss and Christopher G. Takacs, whose *How College Works* (Harvard University Press, 2014) points to the power of personal relationships and relatively inexpensive interventions to help students succeed in college.

>>The ages of imagination<<

This is the beautiful poetry written by Augsburg alum, Gracia Grindal, '65 for a hymn that was sung at my inauguration eight years ago. The music (not included here) was by fellow Augsburg alum, David Cherwien, '79. These words evoke fall on our campus for me - past, present and future.

Autumn leaves turned gold and scarlet drift into the city streets
Farmers gather in their harvest filling bins of corn and wheat
Gifts from God whose majesty still provides abundantly
All the sustenance we need life, and health and daily bread
Heleluyan, heleluyan!

Golden as the sun at daybreak gleams our legacy of light
Saints are dancing all around us all too bright for sense or sight
Here among us in the flesh we can see God's grace afresh
Whose own Son has come to bless us with his own righteousness
Alleluya, Gloria Christo!

Evening shadows fall around us as the city lights appear
Sparkling points amid the darkness Christ our light is drawing near
We can see him face to face in the neighbor whom by grace

We are called to serve and give what we have so they can live
Alleluia, msifu Bwana!

Send, oh God, your Holy Spirit give us wisdom, love and faith
Faith enough to move a mountain, love that died to conquer death
Wisdom crowned with healing leaves, truth made flesh to see us free
Let your glory bear rich fruit growing from your sturdy roots
Alleluia, alleluia!

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Citizenship and work
- Public work
- An invitation to think theologically

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