

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 to my many friends and colleagues who faithfully read these Notes. I am en route to Hong Kong as I write – both for some business and to pick up my 15-year old son who has spent the past month with a family in China. What a world! This issue of Notes will focus on one major address I gave this past spring. I trust you will recognize its interlocking themes from my work over the past several decades. As always, I welcome your thoughts and reflections.

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

>>Promises to keep: An Ethic of Stewardship<<

I presented this address to the employees around the world of Cargill Corporation at the launch of their ethics and compliance week in May 2016

Good morning. It's great to be here with you and kick off this important series of discussions for Cargill.

I am an ethicist by academic training – a Ph.D. in ethics gets you lots of gigs like this – grad school prof once said that ethics is a “growth industry” – perhaps true in our ever more complex and interconnected world – but the problem is that too often, good folks want those of us with degrees in ethics to give the answers to the moral dilemmas they face – instead, I believe that my responsibility is very much tied to the sort of work we are doing together today – it is to equip all of us to be reflective practitioners, exploring the moral decisions we must make every day. No expert should tell you what to do – but we can help you learn how to make those decisions!

In particular, our topic this morning is “stewardship,” and the ethical implications of stewardship for your daily lives in this remarkable company and beyond, implications that are about the promises we make and keep with each other - but before I get into that, I wanted to share some

observations and context with you that may offer you a sense of where I am coming from in my commitment to stewardship.

First, in preparing for this talk, I noticed some uncanny similarities between our two organizations....

We're about the same age, for one thing.

Augsburg was founded in 1869...just four years after Cargill, and we're getting ready to celebrate 150 years!

We also both have a talent for the use of cutout characters. ("Proud W. W. Cargill" in France, part of your 150th year celebration; Auggie Eagle at the Minnesota State Fair, our mascot.)

More seriously, we both are concerned with food sustainability. This is, of course, at the core of Cargill's work.

At Augsburg, we're located in one of the most diverse ZIP codes west of Chicago. Our Cedar-Riverside neighborhood is bounded by I-94, 35W and the UofM West Bank and Mississippi River. We work to create safe and welcoming pedestrian connections to downtown Minneapolis and to the neighboring communities across the freeway, but often, the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood can be somewhat of an urban food desert.

Augsburg has a robust Campus Kitchen program. The program:

- Organizes a farmers market – for the whole community -- on campus during the summer.
- Provides education on food and nutrition. This is especially helpful for new immigrant families who are not familiar with many local cooking and food provisioning practices.
- Uses leftover food from our cafeteria to prepare free meals that we deliver to non-profits across South Minneapolis – a few thousand meals a month!
- Operates the community garden on campus .

Finally, you and we are both placemakers – committed to and anchored in our communities, wherever we're found...

In addition to our Minneapolis campus and Rochester, Minnesota, location, Augsburg has several international sites. The top image here is from our site in Windhoek, Namibia. We also have locations in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Nicaragua. In all our global settings, we work to become part of the community, to take a long-term perspective, and build relationships so that we are citizens, not visitors, in our locations.

So, here is a helpful beginning point for our reflections – already we're talking about stewardship. We each seek to be stewards of our history, our people and community, our environment, our neighborhood and our place – we make and keep promises, we share an ethics of stewardship.

So, it seems, we are alike in many ways.

But there are also a few things I want to share that you might not know about Augsburg – things that might help provide some further context for today.

First, at Augsburg, we love uncomfortable conversations. We embrace them. We seek them. Throughout its history, Augsburg has had a sensibility that draws us toward emerging, contemporary tensions. And we consistently respond by building the intellectual capital to engage these topics...and even lead the conversation about them...and then create a practice of learning designed to unpack and understand the tensions. Immigration, social justice, privilege, implicit racial and ethnic biases, gender identities, substance addiction, ability differences -- even the differing world views of philosophers, historians, and theologians... We engage all of these. We believe that robust conversation creates powerful learning...and thoughtful stewards.

In that previous list, I should have mentioned inter-religious dialogue. Even as Augsburg is faithful to its Lutheran foundation, we also are a national leader in interfaith dialogue – equipping our students with the competency to successfully talk and work and build relationships with people from different faith backgrounds...or from no faith background. If this seems inherently contradictory – adhering to our Lutheranism and embracing interfaith friendships – then you’ve discovered the second thing about Augsburg that I wanted to share: We are adept at holding two opposing ideas in mind at the same time and still retaining the ability to function.¹ We are not “either/or.” We are “both/and.” This is definitely a Lutheran thing. (Some of you with direct Lutheran experience may know exactly what I mean.)

Finally, and again because of our Lutheran foundation, we are all about vocation...calling...meaningful work...educating for lives of purpose. Use whatever phrase makes sense to you, but here’s what we mean:

- We believe that you – you in this room, your families, your children, and our students – we each have gifts.
- And we believe that the world needs your gifts.
- Which means that there is an obligation to develop...to tend to...those gifts so that we do not waste what has been given.

This topic will come up again later, as it has a direct relationship to stewardship.

What is stewardship? Where and how do we practice stewardship? Stewardship of what?

So let’s get to the topic at hand.

I wrote my PhD dissertation on the moral meaning of professions in America, including the role of professionals as stewards of the public trust...and I teach on the subject of crafting “stewardship covenants” for organizations. Here’s the basic framework that I use for these conversations – first, I ask “what is stewardship”, then” how do we practice it,” and finally, “stewards of what?”

I have a hunch that you, at Cargill, may have a fairly good grasp of what you are stewarding. And I’m guessing that much about the practice of stewardship will match with what you’ve learned and experienced in your professional careers.

But what stewardship is...what it requires of us...that is not as intuitive – and, in fact, is counter-cultural, so let's start our conversation this morning there...

What is stewardship?

So, what is stewardship?

It is a way of understanding human nature.

A way of organizing our shared lives.

A way of being in the world.

Heady stuff, so let me offer a bit of explanation of why I start here...

Let's start with how stewardship requires that we understand human nature.



Now, before I develop this idea further, I want to explain this photo. The woman with the tattoos is Reverend Nadia Bolz-Weber, pastor of House for All Sinners and Saints in Denver, Colorado, and New York Times best selling author of “Accidental Saints: Finding God in All the Wrong People.” She visited Augsburg in 2014 as a featured speaker in our annual convocation series and, unsurprisingly, was a big hit with the students, staff and faculty alike. In this photo, she’s

seated next to Reverend Mark Hanson, former bishop of the Lutheran church and now director of Augsburg’s Christensen Center for Vocation. What these two faith leaders deeply understand is that we, as humans are both deeply flawed and perfectly blessed.

- It’s not difficult to see the flaws in ourselves and other humans. Every day, people do bad things, manipulate others, or make mistakes...or just don’t care enough.
- But we also are beings who pursue good...and we do this on a regular basis, as well – for ourselves, for each other, for society, for the created world. I see this every day in my work at Augsburg. I’m sure you do, too.

In understanding this dichotomy, we can see that stewardship calls on us to step into the breach of human nature. This is hard work. When I teach young managers, I often tell them that stewardship -- or leadership -- requires them to work with the whole human. And that means addressing issues when employees mess up or struggle in their work. Stewardship cannot pay

attention only to the good. It requires us to face the challenges that come when good and flawed people come together in our companies, show up in our offices, and interact with each other. It's messy business.

Stewardship also challenges us to recognize the mutuality of human life – mutuality of interests and power and values. The term “stewardship” is often used in the context of environmental sustainability, but it is just as applicable in the social ecology in which we all live. Stewardship calls on us to honor the interdependence in all of our experience.

One of the key concepts of stewardship is an idea – called “oikonomia” – which is grounded in Greek political thought. It means “the management of the household so as to increase its value to all members of the household over the long run.” [That's a lot of meaning packed into a single word.]

Oikonomia is about the long-term. About common v. individual benefits. About concrete value as opposed to unlimited accumulation. It is a way of structuring our economic lives so that the public good is served.



The photo is from Augsburg's year-end student research exhibit. Augsburg has a strong tradition of engaging students in hands-on research projects, working directly with faculty, learning problem-solving and analysis and communication skills over an extended-term project. These students end up competing successfully for graduate school internships and admittance at the top research institutions in the U.S. They benefit; their grad schools benefit; their ultimate employers benefit. But, if you could

see...or feel...the ENERGY in the room during this event, when professors and college leaders travel from one student to the next to the next and have them teach us about their work, their learning, their outcomes, you would know that the benefit of this fantastic undergraduate research program is absolutely mutual.

In a society that is so strongly biased to “individual” interests, it is crucial that, as stewards, we seek ways to keep the mutual nature – the common nature – of human life explicitly present in our work. Good stewards focus their attention on how we organize our common lives in order to maximize the public good over any individual (or organizational) good.

Finally, stewardship requires us to take responsibility for all that is given to us. This is the obligation I spoke about earlier. Here's the logic:

- We each have gifts that have been entrusted to us.
- And with these gifts comes the obligation to care for them.

So, stewardship is a way of behaving and of seeing the world in a manner that is about being grateful for all that we have been given and responding to the obligation occasioned by those gifts.

Stewardship is a personal stance – an attitude – to recognize, and then hold ourselves accountable for tending to, those gifts. Stewardship is an ethic, a way of living in the world.

We are gifted people – and we are people called to steward those various gifts.

And that is where we turn next, the practices of stewardship...

Where and how do we practice good stewardship?

Let's turn to the second question now -- If we understand that stewardship is a way of understanding human nature, a way of ordering our common lives, and a way of behaving and seeing the world, then what exactly does the practice of stewardship look like? How do we live it out?

We can start with the work of management, which, above all, is simply another way to talk about good stewardship.

I often find that students studying management approach their learning with the notion that they need to capture a set of techniques that might be applied in their organizations. But it is helpful to remember that management is really about serving as a wise and faithful steward of the various human and financial and moral resources entrusted to us.

To do this well, a good steward-manager needs to work to cultivate a holistic understanding of how organizations work – to look beyond the obvious and superficial and to understand what is really going on in an organization. Understanding how an industry works is not just good business. It is good stewardship.

But if stewardship involves taking care of – holding in trust -- other people's stuff, then a good steward-manager must also look beyond the boundaries of their organization, into their neighborhoods and cities and regions.

I talked earlier about vocation. A core concept of vocation is that your gifts are discerned *in relationship to the community*. They are not merely talents that lie independently within you. No, stewardship calls on you to address the needs of your community, your organization in ways that only you, with your unique gifts, can do. Sometimes this work is challenging, even unwelcome.

What our community needs from us may not match with what we would have preferred we would get to be engaged in. Stewardship calls on us to engage anyway.

And engagement requires conversation...listening to the wisdom of the community in order to define the future we choose to co-create. In his seminal book, "Stewardship," Peter Block asserts that purpose gets defined through dialogue.² So, stewardship calls on us to be facilitators, supporters – even instigators, if needed – of conversation in all the settings of our lives. Our ability to talk together is inextricably linked with our ability to live together. The basis for holding each other accountable – for promoting a sense of our mutuality – is grounded in our ability to engage in healthy conversation...

An ability that has never been more precious and needed than in our world today...


It is through healthy, productive, ongoing conversations that we create an order for our common lives. So, the good steward must do everything to make conversation happen – to build trust, to provide a common language, to create places and contexts for conversation. It takes time and patience and courage and forgiveness to make conversations happen, but there is no more important role for the good steward.

Each May, after commencement is behind us, Augsburg has an all-campus strategic planning session. The conversation at those meetings is referenced and built upon for the entire year following – sometimes beyond. These conversations provide a center for our common work. This ethics series that Cargill is convening this week is another fine example. I hope it will provide for you and your teams a common text from which to develop a shared understanding for how you will approach your shared work going forward.

Finally, stewardship involves a practice of standing up, speaking up in a manner that reflects – and makes clear – our values. The challenge for the good steward – as a parent or manager or citizen – is to pursue practices that help connect us with the deeply held values and commitments that characterize our personal and corporate lives.

The truth is that many people do not think about the reasons for their actions. They act, and they expect others to accept their action at face value. But good stewardship demands reflection, then the courage to act based on our convictions, and to do so overtly so that we are publicly accountable for how our actions reflect our values. Only in that link is there integrity in human life.

This Star Tribune ad that we ran earlier this year is a great example. Cargill signed it. Augsburg signed it. It publicly proclaims what we stand for. I'm sure you received some negative feedback after the ad ran. I know I did. But that feedback only provided further evidence of the need for being clear – as clear as we can possibly be – where we stand on issues such as this.



It'd be Un-Minnesotan

If you're reading this, you're probably a Minnesotan.

Pop, "Up North" and snow days all mean something to you.

So do the values we're raised with: everyday, sleeve-worn courage, goodness and kindness.

Though we may be a soft-spoken bunch, we know better than to be silent or still in the face of bigotry shown to Muslims. Our fellow Minnesotans.

Every intolerant social post, every prejudiced comment aimed at Muslims needs a response. Your response.

We must lead people to a place of tolerance and understanding.

We must come together as a diverse and vibrant community.

Our values don't take days off and neither should we.

If you're Minnesotan, you know this to be true. We know better. We can't be tricked into betraying our values.

It'd be so very, very un-Minnesotan of us.

MARK CANTON COO	DAVID QUINN-BECKER PRESIDENT	BRANDALL HUGHAN CEO	BETTY MCCOLLUM COMMUNICATIONS
TRIA SMITH MARKETING	MARY BRANNIGAN SVP	JOHN ROSENWORTH, Ph.D. SVP	PETER GILLETTE SVP
KEVIN LINDSEY SVP	ROGER HALL SVP	TRWALD SVP	AL THORSEN SVP
JOHN AND JULIA TAIT	BILL MCCARTHY SVP	BOB WATNEY	WHEELER WATNEY AND KYLEE BLAIZ
KEITH BLANK SVP	RYE WEBER	NICHOLE FITZGERALD	DAVID WALSON
SAP AND SYDIA KAPLAN	BILL AND KENNY SCORIE	ERIC MCLAN SVP	CHARLIE ZELLE SVP
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#UnMinnesotan

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Stewardship of what?

Finally, that brings us to this question: Stewardship of what?

First, and above all, we are stewards of the public trust. Block says that stewardship is holding something in trust for another...our organization, our community, the earth itself... It involves the willingness to be accountable for the well-being of the larger organization by operating in service to -- rather than in control of -- those around us.³

I cannot overestimate the difficulty of measuring up to this claim upon us. There are serious obstacles to being a good steward of the public trust... That is why we need to work with all the imagination and resolve and courage that we can muster to pursue the claim of good stewardship.

And Cargill seems to understand this.

Just take a look at how you talk about yourselves – and your reason for being. You help the world thrive. You work together with farmers, customers, governments and communities. You are committed to feeding the world in a responsible way, reducing environmental impact, and improving the communities where you live and work.

Too many mission statements lack an explicit articulation of the public trust that the organization serves. Too many are not necessarily in response to what the public needs or cares about. Too many do not reflect the way the organization has listened to its publics and do not make their publics the leading value in their mission. But at Cargill, you have built those voices and that public trust directly into your core commitment.

This is impressive.

Of course, in addition to being stewards of the public trust, we are also stewards of the diverse organizational resources entrusted to us, as staff, as managers, as board members. This is the more traditional understanding of stewardship.

And so, we must be consciences of organizational investment. Organizations invest in many things: people, money, buildings, and relationships. A good steward must help an organization to align the practices and policies related to all of its investments.

Here at Cargill, the decision to move your senior leadership team from the “Lake Office” to the main headquarters is a wonderful example of stewardship, closing the gap that sometimes exists between leadership and those on the front lines. At Augsburg, we are reimagining our campus as an urban arboretum, creating public spaces on our campus that encourage reflection and action on urban sustainability.

Good stewards also pay attention to their essential role as managers of the tangible and intangible organizational infrastructure. I know that you at Cargill innately understand this. You know that even (or maybe especially) the flashiest and most successful strategy will fail if we don’t ensure that resources are devoted to – and well managed in support of – the relationships and public trust served by that strategy.

It’s a long-term view. Something that organizations that have been around for 150 years may know something about.

Speaking of intangibles, we are also stewards of our organizational image – not a purely promotional image, but an image that is a direct and powerful reflection of organizational trust and integrity.

What the public sees in the image we portray is, at its core, a symbol of organizational health and responsibility. And so we must attend to the organizational practices and actions that define who we are. Through our decisions and actions today, we are creating the facts that will be the basis for our story tomorrow.⁴ This requires aggressive and proactive and steadfast stewardship.

Perhaps you saw the KARE 11 piece by Adrienne Broaddus (Broad-Us) earlier this month about Augsburg graduating its most diverse class in the college’s history. Our traditional undergrad class this spring was 42 percent students of color. That’s an achievement we are extremely proud of. And it took years of work – years of new organizational practices and initiatives across the institution.

Along the way, our stewardship of this organizational image grew and matured – from a focus on diversity (attracting a broader mix of students)...to inclusion (creating a community that welcomes all)...to equity (the work to change systems and barriers to ensure all students have the opportunity to fully apply themselves and achieve in college...and beyond). We are still actively working on that last one. It is a core focus of our work as stewards of Augsburg and our region’s need for a diverse group of educated people who will lead and create the workplaces of the future.

In answering the question, stewardship of what? we also need to look outside ourselves...to our stakeholders and communities. We cannot be good stewards unless we involve them in our work. Unfortunately, our leadership culture today reinforces the idea that accomplishment comes from individual acts. Peter Block has noted that we tend to credit individuals for outcomes that

required teams and communities to accomplish.⁵ What's really needed instead is a focus on building partnerships and relationships.

I am inspired, in this area, by Jane Addams, the pioneer urban settlement activist and reformer. At the turn of the 19th century in Chicago, she did not accept gifts from rich benefactors for her important work at Hull House without promoting a conversation between them and those would be served by the gift. She sought to close the gap between donor and recipient, to forge a partnership in pursuit of common ends. She called it humane philanthropy. It also was good stewardship.

Too often, today, our partnership work is stymied by a culture of expertise. Having “experts” can become a potential excuse for losing the balance of participation within the community’s work. For example, in my work in philanthropy, I have noticed that when we have professional fundraisers, then we tend to engage volunteers less. If we have professional grant writers, then we don’t bother with involving all the people who might be served by the program. It’s more efficient this way.

But the promise of efficiency pales in comparison to the promise of the abundance we experience when all of us are involved in the important public work that needs to be done together, the work needed to sustain our common life. Augsburg works hard at this commitment to partnership. This photo shows one of our classes visiting the Brian Coyle Center in Cedar-Riverside – a social services center that serves more than 7,000 people each year. Our students work and volunteer there, of course, but as importantly, they listen to the staff and community members in the center and learn from their wisdom about the needs and solutions for the community.

To whom much has been given

Engagement. Gifts and obligations. Standing for and acting on behalf of what we believe. Holding in trust the interests of our communities. This is stewardship.

And when I think of my role in stewarding my gifts, engaging the wisdom of the community, and holding in trust the interests of our common world, I am inspired by this familiar quote from the gospel of Luke:

“To whom much is given, much will be required. And from those who have been entrusted with much, much more will be demanded.”

In this picture, I am standing on the bank of the Mississippi River in St. Paul, about to launch a dozen students and their faculty leaders on a semester-long experiential education journey down the River...all the way to New Orleans. That's how cool my job can be. I am grateful every day for the amazing students and instructors and stewards I get to work with. I have been given much. And, therefore, much is expected.



Stewardship is hard work, and it should be. We are blessed with amazing gifts – and we are blessed with an abundance of needs in the world for those gifts.

At Cargill, as at Augsburg, we, good stewards all, are called to ensure that those remarkable gifts and pressing needs find each other. At the end of the day, it is about the promises we must keep to each other, to our communities and to the world. May it always be so! Thank you.

Citations

¹ F. Scott Fitzgerald.

² Stewardship: Choosing Service over Self-Interest. P. Block. 1993. Berret-Koehler.

³ Stewardship: Choosing Service over Self-Interest. P. Block. 1993. Berret-Koehler.

⁴ Reputation Rules: Strategies for Building Your Company's Most Valuable Asset. D. Diermeier. McGraw Hill Education. 2011.

⁵ Stewardship: Choosing Service over Self-Interest. P. Block. 1993. Berret-Koehler.

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

In time for next year's celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation comes Martin Marty's *October 31, 1517: Martin Luther and the Day that Changed the World* (Paraclete Press, 2016), a brief and compelling overview of the circumstances of the Lutheran/Roman Catholic separation in the 16th century and efforts to find common ground in recent decades.

William Bowen and Michael MacPherson, two of higher education's wise elders, weigh in on the state of higher education in the 21st century with *Lesson Plan: An Agenda for Change in Higher Education* (Princeton University Press, 2016).

>>Peace of Wild Things<<

And Wendell Berry to close this issue of Notes...

When despair grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought

of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting for their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

>>Subscription information<<

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Citizenship and work
- Chief strategy officers
- Health as membership

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