

NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Seventeen, Number One (October 2015)

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

(W. Wordsworth, from "The Prelude")

NOTES FROM READERS

>>What you think<<

Welcome to our 17th year in this community of reflective practitioners – surely our efforts to model reflective practice as more and more urgent and relevant as we witness the breakdown of public and political discourse in our lives. Keep the faith, my friends! I'm always happy to hear from you with reflections on your practice.

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

>>Till and Keep<<

Here is a homily I preached in our chapel earlier this fall on the occasion of our exploration of our responsibilities to care for our environment.

Scripture: Psalm 104: 1-7, 24, 35b

Our chapel services last week, organized around the themes of Care for Creation, healing ourselves and the world, and the possibility of Augsburg becoming an urban arboretum (as oxymoronic as that may be, Professor Crockett!) gave me pause to consider one of the most meaningful experiences I've had in my 9 years at Augsburg.

It was back in the fall of 2006 at my first Board of Regents meeting as Augsburg's 10th president. We had invited Professor Mark Tranvik and then Christensen Professor David Tiede to share with Regents some of the ways they engage students around the theological concept of vocation. The specific exercise they chose had the Regents read the two accounts of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 – perhaps students still do this exercise in Religion 100, I hope so. The Regents then were asked to underline in the text the specific ways in which God was speaking to them (and all of us) and to compare the different “calls” from God in the two creation stories.

I was struck, as never before, by one glaring difference in the two accounts. In Genesis 1, God calls for humans to be created in God's own image and then charges them to “have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the

earth, and over every creeping thing,” and “to fill the earth and subdue it.” Dominion, subdue – words of power and control.

In Genesis 2, however, God forms humans from the very dust of the earth and likewise creates all living things on the earth, and then charges humans to “till and keep” God’s good creation. Till and keep, of dust created – words of care and stewardship.

The theological tensions between these accounts of creation have played themselves out over the millennia. I don’t need to rehearse the ways in which dominion and power over creation have too often led to degradation and violence unleashed on God’s good creation. And stewardship of the gifts of creation we all enjoy has not been the leading edge of our environmental behavior and policies.

Well, I’ll be so bold as to claim that Augsburg intends to be a Genesis 2 sort of community – a till and keep community – a community of stewardship, as we plan for our lives together on this campus and in the neighborhood in the years ahead. We’ve not always been so. Histories of Augsburg’s environmental policies and practices – written by our students in recent years – point to example after example of decisions and behaviors that undermine our callings as stewards of the people and place we call Cedar-Riverside and Augsburg College. From the sorts of materials we use to build buildings, to the waste we produce, to the irresponsible use of fossil fuels in our facilities and vehicles, to the lack of attention we pay to the implications of our behavior to our neighbors, both human and natural. “Forgive us” must be our lament. And conversion – genuine changes of heart and mind and hands – must be our way forward.

And based on what I see happening on campus in recent years, we are practicing what we preach. The Green by 2019 plan – though still a work in progress – set a framework for our “till and keep” community. Students challenged us to employ alternative sources of energy, like wind and solar. A new solar farm is planned for the roof of the ice rinks. We focused on composting and reducing waste in the cafeteria. We prepare and give away excess food through Campus Kitchen. Nice Ride bikes and Hourcars and light rail lines became more and more primary means of transportation. We committed in our Campus Space and Master Plan to create an urban campus that embraced the oldest city park in Minneapolis and made its presence at the heart of our lives together a pathway to seeing the entire campus as an urban park and arboretum. I could go on and on for these and more initiatives that symbolize our embrace of the call to till and keep God’s good creation, to be stewards of the remarkable gifts we have been given.

“O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you made them all, the earth is full of your creatures.” So writes the Psalmist, who calls us back again and again to witness to gifts of our Creator – gifts not to be subdued and controlled, but tilled and kept. But, as much as we embrace our roles as stewards of creation, the fact is that the world tends to be much more concerned about power and control – and we live in the world. So how shall we remain faithful in our calls as stewards when the temptations and demands of the world steer us toward dominion and entitlement?

A few rules help. First, we must truly treasure the local – the place and people around us. Too often, we are overwhelmed by the claims of our increasingly complex global lives and it is daunting to imagine how we can do anything to make a difference over against big corporations and systems and governments. It is precisely for this reason that we must embrace the difference we can make where we are – in our local place and with our neighbors. Augsburg’s community garden will not

feed the entire city, but it will help to feed our neighbors – and others will be inspired to create their own gardens to meet the needs of their neighbors. Augsburg's Urban Arboretum will not save all the native species, but it will save some and through its educational purposes will teach others how to plant and save trees and other vegetation in their own local places.

I often return to Kentucky farmer and author Wendell Berry's "17 Rules on Sustainability" as guides to treasuring the local. Among his rules are: (1) Ask of any proposed change or innovation: What will this do to our community? How will this affect our common wealth? (2) Include local nature – the land, the water, the air, the native creatures – within the membership of the community; (8) Strive to produce as much of your own energy as possible; (11) Invest in the community to maintain its properties, keep it clean (without dirtying some other place), care for its old people, and teach its children; and (15) Be aware of the economic value of neighborliness – as help, insurance, and so on. The costs of living are greatly increased by the loss of neighborhood, leaving people to face their calamities alone. Simple rules to help us treasure the local, to till and keep God's good creation here in this place.

We also must learn to live with patience. Again, easier said than done in a world of faster and faster, instant gratification and one hour Amazon deliveries – even on Sunday! But surely God's good creation offers us a daily reminder of the horizon of patience, our lack of control over the pace of growing seasons, our need to imagine the future even as we tend to the present. I have long been a student of Frederick Law Olmsted, the great American landscape architect who designed Central Park in New York, the National Mall in D.C. and myriad other remarkable places around the world. Olmsted was once asked how he had the patience to plan a garden or park when he might not see the full execution of the plan in his lifetime. He responded with this inspiring vision of life: "I have all my life been considering distant effects and always sacrificing immediate success and applause to that of the future." Do we have the patience to "consider distant effects" in our lives as stewards of this place and community?

Last spring, I had the privilege to work with 2015 Auggie grad, Emily Knudson (who, by the way, is one of the wilderness guides on this fall's River Semester). Emily was an environmental studies major and she wanted to do a project for our honors keystone course that both drew upon her major and had an impact on campus. So she worked with our grounds staff to make a plan to replace the giant Spruce tree that used to stand outside this chapel building – a tree that was overgrown and a threat to security – with three apple trees that will grow over the next decades to frame the entry to this building and to produce fruit that can be enjoyed by all of us. You can see the trees as you exit the building – they are tiny and it's a bit hard to imagine what they will look like in the future, but Emily had the patience and vision to imagine that future and to consider distant effects, surely part of the call for those who would till and keep God's good creation.

[As an aside, sometime this summer Emily and I both received a text with a picture of the apple tree, onto which someone had photo-bombed a big ripe apple – fruit that will not be produced for years to come – but impatience tempts...]

And finally, as those called to love the local and practice patience, we must believe that what underlies all of our work as stewards is a profound sense of thanksgiving for God's good creation and continuing presence in our history. We must give thanks constantly – and truly mean it. The Psalmist concludes as he begins: "Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, you are very great...Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord!"

In response to the many gifts we have been given – gifts of place and community and education and justice and health – we ask how we can be even more generous and faithful in our callings to till and keep, to be stewards of God’s good earth and creation and people. It’s a theological claim, to be sure; but even more urgently, it’s a practical claim, one that transforms how we live and work and have our being in this place we inhabit with our neighbors all.

Wendell Berry writes rules, and he also writes poems – Sabbath poems like this brief excerpt:

We live by mercy if we live.
To that we have no fit reply
But working well and giving thanks,
Loving God, loving one another,
To keep Creation’s neighborhood.
(from “Amish Economy,” 1995)

Urban arboretums, healthy and vibrant neighborhoods, food and justice for all, education for service – may God’s good and loving presence in our midst strengthen us to treasure the local, practice patience and give thanks always – may we always follow God’s call to till and keep all with which we’ve been entrusted. And God’s people join together to say, Amen.

>>College and university presidents as public intellectuals<<

My Augsburg colleague, Harry Boyte, along with Denison University president Adam Weinberg and I, are engaged in a project with the Kettering Foundation in Ohio that seeks to engage with our presidential colleagues around the idea of higher education leaders as public intellectuals and philosophers. It is an old idea that has unfortunately eroded as presidential duties have become much more about running the “business” and fundraising (both important, of course!) than our responsibilities to encourage public discourse on important issues. We wrote the following introduction to encourage our colleagues to imagine how they might take up their public roles. We welcome your thoughts!

Leading Democracy Colleges and Universities: The Public Roles of Presidents

(Drafted by Paul Pribbenow and Adam Weinberg, with Harry Boyte, Fall 2015)

“The first and most essential charge upon higher education is that ... it shall be the carrier of democratic values, ideals and processes.”

[Truman Commission on Higher Education, 1947]

“Our institutions need to be citizens of a place, not on the sidelines studying it.”

[Nancy Cantor, Chancellor of Rutgers-Newark, 2015]

The Truman Commission drew from a large and inspiring view of “democracy as a way of life” widespread earlier in the 20th century. As John Dewey put it, “Whether this educative process is carried on in a predominantly democratic or non-democratic way

becomes a question of transcendent importance not only for education itself but for the democratic way of life."

This view once infused higher education -- land grant and public universities, liberal arts colleges, historically black colleges and universities, normal schools, state universities, and community colleges. "Most of the American institutions of higher education are filled with the democratic spirit," said Harvard President Charles Eliot, conveying a large conception of democracy.

Today, though many colleges and universities invoke "democracy" or "democratic engagement," it is rare to have public discussions that reflect on the actual meaning of democracy, just as it is easy to miss the deep challenge to cultures of detachment in Nancy Cantor's call for colleges and universities to be "citizens of a place, not on the sidelines studying it." In a time of threats to democracy at home and abroad, the meaning of "democracy" has shrunk along with the purposes of higher education. Democracy often means simply free and fair elections, as the US Agency for International Development defines it (below). For many, colleges are a ticket to individual success.

Yet there are signs of renewed concern for the public purposes and work of colleges and universities, reviving higher education's democratic roles. In this view, colleges and universities are centers of knowledge making and leadership formation, responsible not only for creating and dispensing information but also for addressing local issues and stimulating public exploration of great questions: What does it mean to be a "democratic way of life"? How can higher education, working with communities, help get us there?

This template on leading democracy colleges and universities responds to a request from a group of presidents convened in July 2015 by the Kettering Foundation on "College Presidents and the Civic Purposes of Higher Education. Like two efforts by National Issues Forums to organize deliberative dialogues on the purpose of higher education, *Shaping Our Future* and *The Changing World of Work*, and the Imagining America Democracy's College discussion among a group of colleges and universities, it grows from the American Commonwealth Partnership invited by the White House to mark the anniversary of land grant colleges, a coalition to strengthen the public purposes and work of higher education. This effort also builds from efforts like the Carnegie Classification on Community Engagement and the President's Honor Roll for Community Service that push back against narrow views of "excellence" like the rankings of *US News and World Report*.

This statement aims to help spark a broad discussion, on campuses and beyond, about what it means for college and university presidents to lead a public conversation about democracy as a "way of life" with higher education playing vital roles. There is evidence that the nation may be ready for such a discussion. To launch this process, we suggest five focus areas for conversation and action:

Democracy saga/public narrative: This focus area emphasizes an intentional campus and community-wide effort, working with students to recover, discuss and engage the "saga" or "public narrative" of each unique educational community (for example see Paul Pribbenow, "The Saga of Augsburg College," http://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/issues.aspx?article_id=3774).

Democratic excellence through diversity: This area of focus revitalizes the conviction, buttressed by research, that a mix of students with diverse backgrounds and talents, interacting in learning cultures of high expectation which develop their unique gifts, can achieve both individual and cooperative excellence which no focus on winnowing out the stars can achieve (see "Lani Guinier

Redefines Diversity” *New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/08/education/edlife/lani-guinier-redefines-diversity-re-evaluates-merit.html?_r=2, <https://www.aacu.org/diversitydemocracy/about>).

Preparation for citizen professional leadership: This area of focus involves professional programs, disciplinary fields, and learning outside the classroom that recall the democratic values of scientific and other fields and instill democratic skills and habits of public work in students, as well as faculty and staff, to prepare students to be empowering civic leaders and change agents (see citizen professionals at Augsburg <http://www.augsburg.edu/news/tag/citizen-professionals/>)

Free and public spaces: This area of focus develops intentional plans to create diverse free spaces and public spaces where students and others learn the skills of surfacing tensions and conflicts constructively, while working with others who are different (see <http://www.pps.org/campuses/> ; and Adam Weinberg, “Get the Most Out of College, #4 at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/adam-weinberg/getting-the-most-from-a-liberal-arts-college_b_7946678.html)

Citizens of places: Colleges and universities as “stewards of place” and “anchor institutions” contributing to the civic and economic health of communities are spreading rapidly. These include a variety of practices, from college purchasing power used to support local businesses and partnerships in creating public spaces to collaboration on local school improvement and support for staff involvement in civic life (http://www.margainc.com/html/anchor_task_force.html).

Presidents who act as “public philosophers of democracy and education” are key players in recovering a vision of democracy as a way of life. We encourage presidents to consider their roles in the context of the 2016 Campus Compact Civic Action planning process (see www.compact.org/), which will commence in early 2016, in conjunction with the Compact’s 30th anniversary. Future meetings of college and university presidents, under the auspices of the Kettering Foundation (www.kettering.org), will offer opportunities to refine and grow this emerging understanding of the public roles of presidents in our democracy.

US AID definition: “Democracy refers to a civilian political system in which the legislative and chief executive offices are filled through regular competitive elections with universal suffrage.” [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/USAID%20DRG_%20final%20final%206-24%203%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/USAID%20DRG_%20final%20final%206-24%203%20(1).pdf) p. 37

Other resources: “Democracy University” WNYC Radio show with Harry Boyte and Tim Eatman on the new book collection, *Democracy’s Education: Public Work, Citizenship, and the Future of Colleges and Universities* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2015) - <http://www.wnyc.org/story/democracy-university/>

PRACTICE THIS

>>From data to information to wisdom—the ‘sin’ of terrific plans<<

Our abiding work at Augsburg translating our strategic plan (Augsburg2019) into action reminded me of this piece I first shared back in 2000 (!), which is still relevant to plans that truly make a difference in securing an organization’s future vitality.

“I am convinced that the daily challenges of managing and leading an organization are summarized in the process described by the phrase, “from data to information to wisdom.” In our age of data and information overload, it is too easy to get bogged down in the details, the minutiae, the sheer

quantity of data and information, and to forget the values, the stories, the metaphors, and the principles that show us the way to wisdom, to what is really important.

Management consultant Eileen C. Shapiro, in an excerpt from her “The Seven Deadly Sins of Business” (LPC Group/Capstone Publishing, 1998) entitled “The ‘Sin’ of Terrific Plans” (in “Perdido: Leadership with a Conscience,” Fall 2000), makes a similar point when she proposes that we need to be much more deliberate about creating strategy and ensuring that our organizations know what our strategy is. Otherwise, strategy gets created in ways that do not serve our best interests or values. In fact, she says, strategy gets lost in terrific strategic plans—and that is a sin.

Ms. Shapiro makes several strong points about strategy:

- Every organization has an implicit strategy—an overall pattern of actions taken, resources spent, and rewards given. But implicit strategy is not the same as good strategy, not all directions are equally attractive. We must be explicit; we must see through our beliefs to real strategy.
- We must frame the activities of our organizations—offer our employees and volunteers guidance on the ‘how’s’. Shapiro calls this a decision space, the context in which people can use their creativity to do their work.
- Organizational goals must be translated for every level of activity in the organization—goals must be tethered to reality. It is not good enough to promote a vision and organizational strategy without translating that vision and strategy into terms that our employees can understand and make happen.
- The essence of strategy is where the resources are allocated—misreading strategy can lead to an inappropriate allocation of valuable resources.
- Sustainability is a mirage—advantage in the marketplace, no matter the nature of our work, requires constant vigilance and attention to real strategic thinking.
- It is better to be agile than strong, as long as you know what you’re aiming to do and why.

Here’s to agility, perhaps the most underrated of organizational characteristics. I often quote Martin Luther, who said that education was about creating individuals of “wondrous ability, fit for everything.” Perhaps that same claim could be made of organizations that are always learning.

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I won’t add to the many resources noted above!

>>Giving and thanks<<

When Giving Is All We Have

[Alberto Ríos, 1952]

*One river gives
Its journey to the next.*

We give because someone gave to us.
We give because nobody gave to us.

We give because giving has changed us.
We give because giving could have changed us.

We have been better for it,
We have been wounded by it—

Giving has many faces: It is loud and quiet,
Big, though small, diamond in wood-nails.

Its story is old, the plot worn and the pages too,
But we read this book, anyway, over and again:

Giving is, first and every time, hand to hand,
Mine to yours, yours to mine.

You gave me blue and I gave you yellow.
Together we are simple green. You gave me

What you did not have, and I gave you
What I had to give—together, we made

Something greater from the difference.

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Citizenship and work
- Chief strategy officers

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