

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<<

School has begun – always an energizing time of the year for those of us who dedicate our lives to academic communities. We're off to a great start here at Augsburg with another strong class with amazing diversity (more than 45% students of color in the entering class!), which has led us to spearhead a broader campaign for equity in higher education in Minnesota. See the editorial at this link (<http://www.startribune.com/augsburg-college-leads-the-call-for-campus-equity/391809051/>), which outlines and applauds our efforts. Good and important work, and I'm proud to be part of a community with such strong values and commitments.

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

>>Convicted<<

Here is the homily I offered in our Augsburg Chapel during this first week of the new term.

Scripture: Romans 4: 16-22, Hebrews 11: 1-3

I was driving back to campus with a couple of our fundraising staff members earlier this summer when – quite out of the blue – one of them asked me this provocative question: "Have you ever been convicted?" Well, what do you do with that??

Once I recovered my senses – realizing that he was not concerned about my possible felony record – I was led, as is always the case with good questions, into a wonderful opportunity to explore the dynamics of conviction and its multiple meanings for our lives in this community.

What does it mean to be convicted? There are two meanings, both of which are relevant to our lives together in this community. On the one hand, to be convicted is to be "called out" for our crimes, our sins, the ways in which we have failed and flailed in our personal and common lives. Thus convicted, we plead our guilt, ask for forgiveness, perhaps do our time.

And in response to being "called out" in this first way, we are given the opportunity – the gift, really – to be convicted in the second way, to be firmly convinced of the values and causes and

relationships that matter most and demand our attention and advocacy and passionate service. Convicted twice over.

“Have you ever been convicted?” is the question I now ask of each of us as we begin this new academic year here at Augsburg.

What say you? What convicts us in this community? A few thoughts to launch our personal and common reflections.

Surely, we are convicted by the world, by the needs all around us for compassion, justice and solidarity. Canadian educator, journalist and public servant, Michael Ignatieff, has written of the claim to find an adequate language to describe our shared needs and how they press upon us, convicting us first of all the ways in which we do not share or work for justice, and at the same time, convicting us to get to work, to meet the needs of strangers, to fight for justice, to be democratically engaged. As Ignatieff writes, “We need justice, we need liberty, and we need as much solidarity as can be reconciled with justice and liberty. But we also need, as much as anything else, language adequate for the times we live in...”, language, he claims, that must illumine our lives now, not in some nostalgic past.

So, what about now? What convicts us now? I am more and more aware of how we are convicted right here on campus – too many of our fellow community members suffer from systemic bias and discrimination; too many go hungry or homeless or without the means to fully pursue their educational aspirations; too many live in fear and stress and anxiety because of all that presses upon them and their families. Similarly, we are convicted in our neighborhood for the stereotypes that fuel religious hatred and social disruption. And surely, we are convicted in our democracy by our lack of civility and common purpose, our inability to see beyond our personal interests to imagine a common good.

And so I am convicted also to take our stand as a community for equity and justice, for neighbor-love, for a democratic ethic that makes room for all citizens to pursue their dreams. Here is the work we must pursue together as those convicted and convicted again...

Likewise, we are convicted by our education in this college, by recognizing that we do not have all the information and knowledge and experience and wisdom and perspective, so that we are propelled to learn more, to dig deeper, to ask more questions, to seek new experiences and the wisdom they have to offer. University of Chicago philosopher, Martha Nussbaum, calls us to a liberal education, an education that frees our minds and hearts to pursue the “examined life,” committed to our membership in a global community, and called to a narrative imagination that equips us to chart a path forward together across our differences.

In this college, we are convicted everyday in the classroom, in laboratories, on stages, in residence halls, realizing the need to be humble and critical in our inquiry, asking what does this mean about human experience, about our lived environments, about our relationships with each other. We must admit our pride, our arrogance, our fears, our lack of imagination – as well as our shared needs and aspirations – as we are educated to take up the work we are called to do.

Convicted by our incomplete knowledge and wisdom, we are convicted again and again to keep asking our questions, broadening the circle of our fellow learners, seeing our learning in service of our neighbors.

But above all, we are convicted by our faith in the Gospel, by our gracious and loving God who, in our baptisms, names and claims and calls us, who knows the desires of our hearts and minds, and who has sent God's only Son into human history to forgive and free us, to give the gift of faith in things unseen, to be the author of our lives together in the world God loves so much. Kentucky farmer and poet, Wendell Berry, in an essay entitled "The Burden of the Gospels," challenges us to return to the gospel claim that convicts us to serve our neighbor when he writes, "If we take the Gospels seriously, we are left, in our dire predicament, facing an entirely humbling question: How must we live and work so as not to be estranged from God's presence...?", from the commandments, from the lessons of Jesus's teachings and parables? Will we follow Jesus? Convicted.

And therefore we are convicted everyday in this chapel – our firm commitment to confession and forgiveness and reconciliation. Convicted by the call we receive individually and in common to be God's people in the world, the world that God loves so much. Convicted by the Gospel that calls us to the firm belief that God is in charge and has work for us to do, work that is about love and hope and compassion and reconciliation. Convicted to cry and pray for peace in the world.

Have you been convicted? Like it or not, as members of this teaching and learning community, this democracy, this community of faith, you have been – and therein is the first and abiding step that propels us to true conviction – the conviction to serve, learn and grow as we discern God's plan for God's people – the work of the faithful. Convicted – and convicted again. Thanks be to God. Amen.

>>Don't boo, vote!<<

I wrote this editorial as part of our participation in the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge (see www.allinchallenge.org) - a national voter participation challenge aimed at college students this fall. You'll see it's not just about voting!

"President Obama's retort to those in the audience booing the mention of Donald Trump's name at the Democratic National Convention earlier this summer stands as a clarion call to all of us who care deeply about our democracy – and especially to the college students on campuses like mine in Minneapolis.

The fundamental claim upon a citizen of our country is to engage in our political system by exercising the right to vote guaranteed in the US Constitution. It is a right that has been fought for over the centuries and it is a right that continues to require fighting for as jurisdictions far and wide seek to limit its power.

The members of our college community are standing firm in our resolve to get out the vote this political season. And we are proud to be inaugural partners in the efforts of the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, which is committed "to working with higher education institutions to improve, measure and celebrate efforts to change campus climate and encourage informed participation in our democracy."

But, to be quite frank, it is not always easy to convince college and university students that their votes mean something, especially in a political climate that is so toxic and polarized. Charges that the system is rigged, deadlock in our legislatures, corruption among public servants, and a sense that government doesn't make a difference in my life, means that young people often tune out when

challenged to engage in the system. There is not much evidence for optimism about the system. Which is why I'm focused on hope on my campus!

I hope that these college and university students see voting not as an end in itself, but as a basic building block for something much more inspiring and compelling. And that is our democracy itself – not simply the political system, not a creed we recite, but a robust way of life together. Democracy as a social ethic.

My heroine, Jane Addams, the great social reformer of the late 19th and early 20th century, argued that democracy is like a “thronged road” that we travel together and that our responsibilities as citizens are to recognize each other’s burdens and gifts – to see each other as fellow travelers deserving of our respect and engagement.

Voting is a first – and important – step on this road of hope for our students and for all of us. Voting says that I have the responsibility and with it, the power, to be a co-creator of our democracy. My colleague at Augsburg, Harry Boyte, reminds us of the compelling power of the anthem, “We are the ones we have been waiting for.” It is our work as citizens – in all of its mundane and transformative forms – that will make our democracy strong and vital. No one else is coming to take up the work in our stead.

And there most certainly is work to be done. If voting is a first step, then there follows the often difficult and messy work of finding common purpose, listening to each other, organizing with each other to effect change, and being open to the need for forgiveness and reconciliation and having our minds changed.

I have the privilege to lead a college located in one of the most diverse zip codes in the US – the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood in Minneapolis, where our neighbors are immigrants from Somalia, Ethiopia, Vietnam, Korea and elsewhere. What I see every day in the extended classroom that is our neighborhood are new citizens pursuing the American Dream, building businesses, pursuing education, making lives for themselves and their families.

And then I turn my attention back to our college community, populated by thousands of diverse students being educated for lives of meaning and purpose, and I am filled with hope. Hope for our neighborhood, our democracy, and our world – hope that begins with voting and continues with the work we do together each and every day.”

PRACTICE THIS

>>The etiquette of democracy<<

As part of my opening convocation address this year, I added the important words below to point to the ways in which we can walk the fine line between our commitments to academic freedom and inquiry with the needs for civil and respectful spaces and places. Especially in this contentious political season, this was received as a meaningful statement for our community. I welcome your thoughts.

“...Especially at the beginning of this academic year – at a time fraught with social and political division and fear – I want to say a bit about the place and space in which you will pursue what is required of you. You come to college at a time when many are questioning whether or not our democracy will survive. Most of you will vote for the first time (and you must vote!) this fall in a US

presidential election, an election campaign marked by some of the most corrosive and anxious rhetoric and behavior in recent memory. Throughout the past year, our city, country and world have been torn apart by violence fueled by all sorts of isms – racism, nationalism, fundamentalism. During your lifetimes, our economic lives have been marked by a growing gap between those who have and those who have not, a gap that threatens to unravel the social fabric of our communities.

In the midst of all of this volatility, you come to this college – Augsburg College – an institution that at its very core believes in democracy, not simply as a political system, but as an ethic, a way of life. And this democratic ethic means that you become members of a teaching and learning community – students, faculty, staff and partners – that believes that there are clear parameters for our lives together, in classrooms, residence halls, playing fields, in this chapel and everywhere we navigate daily life. There is, in other words, what Yale law professor Stephen Carter has called an “etiquette of democracy,” rules you must follow if we are to live and work and study in ways that live out our mission as a college.

We have always believed that a college education is about challenging ourselves with new ways of thinking, provocative questions, mind-stretching inquiry and conversations, pursuing knowledge and wisdom with abandon. And that is deeply intense and sometimes emotional work. The commitment to our academic vocation – critical thinking, openness to other perspectives and experiences, having your mind changed and your life transformed – may be even more difficult in the midst of our social disruptions. It can be frightening to learn new things; it can make us angry to be challenged by provocative ideas and experiences; it can be threatening to risk our social identities in the midst of those who do not share our paths in the world.

And for all of these reasons, the etiquette of our lives together has perhaps never been more important to the well-being of our common lives here at Augsburg. Professor Carter suggests a few rules – “Our duty to be civil toward others does not depend on whether we like them or not”; “Civility requires that we sacrifice for strangers, not just for people we know”; “We must come into the presence of our fellow human beings with a sense of awe and gratitude”; “Civility requires that we listen to others with knowledge of the possibility that they are right and we are wrong”; and “Civility allows criticism of others, and sometimes even requires it, but the criticism should always be civil.” All important markers of our lives together. Perhaps I could suggest an even more personal and simple rule – let us be generous and gentle with each other, perhaps with a portion of forgiveness and grace, not so that freedoms are abridged or opinions squashed – college is not meant to be a safe place for your minds, you will encounter provocative, even troubling ideas here – but so that we might pursue our teaching and learning in ways that advance our mission and our democracy. Gentle and generous, the etiquette of democracy – a claim upon all of us in this place we call Augsburg College.”

>>Health as membership<<

I have recently had the privilege to visit Augsburg’s Health Commons in downtown Minneapolis, a non-clinical health center established by our nursing faculty more than 20 years ago to serve those experiencing homelessness. Its services are more about relationship-building and meeting basic human needs than prescribing expert advice, clinical interventions and drugs. I was struck again by how the Health Commons reflects Wendell Berry’s helpful understanding of “health as membership.” Here’s what he means...

“In his essay that explores the nature of our health care system and its relationship to human health, Berry draws the helpful distinction between the *world of love* (by which he means human efforts to struggle with our finitude, to forge relationships that seek to make us whole, to admit in the face of our mortality that we still have something to live for) and the *world of efficiency* (by which he means specialization, machinery, and abstract procedure).

Berry obviously sees these two worlds in great conflict within the modern health care system and its hospitals. The world of efficiency ignores the world of love, Berry tells us, because “by definition it must reduce experience to computation, particularity to abstraction, and mystery to a small comprehensibility.” And yet, the world of love would stubbornly hold that this sick human body cannot be reduced to a chart or a law. This body is my father or brother or daughter—a living creature, a small, fragile light in the dark.

Berry’s work is powerful in the extreme tensions it draws about human experience. Think, for example, of how the world of efficiency (in a hospital setting) is stymied by death—it puts aside the machines and procedures that define efficiency’s being. On the other hand, the world of love extends beyond death, and grief is the proof.

Berry draws his distinction further (and more to our point) by suggesting that we might call the world of love the realm of the “amateur,” literally, a lover, one who participates for love. The world of efficiency (or work) is the realm of the professional, one who performs highly specialized or technical work for pay.

I want to suggest that Berry’s simple definitions of the world of love (the realm of the amateur) and the world of work (or efficiency, the realm of the professional) offer a framework for us to identify alternative, typical answers to how the two worlds—love and work—are related in human experience.”

I wonder how we might extend this concept of “membership” to include a wide variety of human needs and aspirations that we share in common? Food for thought this fall.

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

In our various interfaith initiatives at Augsburg, we have benefitted from some emerging literature that helps inform our work. Recently, *Engaging Others, Knowing Ourselves*, edited by Carol Schersten LaHurd (Lutheran University Press, 2016) was a helpful addition to that literature, reminding us of the need to understand our own tradition well, even as we engage others.

I have returned to some of the intriguing work of neuroscientist Steven Pinker, whose *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (Penguin Press, 2012), is an important myth-buster for those of us committed to progress and peacemaking

>>Mending Wall<<

Robert Frost’s familiar poem about walls and fences was the themes of our opening convocation at Augsburg, where we believe in neither walls nor fences separating us from our neighbors!

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,

That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
"Stay where you are until our backs are turned!"
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, "Good fences make good neighbors."
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
"Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down." I could say "Elves" to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Citizenship and work
- Chief strategy officers

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