

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 Reformation Day! *Semper Reformanda!* Welcome to the 18th year of these Notes and thanks for your faithful accompaniment over the years.

This month marks the 10th anniversary of my inauguration at Augsburg and the campus community was kind to celebrate with me last week at a chapel service, offering blessings for the next phase of our work together. And it was topped off with bowtie shaped sugar cookies for everyone. Coincidentally, my colleague Harry Boyte published a profile of me last week as part of a series in the Huffington Post supported by the Kettering Foundation. You will recognize many themes from our conversations over the years if you go to the essay at <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/58092b3de4b0b1bd89fdafcc?timestamp=1476996725247>.

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

>>Concerned<<

Here is a homily I offered in our Augsburg Chapel earlier this fall.

Scripture: John 2: 1-11

I've decided to organize my homilies this semester around "c" words – why not? A few weeks back, I reflected on what it means to be convicted – first, called out for our failings and flailings, and then convinced of the cause or person we will follow. This morning, I'm wondering about being "concerned." More about that in a moment. For my third homily, I'm open to suggestions. Given that it falls after the November elections, I'm considering "conflicted" or "consternated." We'll see...

This theme of being concerned is such an important aspect of our chapel series for this week on Vocation 2.0 – so I now start to mix my "c" words with the "V" word!

But let's begin with the gospel story for this morning – this familiar tale of Jesus's first miracle, labeled "The Wedding at Cana." As an aside, I visited the purported site of this miracle a year ago during my trip to Israel and was struck by how out of the way, down narrow alleys, in the midst of an ancient neighborhood, it was. Not a grand place at all, and here was where his ministry began.

I'm sure we all recognize the broad outlines of the miracle story. At the beginning, Jesus is with his mother and disciples at the wedding, when the wine gives out. The story ends with this surprising act as Jesus turns water into fine wine.

It's the interactions that happen in the middle of the story that I want to focus on. It's Mary who comes to Jesus with news that the wine has run out. And Jesus's reply is where I want to pause: "Woman, what concern is that to you and me? My hour has not yet come." Now, I don't know about you, but I've always heard this reply as a rebuke of Mary. Go away, Mom, this is not my problem – I'm all about bigger and better things.

But in a recent article, Jesuit theologian Michael Buckley has suggested that there is a deeper and more nuanced meaning to Jesus's response. Mary does not make a request, she simply states a fact – there is no more wine. Jesus responds with a question that gets at the heart of his entire ministry – Buckley rephrases the response this way: "How do we include essentially within our lives those who we might otherwise forget as we go about the business of our lives." In other words, Jesus is noting in his question the truth that we are inextricably bound up with each other. To be concerned is to be truly human.

And the interesting thing is that Mary seems to get it. Instead of responding with some sort of moral argument for why Jesus should be concerned, she turns to the servants and tells them to do whatever Jesus tells them. She understands that the concern Jesus has for the needs of others demands obedience, not arguments.

And here is the lesson for us in this story – here is the vocational challenge for faithful people. The gift of faith from our gracious God carries with it both Mary's statement that the wine is gone and the response Jesus gave to his mother: "What is this to you and me?"

Again, Buckley challenges us with this lesson for our contemporary lives in the world.

"Those parents who watch their children grow up without education, without much hope for a better life...they have no wine. The millions of aged, hidden away in our cities or in dreadful convalescent homes...they have no wine. The despised or feared or uneducated, whose lives are terrorized by the violence on our streets...they have no wine. Women demeaned and threatened by violence and their disproportionate level of financial insecurity...they have no wine."

And we could go on with the threats against our Muslim neighbors, the systematic racism in our country, the corruption in organizations and countries around the world – they have no wine. To which Jesus calls us to grapple with what concern this is to you and me, to recognize our common human experience, and to get to work as those called to follow him. Obedience, not arguments.

I love how this story is told as the beginning of Jesus's public ministry, because from here – from this claim that being concerned is at the heart of the life of faith – we then are offered lesson after lesson of what Jesus calls us to be and do. We are called to heal the sick, to free the imprisoned, to feed the hungry, to comfort the heartbroken, to fight for peace and justice for all God's creation.

So, back to Vocation 2.0. One the most distressing ways in which the theological concept of vocation has been corrupted in the public discourse is the idea that a calling is simply a personal possession, unencumbered by the demands of others, and always it seems on an upwardly mobile life trajectory.

Well, no... The message we must proclaim for all to hear is your vocation, your calling, is never separated from the needs and aspirations of the communities and organizations and neighborhoods in which we live and work. Our callings are an obedient response to those who have no wine, because we are called to be concerned. No arguments, follow Jesus. We must reclaim the fact that at the core of our lives together in the world, our gracious and loving God intends for us to love each other as God loves us, to be concerned for each other as our God is concerned for us.

And here's the cool thing about all of this as we return to our gospel story. Jesus tells the servants to fill the jars with water, to then draw some out and take it to the chief steward, who then exclaims to the bridegroom: "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." The story ends with this powerful lesson. For those who follow Jesus, for those who are called to be concerned and do God's work in the world, the best, the very best, is yet to come. Thanks be to God. Amen.

>>From Either/Or to Both/And!<<

We're very proud of our interfaith work at Augsburg, for which we've received lots of national recognition. Recently, I wrote an essay, excerpted below, that described why we are committed to the work and what it means to our community.

"The intrepid Norwegian-Lutheran pioneers who founded Augsburg College almost 150 years ago to educate teachers and preachers for their immigrant communities likely would not have imagined that today, Augsburg – one of 26 colleges and universities affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America – would be a leading institution in the interfaith movement. Some might even consider this fact a turn away from the college's founding values and identity.

I would argue, however, that our journey to interfaith living in the 21st century has been possible precisely because we are a college of the Lutheran church, not despite that heritage. Instead of the "either/or" dialectic that creates chasms between insiders and outsiders, those who share the faith and those from other traditions, we have embraced the "both/and" perspective that enables us to be both faithful to the tradition that shaped us and relevant to the diverse cultures and faith traditions that are present in what theologian James Wallis has called "the new America." In this essay, I will describe the logic that has guided Augsburg on this journey to interfaith living. First, I will address why our Lutheran Christian faith tradition undergirds our commitment to

interfaith work. I then will outline how we have undertaken our interfaith initiatives on campus and in the wider community. Finally, I will describe what we are doing across the college and beyond to live out our commitment to interfaith living in 21st century America.

It is my firm belief that our interfaith work at Augsburg is a clear example of how higher education must be willing to change and innovate to respond to changing demographics, social expectations and democratic values. Being both faithful and relevant is a challenge all of higher education must address as we equip our students for lives of meaning and purpose in the world.

Why? The gifts of our faith tradition

Augsburg College will celebrate its 150th anniversary in 2019. Founded originally as a theological seminary in 1869, the college evolved over the decades to become a comprehensive university, defined by excellence in the liberal arts and professional studies, serving more than 3,500 students in traditional undergraduate, adult degree completion, and graduate academic programs. Located in the heart of the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood in Minneapolis – one of the most diverse ZIP codes in the country and home to myriad immigrant communities, including the largest Somali community in the United States – Augsburg has become one of the most diverse private colleges in the country. More than 45% of our first-year undergraduate class in the fall of 2016 was students of color. In the spring of 2016, our traditional undergraduate graduating class comprised 42% students of color.

Augsburg also has deepened its student body diversity beyond racial and ethnic categories. Once a haven for students who hailed from the homogenous towns and churches founded by our Northern European, Lutheran ancestors, today Augsburg is an institution that welcomes students of diverse cultural and religious traditions. We no longer have the opportunity to assume that our students share our Lutheran faith, and yet we contend that our faith heritage remains critical to our mission and identity – a foundation of core values and practices that continue to shape our academic mission and community life.

In order to address the inherent tension between the diverse students we serve and the tradition that has shaped our identity, we needed to return to our tradition and name the gifts that make us who we are. During a presidential sabbatical in 2012, I specifically explored those gifts (or charisms) of our tradition – gifts that make us relevant to the needs of the world. Five particular gifts of our Lutheran tradition emerged in my research.

- We have the gift of the theological concept of vocation—the belief that God calls us to lives of meaning and significance in the world. We believe that we are called as an academic institution to help students discern their callings and to equip them to live out those callings.
- We have the gift of critical and humble inquiry—the belief that already saved through God’s salvific act in Jesus Christ, we are freed to seek knowledge and understanding, to ask difficult questions and to make education a central value of a faithful life. We are grounded in the liberal arts, academic freedom and the search for truth among competing ideologies.
- We have the gift of engaging the other—the claim that God’s diverse creation is good. We believe that we are called to embrace diversity and otherness, to learn from each other and to build healthy communities.

- We have the gift of servicing our neighbors and seeking justice in human affairs—the belief that God calls us into relationship with each other and that our neighbors, individually and collectively, demand our love and service. We educate for service and justice in the world.
- We have the gift of semper reformanda—the belief that only God is permanent and that all human forms are imperfect and in need of abiding and loving reform. We are well positioned to build institutions that embrace change and value sustainability.

With these five gifts of our tradition articulated, we then began the important work of translating their relevance for our commitment to serving our students in the curriculum, co-curriculum and community outreach. This work, we argued, was a form of “evangelism,” sharing the gifts of our faith with all of our students. This evangelism was not about converting students to our faith, but rather was grounded in the belief that the gifts of our tradition are in fact relevant to the mission-based commitments of the college to “educate informed citizens, thoughtful stewards, critical thinkers and responsible leaders.”

This belief in the relevance of our faith tradition for our identity and mission is informed by the work of Darrel Jodock, emeritus professor of religion at Gustavus Adolphus College, one of our sister schools in the ELCA. Dr. Jodock has developed a schema that describes a continuum of institutional identities, where on one pole reside “sectarian” colleges and universities, those whose identity is grounded in a particular faith tradition, a tradition privileged in the mission and work of the institution. Leading examples of sectarian institutions include Wheaton College in Illinois or Liberty University in Virginia. On the other pole are “non-sectarian” institutions, where religion might be studied but it is in no way a part of the identity or mission of the university. Public institutions would be prime examples of the non-sectarian model.

Between these two poles of institutional mission and identity, Jodock describes what he calls a “third path” institution:

I would like to suggest that a Lutheran identity commits a college to a third path—one that is neither sectarian nor non-sectarian. Unlike the non-sectarian model, this third path takes a religious tradition very seriously and seeks to build its identity around it, exploring the riches of that tradition as part of its contribution to the community as a whole. But, unlike the sectarian model, it seeks to serve the whole community and in so doing is ready to work with people of other religious traditions—indeed, welcome them into its midst. The sectarian and the non-sectarian models avoid religious diversity, either by withdrawing from it or by minimizing and sidestepping it. The third model takes religious diversity seriously enough to engage and struggle with it, while at the same time remaining deeply committed to the importance of its own Lutheran tradition. Rather than an enclave or a microcosm, the third option is a well dug deep to provide something helpful for the entire community.

Jodock’s “third path” describes Augsburg’s efforts to combine its particular faith tradition with an openness to critical inquiry, learning from others, and equipping our diverse students for lives of meaning and purpose, no matter their paths in the world. It is upon this foundation that we

have built our commitment to interfaith living at Augsburg. As Augsburg professor Martha Stortz has written, this stance allows us to claim that “Lutheran institutions pursue interfaith work, not *in spite of* the fact that they are based in a particular religious tradition, but *because* they are based in a particular religious tradition.” In other words, interfaith work is not a luxury for our Lutheran college, it is a necessity.

How? An organizing framework for interfaith work across the college and beyond

Having grounded our interfaith commitments in our Lutheran faith tradition, we then began to explore the form these commitments might take on campus and beyond. We were pleased to work with the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), an organization founded and led by Eboo Patel and committed to partnering with colleges and universities to ensure that interfaith work is integrated into all aspects of institutional life. A comprehensive audit of Augsburg’s curriculum and co-curriculum, along with a survey of students, was conducted by IFYC staff in 2009-10. Its findings were critical in our strategic planning to integrate interfaith work in the college.

One of the most important contributions IFYC made to our work – complemented by the clear-eyed analysis of our institutional opportunities and challenges – was a framework for organizing our interfaith initiatives. When the IFYC staff provided their analysis and recommendations, it was in the context of three key drivers:

- How do students (and others) gain knowledge (and understanding) of other faith traditions on campus? Is the work imbedded in the curriculum? Are there community rituals and conversations that enhance knowledge of both your institutional faith tradition and those of others?
- How do students (and others) develop relationships with those of other faith traditions? Does the college community have a diverse array of faith traditions in its midst? If not, are relationships with those of other traditions possible in the surrounding community? How does the institution promote interfaith relationships on campus – in the classroom, residence halls and elsewhere?
- How do students (and others) develop healthy attitudes toward those of other faith traditions? How are unhealthy attitudes challenged and reformed? How are healthy attitudes celebrated and extended?

This framework became both a set of criteria to audit the current state of interfaith work on our campus, and also a set of organizing principles to help set priorities for enhancing our interfaith work together. As the next section describes, our work over the past several years has focused on all three aspects of this commitment – building knowledge, developing relationships and shaping attitudes toward the other.

What? Implementing our commitment to interfaith living at Augsburg

Our journey as a Lutheran college from either/or to both/and, our efforts to faithfully walk the third path, is well underway, though far from complete. In this section, I want to describe in broad strokes where we have focused our interfaith work across the college. I will not attempt to be comprehensive, but rather to offer a glimpse into the on-the-ground efforts underway in four areas: curriculum, campus life, institutional practices and community engagement.

In the curriculum

We know that we cannot leave the challenge of interfaith living to chance. In an academic institution, the way to ensure that all students are introduced to a concept is to imbed it in the curriculum. At Augsburg, all of our undergraduates take two required religion courses. At least one of the courses introduces all students to the gifts of our Lutheran Christian faith tradition. As our faculty reports, these classes populated with students of diverse faith and humanistic traditions quickly turn into interfaith conversations as students share how the concepts they are learning relate, intersect, and perhaps clash with their own beliefs. That, I believe, is what education is about.

In addition, we have committed financial and professional development resources to further integrate our interfaith efforts into our academic program.

- With financial support from the Council of Independent College's (CIC) NetVue initiative (Network of Vocation in Undergraduate Education), our campus ministry office has partnered with faculty and staff to build an interfaith module into our first year seminar, ensuring that students understand our interfaith commitments early in their college careers.
- We have created an Interfaith Scholars program, co-organized by our campus ministry staff and religion department, in which 10-12 students of diverse faith backgrounds are selected in a competitive process to participate in a credit-bearing, year-long seminar that includes study of various faith traditions, relationship-building, and service-learning opportunities in various faith communities.
- In partnership with IFYC, we also have provided professional development opportunities for faculty members – both those who teach sacred texts and those who are facing, perhaps for the first time, a religiously diverse classroom. We don't assume that faculty members are always comfortable with the religious diversity of their students and we support them in ensuring that their pedagogical strategies are appropriate for diverse students.

In campus life

One example of our firm conviction of our Lutheran faith tradition is our practice of daily chapel during the academic year. Certainly most of the attendees at these brief chapel services share our Lutheran and/or Christian faith, but we also have begun to include on the chapel schedule opportunities for interfaith rituals and explorations. Often these chapel gatherings are organized and hosted by Interfaith Scholars.

In addition, we have engaged faculty, staff, community partners and our campus space planning efforts to support interfaith living on campus.

- Our residence life staff – those responsible for ensuring healthy community in the residence halls – now receive orientation and training about interfaith issues.
- We have created dedicated spaces on campus for non-Christians to meditate and pray, including making our chapel space available for Muslim prayers on Fridays during the academic year.

- Our dining service provider has been a willing partner in responding to the dietary needs of students from diverse faith backgrounds, including providing late-night dining options for Muslim students who fast during the day during Ramadan.
- We have added a Muslim student advisor to our campus ministry staff, believing that it is a source of strength to ground our interfaith work in an office dedicated to the spiritual life of the community.

In institutional practices

Perhaps one of the most challenging areas of promoting interfaith living on campus has been how we embrace and respect diverse faith traditions in our institutional practices. One simple commitment is to be mindful of the calendar and seek to respect the religious holidays of other traditions. For example, we have changed our employee policies to allow faculty and staff to use flexible personal holidays for religious observances.

We also have engaged important and sometimes difficult conversations about how to integrate the rituals of our Lutheran tradition with the needs of a diverse campus community. We still carry the cross in our commencement ceremonies, contending that the cross is a symbol of the tradition that makes us the sort of college we are. At the same time, we have begun to think differently about how we illustrate our commitment to diverse faith traditions by going beyond simply Lutheran Christian practices. For example, at this year's opening convocation for new students, we complemented the traditional Christian invocation and benediction with prayers and readings from several different religious and humanistic traditions. The impact of this simple change in practice was profound – both for new students who witnessed our commitment to honoring both our own tradition and those of others, and for long-time faculty members who were visibly moved by this embrace of our multi-religious community.

I will admit that this effort to ensure that institutional practices honor our interfaith commitments is fraught with complexity. Being both faithful and relevant is hard work. In this effort, we count on a community that is both generous and gentle with each other, knowing that we will make mistakes and counting on each other to both hold us accountable and forgive our failings.

In community engagement

Our experience of the past decade in seeking to honor our commitment to interfaith living has occasioned opportunities to take our work outside of the campus community as well. Right in our own neighborhood, two local Lutheran congregations now partner with the Muslim imams to host interfaith meals and service projects. The local Jewish federation has partnered with us to send our students to Israel for study trips. Our religion courses benefit from regular visits to non-Christian faith communities, extending our teaching and learning community throughout the city.

Perhaps most meaningfully, our interfaith work – seeking to remain faithful and relevant – has been embraced by our Lutheran church body. We are now leading an effort across the 26 colleges and universities of the ELCA to integrate interfaith living in to their diverse contexts and missions. Lutheran congregations across the country are seeking counsel and support from Augsburg to help them learn how to live alongside neighbors of diverse faith traditions. National

foundations are looking to Augsburg to develop programs to support interfaith conversations and projects in Christian churches across the country.

Finally, we are proud to have received national recognition for our work from President Obama, whose Interfaith and Community Service Challenge was launched in 2008 and has continued since. Augsburg's interfaith efforts regularly are noted among the most effective among colleges and universities around the country."

PRACTICE THIS

>>Reflective politics<<

I have to include this oft-repeated anecdote with the fervent hope it might come true...sometime soon!

"I recently heard Scott Simon, the Saturday morning host on National Public Radio, recount a story about Adlai Stevenson, the Illinois Democrat who served as governor and U.S. senator before running as the Democratic nominee for president in 1952 and 1956. At a campaign stop during the 1952 campaign, someone in the crowd yelled, "You've got the votes of all thinking people, Adlai," to which Stevenson is purported to have responded, "That won't be enough, I need a majority."

As we enter the political season some sixty-five years later, perhaps we might hope that our politics could at least aspire to some reflection, some connection to the things we care about, some conversations of substance instead of sound bites. But, alas, thinking remains a minority activity. May the voices of our minority be heard above the din of politics as usual."

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

Lots of good books coming my way this fall...

A lovely novel by Brian Doyle, editor of *Portland Magazine*, entitled *Chicago* (Thomas Dunne Books, 2016), is must reading for anyone who loves the Second City.

I also recommend *Good Neighbors: The Democracy of Everyday Life in America*, by Nancy L. Rosenblum (Princeton University Press, 2016), a fitting companion to the Doyle novel above.

Finally, on a trip to our campus site in Nicaragua a few weeks back, I received my copy of *Faith and Joy: Memoirs of a Revolutionary Priest*, by Fernando Cardenal, SJ (English translation by Augsburg staff members, Kathy McBride and Mark Lester, Orbis Books, 2015). Father Cardenal spearheaded the literacy movement in Nicaragua in the early 1980's and was a good friend of Augsburg, receiving an honorary degree a few years back.

>>Blessings<<

"Blessings" by Ronald Wallace from *Long for This World: New and Selected Poems*. © University of Pittsburgh Press.

Blessings

occur.

Some days I find myself
putting my foot in
the same stream twice;
leading a horse to water
and making him drink.
I have a clue.
I can see the forest
for the trees.

All around me people
are making silk purses
out of sows' ears,
getting blood from turnips,
building Rome in a day.
There's a business
like show business.
There's something new
under the sun.

Some days misery
no longer loves company;
it puts itself out of its.
There's rest for the weary.
There's turning back.
There are guarantees.
I can be serious.
I can mean that.

You can quite
put your finger on it.

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Citizenship and work
- Chief strategy officers

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