

NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Thirteen, Number Two (December 2011)

"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 New Year all! I hope and pray that your holidays have been a time for relaxation and reflection. No snow and fairly balmy here in Minnesota as we head into 2012 – lots of folks have “Let it snow” signs in their front yards.

Dr. Bill G. Enright, Director of the Lake Institute on Faith & Giving at the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, wrote this kind note after my last issue:

“Your reflections always nurture thoughtfulness and inspire my moral imagination. Thank you. I am quoting you in one of our upcoming tweets. I look forward to your upcoming thoughts on hospitality.”

The tweet appeared a couple of weeks later: “When generous w/your mind you create orgs that are marked, not by scarcity, but abundance of possible.” Follow Bill on Twitter @LakeInstitute. I’m @paulpribbenow. 140 characters surely demand imagination of format, if not substance!

Occasionally, I (or my colleagues) refer to items from previous issues of Notes. If you have not been a subscriber previously, and wish to review our conversations, past issues of Notes are available on-line at www.jgacounsel.com. The website version of Notes also includes helpful hyperlinks to sources for purchasing or subscribing to the various publications mentioned in Notes. I thank my friends at Johnson, Grossnickle & Associates for their many years of abiding support for our reflective practice.

REFLECT ON THIS

>>Advent reflections<<

I was struck this year by the juxtaposition of two scripture readings assigned for the first Sunday in Advent (Mark 13 and I Corinthians 1) and used them in various settings to remind us of our callings in the world. Here is a version of my devotional thoughts...

“I have been reflecting this Advent on two intersecting themes that offer me perspective and inspiration on our lives and work in the world. The lectionary for the first Sunday in Advent brought us once again to the gospel of Mark with its admonition to stay alert, to keep awake for we never know when the master will return. These words could be read as stark, even harsh. But the gift of the lectionary is that we read first in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians a great hymn of

thanksgiving for the gift we already know in Jesus Christ, the gift we receive in the baptismal waters, the gift of faith that calls us to our work in the world. In this way then, the almost command-like words of Mark are set in a new context – a context of thanksgiving – that allows us to hear Mark’s words not as **command**, but as **invitation**, as the call to live as those already saved, redeemed, set free to be God’s people and do God’s work in the world.

“Stay awake” is then not some jarring admonition, offered with the threat of reprisal for those who fail to listen and act accordingly, but as loving call into the life of those whose lives are already in God’s loving embrace. My dad taught me this lesson when he used to ask us to take notes on the sermon. It might have seemed like a command then but now I know it was an invitation to pay attention, to attend to what is most important in our lives, to pay attention to what God is doing in our midst and what we are called to do in faithful response. Wow, what a delightful Advent message this is. Attend to God’s intentions for your life, reflect on your deepest longings for lives of love and peace, and then follow the light of the star that looms over Bethlehem so that you might join in the chorus of thanksgiving for lives redeemed from the darkness.

>>For Democracy’s Future<<

We at Augsburg are deeply engaged in a new initiative entitled “For Democracy’s Future: Education Reclaims Its Civic Mission,” to be launched at the White House early in 2012. Watch for news about this important effort to promote higher education as a public good, rather than a private benefit – counter-cultural, we know, but critical to the future well-being of our democracy. Check out the website for the initiative at <http://www.civicyouth.org/democracy/>. You’ll find lots of good information there, including important blog posts.

Here is a recent blog post by Katie Clark, a nursing instructor here at Augsburg, which gives you a flavor of how this initiative intends to help reshape our teaching and learning:

“In our society today, people have become so medicalized that we often forget that health is not about the absence of disease, but a place of belonging. Here at Augsburg College, our department has been focused on going back to what nursing was originally intended to be about, relationships. We have opened two drop-in centers focused on just that.

One of these drop-in centers is focused on working with people living on the streets of Minneapolis. We listen, we provide basic necessities, and we take the time to make sure people feel supported as well as feel as though they are part of a community. In our current medical world, few people would say that helping someone find housing is a role of a nurse. But to us, it is exactly that. It is about having heart-to-heart conversations. This center has been in existence for close to 20 years. Nurses engage with about 120 people each week.

Our other drop-in center, the Health Commons at Dar Ul-Quba, is a new innovation this year that is focused on immigrant health in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis. Our focus is similar to the other commons, but is carried out differently since many people have a place to call home. Our efforts here have been about trying to help people not only understand our health care system, but to help people realize how they can practice health and healing in similar ways that they did in their country of origin. Also, it is about helping people come together and create the desired change they want to see in their neighborhood.

To us, being citizen nurses means that we are working to strengthen our communities in ways that avoid the expert model. We see people as collaborators and co-creators. Our Augsburg nursing students are able to have experiences at these drop-in centers and are changing their world view in ways that are benefiting our society. Our hope is to continue to work in communities locally as well as abroad to help create a more accepting and loving world.”

Kudos to Katie and her citizen-professional nurse colleagues. Their work is good for all of us!

>>Anchor institutions<<

One of the other major projects we are pursuing as part of this focus on the civic mission of higher education is participation in what is known as the “anchor institution” movement. Perhaps best exemplified by efforts at the University of Pennsylvania, beginning twenty years ago, to partner with neighbors and neighborhood organizations to strengthen the area of Philadelphia around the campus – the results are remarkable – the anchor institution model is now being used by colleges, universities, hospitals and other major institutions in neighborhoods around the country to inform a vision of neighborhood well-being.

Several basic ideas ground the movement. First is the move away from what we might call a “charity” model of relationship between institutions and their neighbors – away from the strictly moral obligation of service with its concern to detail community benefit and economic impact (i.e., a one-way framework for assessing the relationship).

Instead, the anchor institution movement argues for finding opportunities to promote shared value among partners – as we each articulate our self-interests, we look for overlapping interests that might be furthered by joint efforts (i.e., a mutually beneficial measure of the relationship).

A couple of quick examples. In the charity model, our college sends students into the neighborhood to do internships and service learning, helping to meet the needs of neighbors as a part of our academic and service missions. We add up the number of hours they work and laud the sort of needs they are able to meet. Nothing necessarily wrong with this approach. Good learning happens, needs are met.

In the anchor institution framework, however, we start from a different point. In dialogue with neighbors, we begin with the idea of creating long-term well-being for the entire neighborhood, we work together to name our self-interests and ways our joint efforts might create shared value for all of us. An assets-based approach, we lift up both our institutional missions and values and the core interests and values of various neighborhood partners. Likely there still are good internships and service learning opportunities, but there also are neighborhood asset-maps, economic development plans, and long-term strategy to ensure neighborhood well-being.

Set in this broader neighborhood context, our mission-based work fits into a larger vision of mutual well-being. This seems like common sense, but to be quite candid, we default into charity mode, perpetuating the power dynamics that often define relationships between institutions and their surrounding communities.

The power of the anchor institution movement is in its description of a variety of roles which institutions can play in a neighborhood, loosely organized around the themes of “people, procurement and placemaking.” These seven roles include:

- Real estate developer
- Purchaser
- Employer
- Workforce developer
- Core service provider
- Cluster anchor
- Community builder

No one institution necessarily pursues all of these roles. Here at Augsburg, we have done well as a community builder and purchaser – meeting the needs of our neighborhood for social and economic well-being, while at the same time meeting our needs for student learning opportunities and purchasing various services and products. We have recently partnered with a nearby hospital and neighborhood organizations on developing pathways to careers in health care for local residents – the role of workforce developer. And we are currently looking at opportunities for real estate development that might lead commercial building projects that would promote neighborhood vitality, provide much-needed parking and also return a revenue stream to the college.

I am convinced that the anchor institution model holds immense promise for our work as a college in the years ahead. Local foundations are helping to support the work, especially as it relates to a new public transport system being built in the neighborhood. And lots of great ideas are flowing as we move beyond thinking that our work together is a zero-sum game. This might just be what abundance looks like in practice!

For more information about anchor institutions, download this document:

http://www.icic.org/ee_uploads/publications/Anchor-Institutions.PDF or simply google “anchor institutions” and find the wealth of good research and case studies.

PRACTICE THIS

>>Life lessons<<

I was pleased and humbled by references in year-end publications about ideas that I had shared which had shaped thinking and action for two people I respect.

The first was in a year-end blog by Augsburg alum Steve Wehrenberg, who is CEO of Campbell Mithun, a prominent advertising agency based in Minneapolis. Reflecting on what he had learned in 2011, Steve wrote:

“I learned from the president of my alma mater that understanding and living your core values liberates you from seeking the myth of a balanced life. It works like that old ad bromide, “Give me the freedom of a tightly written brief...”

[See his entire post at www.themplsegotist.com/news/local/2011/december/22/what-i-learned-2011-steve-wehrenberg-ceo-campbell-mithun]

Steve and I sat in my office this summer talking about the challenges of a busy personal and professional life, trying to find ways to manage. My suggestion was that he read Augsburg colleague Jack Fortin's *The Centered Life* (Augsburg Fortress, 2006) and my thought was that perhaps we need to learn to live "out of balance," leaving us to rely on the pull of a force and power that draws us in, that centers us, rather than our believing that we can find that fulcrum of balance within ourselves. This is the centered life, not the balanced life. Balance is our human longing – surely if we get our lives in balance, all will work out, and all will be well. We've all been there is this eternal quest for balance in our lives. But these attempts at balance distract us from what God calls us to be and do. Balance is the wrong metaphor for the life of faith (not to mention it is impossible to achieve) – instead, the center holds us in God's orbit, in the orbit of what is truly valuable and significant. And centered there, we suspend our efforts to make everything work out, to pursue what we believe we deserve, to rely on the opinions of others to measure our worth in the world. Centered there, we lean expectantly into what God intends for us to do as partners in the work of making new things happen.

The second reference was in the January 2012 issue of *CASE Currents* magazine, in which Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) president John Lippincott writes on "Ethics and Economics: Remembering the value of values." Detailing his point, Lippincott argues that "perhaps most important, ethical practice is doing what we should do as a conscious act. On this point, I give credit to Paul Pribbenow, president of Minnesota's Augsburg College. He argues that we can only consider our actions ethical if they have resulted from careful reflection on the societal, organizational, professional and personal value systems at work. Most ethical dilemmas are just that—dilemmas with more than one solution. Which of these solutions is right or "righter" can only be determined through the examination of the applicable norms from the culture, the institution, and the field, as well as one's own moral convictions."

This, of course, is the point I have long argued, which is that ethics and ethical decision-making must be reflective practice. If we have this larger framework for our work, we are pushed beyond the transactional and dilemma-oriented focus of a technical approach toward a genuine dialogue between theory and practice, between character and rules, between social and historical context and the circumstances of our daily work. It is helpful in this regard to recall another lesson from the late Bob Payton, founder of the Indiana University Center on Philanthropy: the need for all of us to articulate our philanthropic autobiography, linking moral reflection to our own life experiences!

There are several important components to this understanding of ethics as reflective practice. First, ethical decision-making must be conversational and dialogic. For example, University of Dayton professor Marilyn Fischer's decision-making framework for fundraising ethics demands that we consider public, organizational, professional and personal perspectives on a given situation. The work of Independent Sector also is helpful as organizations develop more deliberative processes for ethical decision-making, becoming more reflective as practitioners within organizations. Second, we also must see how our work is educational and pedagogical. University of San Francisco professor Michael O'Neill is right to challenge us with the notion of fundraisers as moral teachers – teachers about values within our organizations, with donors, and in the wider public.

I trust you note in these brief lines the fact that what I teach, I have been taught by those I cherish as mentors and friends. And so it goes, dear Notes readers, as you share what you have been taught. "What we have loved, others will love, and we will teach them how," the lines from William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* truly sum up the life of reflective practice.

>>Creativity myths<<

Here's a short piece I first posted seven years ago, which strikes me as most fitting for the times...

“Harvard professor Teresa Amabile, interviewed for *Fast Company* (December 2004), discusses six myths that many people believe are related to the sort of work environment in which creativity flourishes. In debunking the myths, she offers a straightforward approach to “smart” management, claiming that “when people are doing work that they love and they’re allowed to deeply engage in it—and when the work itself is valued and recognized—then creativity will flourish. Even in tough times.”

Professor Amabile’s six myths are:

- Creativity comes from creative types – just not true, she says. As a leader, you do not want to ghettoize creativity – everyone in your organization is capable of, and should be encouraged to, imagine novel and useful ideas and practices.
- Money is a creativity factor – certainly people should be compensated fairly for their efforts, but most people value more than money an environment that encourages and supports creative activity.
- Time pressure fuels creativity – research shows that people are less creative when under stress. The key issue is the ability to focus on the work, free from distractions, many of which arise when deadlines loom.
- Fear forces breakthroughs – to the contrary, Amabile’s research shows that creativity is positively associated with joy and love and negatively associated with anger, fear and anxiety.
- Competition beats collaboration – instead, Amabile shows, the most creative teams are those that have the confidence to share and debate ideas.
- A streamlined organization is a creative organization – this is PR spin, according to Amabile. Downsizing creates distrust and that is not an environment that nurtures creativity.

For leaders and managers, Amabile suggests four simple strategies for building a creative work environment: (1) When time pressure is high, clear out the distractions; (2) React to problems with understanding and help; (3) Celebrate a good performance in public; (4) When times are tough, redouble your communications efforts.

Here’s to a new year full of creativity.”

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I’ve just finished a fine book by Susan Resneck Pierce, former presidential colleague at the University of Puget Sound, entitled *On Being Presidential: A Guide for College and University Leaders* (Jossey-Bass, 2012). Susan’s good and successful experience as a president and consultant give her important insights into the nature of our work.

Also on the higher education beat, I’m reading *We’re Losing Our Minds: Rethinking American Higher Education* by Richard Keeling and Richard Hersh (Palgrave MacMillan, 2012) and *Why Does College*

Cost So Much? by College of William & Mary economists Robert B. Archibald and David H. Feldman (Oxford University Press, 2010).

This spring, I'm teaming up with sociology colleague Tim Pippert to lead our Senior Honors Seminar on the topic "An Inter-disciplinary Examination of Homelessness and Affluence in the United States." It promises to be an intriguing and timely conversation. We begin with Dennis Gilbert's *The American Class Structure in an Age of Growing Inequality* (8th ed., Pine Forge Press, 2011).

>>Certainty<<

Here are wise words about the search for certainty from preacher and master wordsmith, Frederick Buechner, writing in his *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons* (HarperCollins, 2006).

"We all want to be certain, we all want proof, but the kind of proof we tend to want—scientifically or philosophically demonstrable proof that would silence all doubts once and for all—would not, in the long run, I think, answer the fearful depths of our need at all. For what we need to know, of course, is not just that God exists, not just that beyond the steely brightness of the stars there is a cosmic intelligence of some kind that keeps the whole show going, but that there is a God right here in the thick of our day-by-day lives who may not be writing messages about himself in the stars but who in one way or another is trying to get messages through our blindness as we move around down here knee-deep in the fragrant muck and misery and marvel of the world. It is not objective proof of God's existence that we want but, whether we use religious language for it or not, the experience of God's presence. That is the miracle we are really after. And that is also, I think, the miracle that we really get."

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Reinventing governance
- Hospitality is not enough

(c) Paul Pribbenow, 2011