

## NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Thirteen, Number Five (June 2012)

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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<<

Summer greetings! We will hold our second commencement on July 1 (our non-traditional and graduate students) and then the family and I head to Chicago for a six-week sabbatical – quite a gift from our Board of Regents at Augsburg. We will live in a rented home in Evanston and I will work on a research project at our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America headquarters. More on the project in future issues of Notes. It will be a true blessing to be in our favorite city with summer time for relaxing and renewal.

Good reader, Tim Seiler, who directs the Fund Raising School at Indiana University/Purdue University Indianapolis, writes with this recommendation: "This month I decided to add a suggested title to your recommended reading. For those engaged in our wonderful work who might on occasion question themselves because of their proclivity to be introverted and quiet in what is generally perceived to be a world of extroverts, a current book which I have found to be quite engaging is *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, by Susan Cain (Crown Publishing, 2012).

Introverts and extroverts alike will find something helpful in this well-written book." Thanks, Tim.

Sharilyn Hale, a long-time subscriber and friend from Toronto, wrote after my last issue of Notes to fill in a blank for me: "I shared Pat Thompson's essay with you last Fall...she is a dear friend and colleague here in Toronto. Happily, she and I are now collaborating on a special initiative, still being defined; to create/seed/nurture/model conversation focused vocational communities among fundraisers here in our city. We've had some terrific early discussions about approach and will be happy to share with you what unfolds in the coming months. Thank you for drawing attention to her good work." We look forward to learning from your experience, Sharilyn. Thanks much.

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](http://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.

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## REFLECT ON THIS

>>Breakfast with Jesus<<

I preached this homily in our chapel at the end of our academic year.

[Scripture assigned for the day, John 21: 1-14]

Biblical commentators suggest that the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter of John's gospel, from which we have read this morning, was added to the original narrative. And as is always the case in such findings, the question is why. What was it that those who edited the gospel felt needed to be added to complete the story? What was going on in the community of those for whom John's gospel account was meaningful that required 25 additional verses?

For some of us, these are intriguing questions of Biblical and theological scholarship; for some of us, not so much so. I might suggest, though, that for all of us – situated here some 1900 years after the gospel was circulated – these additional verses are most relevant. In fact, I might be so bold as to say that chapter 21 is meant especially for you and me here at Augsburg, in this chapel, during this Easter season, near the end of our 143<sup>rd</sup> academic year.

Let's imagine ourselves in the place of the disciples in these days after: after the intense years of ministry across the countryside, after the triumphal entry to Jerusalem, after the Passover, after poignant and emotional final meals together, after betrayal and denials, after the cross, after an empty tomb. Now what do we do?

Well, I guess you do what you know how to do. Simon Peter says it plainly, "I am going fishing." I'm going back to the life I knew before I was called away. I'm going back to the familiar and mundane, as if these years with Jesus were simply a dream, ultimately a nightmare. I can go back and earn a living and get on with things, and the others join in. But there are no fish to find – the familiar and mundane is empty and disappointing.

And then there he is on the lakeshore. A vague figure, who knows of their disappointment and emptiness. "You have no fish, have you?" he asks. "No," they answer. "Cast your nets again and you will find some," and so their nets are filled beyond measure (153 fish, we're told a few verses later!) and they recognize him as Jesus their Lord.

And as they rush to greet him, filled once again with the joy and abundance they have known in their lives together, Jesus says simply "Come and have breakfast." There they are, gathered around the campfire, breaking bread together and eating the fish he helped them to catch. There they are, afraid to ask how this was possible, afraid to break the spell of the moment – and yet they knew it was the Lord! He is Risen, He is Risen Indeed.

I would guess that all of us have had moments when we have this sense of living in the days after ... My spouse, Abigail, has worked over the years in the arts community and she talks about how the preparation for an art exhibit or performance and production leads you through a series of emotions that can leave you pretty dejected when the production is over. Post-production blues, she calls them. Others of us might feel that way about the end of our college years here at Augsburg – what do I do now? Others among us may be retiring, wondering what will offer meaning and direction in

the days ahead. Perhaps your examples are less extreme, though still unsettling. A relationship ends, a job search falls apart, a family splits...what do we do in the days after?

Perhaps, like the disciples, it's back to what is familiar, to what we've always done. Or maybe it's coping with the disappointment and anxiety with a sense of fatalism – this is the best I can do and hope for. And perhaps, we too find our nets empty. The world defines success in ways we simply can't live up to.

And then he is there, standing on the lakeshore – just as when he first called to us, “follow me” – sending words of encouragement our way, instructing us to cast our nets again. And all of a sudden, we recognize our Lord and he invites us to come to the table, to break the bread together, to lay at the altar our burdens and joys, our disappointments as well as the bounty and abundance of our nets overflowing. He is risen; He is risen indeed.

Here is the powerful Easter message in these days after... the message we have from John's gospel that is so relevant to our 21<sup>st</sup> century lives of faith.

*Yes, you must go back to your lives in the world.* But now, your lives in the world have been transformed by the power of the resurrection. Now the calls you have received – your vocations – have a different meaning and trajectory. In your daily lives, God is alive and acting so that you might know and make real God's will for the world. What the world counts as success has been set aside for all time. Now your lives serve the Risen Lord.

*No, I have not left you alone.* I am here with you in your daily lives. I know you may be disappointed and dejected and anxious and afraid. Remember how I called to you from the lakeshore. Remember how you recognized me in the breaking of bread. Remember how I invited you into community. Know that I am with you, offering my comfort and encouragement and guidance and love – even when you feel lost and alone.

*Yes, all has changed...so follow me again and still.* We can't deny all that happened. Healing and compassion, love for our neighbors. Triumphant entries, frightening times of betrayal and denial. Feet washed and bread broken. Government and religious pageants aimed at dousing God's love. Horrific and painful death. Three days and a stone rolled away. Resurrection. Reports of being together again, despite the doubters. That now is done. God loves you. You have been redeemed. But that is not the end...

I need you now to follow again and still, to be my living body on earth, to share the good news. Come and have breakfast with me, for our work together has just begun.

One of the central claims of an Augsburg education, grounded in helping you find vocational meaning or hear your call, is how the various experiences of your life – growing up in a particular family, in a particular place; belonging to a particular religious community (or not); having a certain group of friends; coming to a particular college, where you study in a particular way a particular set of topics; choosing a particular career path, and so forth – how all of these experiences are part of a narrative that has history, that has an “arc” that has been influenced and shaped by the inter-dynamics of relationships and institutions and decisions that are all part of your vocational story. What I believe we do at Augsburg is not to tell you what your vocation should be (though sometimes we all do need advice!), but to help you make sense of your vocational story, to find the coherence in the

narrative, to see the significance of the various threads of your story as they weave a life for you in the world. To consider how you will live in the days after...because there will be many days after.

In this understanding of vocation, then, the Easter message about the days after becomes especially important because these are the days when we need to take responsibility for how our story continues to unfold, even when we are away from those advisors and teachers and friends who perhaps inspired us or motivated us or supported us down this path. As John's gospel concludes, God does not leave us alone in our vocational journeys in the mean time, Jesus is still inviting us to breakfast.

Wendell Berry, in his whimsical poem, "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front", offers us an insightful take on this message for life in the days after:

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,  
vacation with pay. Want more  
of everything ready-made. Be afraid  
to know your neighbors and to die.  
And you will have a window in your head.  
Not even your future will be a mystery  
any more. Your mind will be punched in a card  
and shut away in a little drawer.  
When they want you to buy something  
they will call you. When they want you  
to die for profit they will let you know

So, friends, every day do something  
that won't compute. Love the Lord.  
Love the world. Work for nothing.  
Take all that you have and be poor.  
Love someone who does not deserve it.  
Denounce the government and embrace  
the flag. Hope to live in that free  
republic for which it stands.  
Give your approval to all you cannot  
understand. Praise ignorance, for what man  
has not encountered he has not destroyed.

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Go with your love to the fields.  
Lie down in the shade. Rest your head  
in her lap. Swear allegiance  
to what is highest in your thoughts.  
As soon as the generals and the politicians  
can predict the motions of your mind,  
lose it. Leave it as a sign  
to mark the false trail, the way  
you didn't go. Be like the fox

who makes more tracks necessary,  
some in the wrong direction.  
Practice resurrection.

Practice resurrection. Come and have breakfast. Thanks be to God. Amen.

## PRACTICE THIS

>>Accompanying our neighbors<<

I've recently submitted a longer version of this case study about our work at Augsburg engaging our neighborhood to an international journal on higher education and democracy (thus the consistent British spelling throughout the essay!). The lessons we have learned in response to the tragic murder of one of our students four years ago this fall have helped strengthen our identity and character as a college.

### **“The case study:**

In the autumn of 2008, an Augsburg undergraduate student, Ahmednur (Nur) Ali, was murdered in our Cedar-Riverside area near campus. Nur, who had grown up in the neighborhood, was tutoring children at a local community centre as part of his campus work assignment and apparently had an altercation with some young men inside the centre. When he came out of the centre after completing his assignment, the young men shot and killed him. Nur was the first member of the Augsburg community to be murdered in our vicinity in our more than 140-year history. The case has never been solved because potential witnesses were frightened to come forward and offer evidence. It was a time of great fear and anxiety for our campus community; a time that called into question Augsburg's deep commitment to being in the neighbourhood and with our neighbours; a time that challenged our calling as a college, articulated as “We believe we are called to serve our neighbour.”

But I saw first-hand the seeds of healthy engagement at a community meeting after the murder to address safety concerns in the aftermath of the shooting. At the meeting, we all experienced together the wrenching emotional impact of this shooting on our lives. Though we intended to talk about security cameras and safety patrols, instead we listened to urgent longing for community. When an Imam stood to speak, his first words were “God is good,” and though we were a room of people of very different faith traditions, we could whisper, “Yes, God is good, and this is not what our God wants for us.” In that spirit, our community came together to rededicate itself to the well-being of our neighbours – yes, to more security cameras and personnel, but even more urgently to finding common purpose in the health, safety and well-being of our neighbours and neighbourhood. We are a stronger – and safer – neighbourhood today because we lived in the tensions of that painful moment and found our way forward together. It is what we did together in the days and months ahead to make our local community stronger and safer that serves as the lesson I want to share about the relationships between higher education institutions and their neighbours.

### **What we did together in the aftermath of this tragic incident**

I want to focus on three initiatives that were undertaken in the days and months after Nur's murder that helped to heal and strengthen our community.

First, we *accompanied* each other in our fear and mistrust. Faculty, staff and students joined with local residents, religious and civic leaders and others from around the city to navigate the tensions occasioned by the murder. This work took very concrete forms. We admitted that we were frightened and that we did not know whether we could trust for our safety and well-being and then we did something about it. We joined together in open meetings to discuss our fears and concerns. We participated in safety walks to create a presence on the streets at night and to show solidarity with each other. Our students learned from local Imams about the Muslim practices concerning the recently deceased and we honoured those practices in our own Christian rituals on campus. We engaged with Nur's family – prominent members of the local Somali community – to support them in navigating the local police and court systems.

Second, we *renewed our commitment to the community service and service-learning programmes* that were at the core of our relationships in the neighbourhood. An after-school tutoring programme at a local church, in which Augsburg students helped Somali youth every afternoon with homework, allowed for personal relationship-building and showed that we were committed to their success in American schools. Our Campus Kitchen programme, which uses leftover food from the college cafeteria to prepare meals for local children and seniors, redoubled its efforts to use food as a community-building tool. This work led to an expansion of our community garden and the creation of a weekly Farmer's Market that is jointly sponsored by the college and neighbours. Service-learning courses did not pull back from their forays into the community – despite needing to allow for and address the very real fears of students (and their parents) about being in the neighbourhood.

Finally, we *joined together* with our local institutional friends, business owners and area resident organisations to focus the work of a new organization – *the Cedar-Riverside Partnership* – which had recently been created to help leverage resources to serve the region's needs and interests. Though the murder could have been a distraction from the broader concerns of the Partnership, it actually served to bring focus and clarity to the Partnership's work in its first six months. The local Police Department saw the Partnership meetings as constructive places to come and build trust with neighbours. Institutions stepped up and made contributions to the community centre to help support added security forces. The various police and security forces in the neighbourhood began to do joint patrols and work towards a more collaborative effort to ensuring safety. Augsburg's leadership of the Partnership was particularly significant and showed our students and the wider community how an institution could overcome its own fears and narrow self-interest to serve the good of the entire neighbourhood.

Perhaps the most poignant outcome of these various initiatives was the remark of a Somali elder a year or so after the murder, who said to a local newspaper that the Augsburg community – from its president to faculty and students – was with us in this time of deep need and that will never be forgotten by the neighbours. Four years later, the neighbourhood is safer and stronger than ever before. Students and faculty are ubiquitous in the neighbourhood, building community, meeting needs, learning from neighbours. The work of the Cedar-Riverside Partnership is now focused on a complex set of important economic development and local infrastructure needs. But this progress is all grounded in our abiding commitment to what we believe we are called to be and do as a university dedicated to community engagement and civic education – a commitment that was tested and strengthened in the midst of a terrible tragedy. This important commitment to both being and doing - to the links between our identity as a university and our actions in the community - is at the heart of the lessons we have learned in the aftermath of Nur's murder.

## **Lessons for others**

From our perspective, the question is not whether or not our experiences are replicable for other higher education institutions – each with diverse missions and contexts. We do believe, however, that there are themes to our experience that are relevant for other institutions.

The first theme is how an institutional response to a situation such as we have faced can be an occasion for reflection on academic mission. If our response had simply focused on volunteer service to neighbours, it might have made a difference but it would not necessarily have accomplished what we exist to do – to educate students to be informed citizens, thoughtful stewards, critical thinkers and responsible leaders. Universities with a strong civic identity must ground that identity in academic mission.

Second, our responses to Nur Ali’s murder challenged us to overcome the institutional hubris (even arrogance) that often characterises higher education reactions to challenges. We tend to think we know best, that we are the experts, that we have the right answers. Nur’s murder humbled Augsburg. We did not keep our students safe. But instead of responding by building fences and trying to keep out the danger, we said that we could not keep our community safe unless we joined together with neighbours and asked each other for help. In that spirit, Augsburg and its various community engagement efforts reframed our work as genuine “neighbourliness,” an abiding commitment to shared values and partnership. Mutuality is the centrepiece of our work in the neighbourhood.

Finally, we believe that we have learned important and relevant lessons around the need for a comprehensive and integrated institutional approach to civic education. It is sometimes easy for colleges and universities to fall into the trap of creating wonderful community service and service-learning programmes that are *ad hoc* and disconnected from other institutional priorities – perhaps doing fine work, but not necessarily considering all of the ways in which the institution and neighbourhood will benefit from a more integrated and planful approach to this important work. For Augsburg, Nur Ali’s murder was the occasion for exploring all aspects of our common lives – curriculum, outreach, campus life, neighbourhood development and relations – and the result is a sophisticated institutional model for pursuing our mission-based commitment to educating students to be informed, engaged and effective citizens of neighbourhoods and cities and the world.

### **Summary and conclusions**

All of us at Augsburg remember vividly – even four years later – the sad and difficult days and weeks following Nur’s death. That said, we are convinced that our responses to the tragedy have made both Augsburg College and its surrounding Cedar-Riverside neighbourhood safer, more vibrant and more focused on our future together. That, it seems to us, is the “stuff” of civic education, which we all have the privilege and responsibility to pursue on our campuses and in our communities.”

### **PAY ATTENTION TO THIS**

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I recently read Andrew Delbanco’s *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be* (Princeton University Press, 2012), an inspiring reflection on the role of higher education in our democracy.

I have on my list for Chicago reading two recent leadership texts: Jim Collins (and Morten Hansen), *Great By Choice* (HarperCollins, 2011) and Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do In Life and Business* (Random House, 2012).

I also have Michael Sandel's newest, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (Random House, 2012), his continuing primer on the underlying values of our democracy.

>>Summer thoughts<<

How about a little Shakespeare for our summer reflections...

Here is Sonnet Number 18 (Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?)

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd,  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimm'd:  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,  
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st,  
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Reinventing governance
- Lutheran identity and higher education

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