

## 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<<

A bit late with this issue as we are in the midst of our annual Nobel Peace Prize Forum here on campus. I spent the weekend with His Holiness the Dalai Lama (how cool is that?!) and will host several other Nobel laureates next weekend. With its mission to "inspire peacemaking by studying the life and work of Nobel Peace Prize laureates," the Forum is a remarkable event, attracting thousands of in-person attendees along with a growing international, on-line audience. You can check out the live-streamed presentations at [nobelpeaceprizeforum.org](http://nobelpeaceprizeforum.org).

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

>>I choose you<<

I preached the following homily in our chapel early in the Epiphany season and was struck by the positive response to my using the metaphor of adoption as a way of describing our relationship to the divine.

Scripture assigned: Matthew 3: 13-17, Acts 8: 4-13

"Just over a year ago, Abigail, Thomas, Maya and I were in Vietnam, taking Thomas back to his birthplace and meeting his birth mother. It was there where we had first traveled in 2001 to adopt Thomas and we reminisced again about our exciting adventure – especially the moment when we received our children at the orphanage.

Imagine this situation – five families gathered in a conference room, brief speeches, food is served, and all of a sudden five children are carried out from the back room, there ensues this remarkable cacophony of screaming and crying and picture-taking – and then we are off, loaded into vans and on our way back to our lives, changed forever by what happened in that orphanage.

This scene, it seems to me, is a glimpse of what happens to all of us in our baptism: a ceremony, cacophony, and our lives are changed forever – it is this wondrous moment of transformation, of being claimed and named, of becoming part of a new family, of receiving the greatest gift we could ever imagine to receive.

I am intrigued by the notion that what happens to each of us in our baptism is that we are adopted – we are chosen by God to be God’s child, to become a part of God’s family, to hear what God says about his son, Jesus, in our gospel this morning – this is my child with whom I am well pleased, whom I love beyond measure – rejoice with me!

Consider with me, if you will, what we might learn from the experience of adopting a child that can help illumine our experience of baptism, of being adopted by God – what sort of parent adopts, what sort of child is adopted, how is the world changed by adoptive families?

Our scripture for this morning is a wonderful reminder of the important themes of the Epiphany season, the liturgical time when we reflect on and celebrate the fact that our God broke into our world, came to live among us, and proclaimed the message of redeeming grace to all who believe and are baptized...

One of the most striking aspects of the process of adoption is the requirement of adoptive parents to be very intentional and deliberate about the decision to adopt a child – paperwork and essays, government requirements, major investments of time and energy are required to pass muster and be given permission to adopt. I wonder what would happen if all parents were required to say out loud to the world: this is why I want to have a child, to be a family!

The Holy Scriptures tell us a good bit about the character of our God, our adoptive parent. God our Creator is intentional about wanting to adopt us. God says out loud: you are mine and here is what you can expect from me as your parent - this is why I choose you, and here is what I hope you will do (and not do!), and here is what the future holds. I want to have a family, God tells us through the scriptures and the work of his faithful community – I promise to love and care for you, my adopted child.

Another important part of adopting a child is the act of giving the child a name, an identity symbolized by the name we are called. For Abigail and me, the choice of a name for our children was a source of meaningful prayer and discussion. Thomas already had a name – and we changed his name to Thomas. In those first moments in the orphanage, we called to him alternatively as Thuong and Thomas. We choose you, Thuong, we said, to be our beloved son. We name you Thomas, a name that has special meaning to us, so that you shall know how much we love you, forever and ever. You are ours, forever and ever. Welcome home, Thomas. [All of us are welcomed each and every time our name is spoken – Sonja, Justin, Barb, welcome home, I love you].

As the gospel of Matthew so poignantly reminds us, baptism is God’s way of offering his adopted children the blessing of their name, their identity as those chosen, those beloved. To receive the blessing of a name is to hear the voice of your parent say, “My son, my daughter, welcome home, I am pleased with you.” That is what our God did for Jesus as he began his ministry in the world – baptized by his cousin, John, Jesus receives the blessing of his Father, the blessing of an identity, of a mission in the world. I choose you, God says. I love you, God promises.

As you might imagine, the six hour trip back to Saigon with our new families was an adventure that none of us will ever forget – an old world had been put aside and a new world created for each of us, our lives had been changed forever, by this child who was now ours to hold and care for and love, no matter what! And the adventure continues for each of us who are part of an adoption...

The poet, WH Auden, writes in his wonderful Christmas prose poem, “For the Time Being,” about what it is like when Christmas is over. He says:

“Well, so that is that.

Now, we must dismantle the tree,

Putting the decorations back into their cardboard boxes—

Some have gotten broken—and carrying them up to the attic...

To those who have seen The Child, however dimly, however incredulously,

The Time Being is, in a sense, the most trying time of all.

For the innocent children who whispered so excitedly

Outside the locked door where they knew the presents to be

Grew up when it was opened...

In the meantime

There are bills to be paid, machines to keep in repair

Irregular verbs to learn, the Time Being to redeem

From insignificance.”

As we move now into Epiphany, this time after Christmas, this ‘time being’, we have the gift of baptism, the gift of adoption, to help us know how to redeem the time being from insignificance. And so I conclude with another baptism story. Our youngest, Maya, was surrounded by family and friends at her baptism, including her older brother, Thomas. As my dad baptized her in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, spilling the ceremonial water over her head, Maya let out a great cry, and her brother, always quick to get a word in, shouted out for the entire congregation to hear, “Maya, shake it off like a dog.”

As much as we might like to shake off the role of faith in our lives, it is, of course, impossible to do, but that doesn’t mean we don’t try...I choose you, God tells us – as he told his Son on the banks of the Jordan River some 2000 years ago, as he told those early faithful in Samaria – I choose you and nothing will ever be the same again. Thanks be to God. Amen.”

>>Urban settlements<<

Here is an excerpt from an essay that will appear later this spring in *Word and World*, a journal from Luther Seminary in Saint Paul. It was an important project for my thinking about Augsburg’s identity and role as an urban institution. I welcome your thoughts.

“In 1871, a small band of Norwegian settlers from Trinity Lutheran Congregation in the still tiny village of Minneapolis invited the fledgling remnant of a theological seminary in Marshall, Wisconsin to come north to be an outpost for preparing preachers and teachers for the Lutheran immigrants of Minnesota. It was a humble beginning that has unfolded as an institutional saga with significant implications. Little did they dream, those intrepid pioneers that almost 150 years later, Augsburg College would be a thriving small university, educating students of diverse backgrounds and equipping them to live out their vocations around the world. Little did they dream, those faithful few, that this institution they helped survive its early years against all odds would be an anchor in its urban neighborhood and an international model for linking education, community-building, and service to neighbor.

I want to use the example of Augsburg College’s evolution as a community of learning and faith to suggest that all communities of faith might find important resources for their lives by paying attention to the intersections of vocation and location. It is in those intersections, I will argue, that we discern how best to be God’s people and do God’s work in the midst of our diverse and often turbulent world.

On the cusp of its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Augsburg College lives out its saga as a college dedicated to the liberal arts, grounded in its Lutheran faith, and shaped by its distinctive location in the midst of an immigrant urban neighborhood. It is a saga that has been tested again and again throughout the college’s history, but as I will detail in this essay, it is a saga that abides because it is infused into the identity and character of the institution. *It is the saga of an urban settlement, exemplifying the inextricable links between education, faith, place, and service to and with the neighbor.*

### The idea of a saga

What is a saga? My understanding of the concept of saga comes from research done by Burton Clark on what it is that creates a distinctive character and identity for colleges and universities. A saga is more than a story – all of us have stories. A saga is more of a mythology – a sense of history and purpose and direction told in vocabulary and narrative that accounts for a community’s DNA, its essence, even. A saga abides in the sort of people, programs and values that define an institution.

Clark contends that not every institution has a saga. Sometimes that is a function of not being true to founding values; at other times it can be occasioned by a change of location or core mission; still other institutions have not found a way to link their pasts, presents, and futures in a coherent narrative. Augsburg College’s saga runs deep in the culture and meaning of our work together. An exploration of Augsburg’s history surfaces several themes that are central to our saga: an immigrant sensibility shaped in an urban neighborhood, freedom through faith to ask tough questions and engage otherness, a moral commitment to access to quality education for all, and the vocational aspiration to be neighbor to and with each other. These themes inform Augsburg’s identity as an urban settlement.

### Colleges as 21<sup>st</sup> century urban settlements

What is an urban settlement? The settlement house tradition, birthed on the east end of London in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by Oxford-educated young people, sought to model how taking up residence in the midst of immigrant neighborhoods, engaging neighbors in exploring how best to respond to the realities of their lives, and then working alongside each other to make the neighborhood safer, cleaner and more just, could help solve urban problems and ultimately shape public policy.

In other words, “settling” in a neighborhood, becoming neighbor, was seen as the most effective way to ensure healthier and more vibrant urban communities. This was in juxtaposition to the idea of “experts” coming in to a neighborhood to offer and impose their solutions. The well-educated settlement residents certainly had expertise to offer, but it was offered in the context of neighborhood-wide engagement and participation. The lessons learned from these neighborhood efforts then became the impetus for social policies that would shape urban life for decades to come.

In the United States, the settlement house tradition took root initially in New York and then Chicago, where Jane Addams and her colleagues founded Hull-House in 1889 on the near west side and sought to transform a troubled immigrant neighborhood. Their work at Hull-House – including educational programs, community centers, libraries, music schools and theaters, sanitation efforts, child labor practices, and honoring cultural heritages – illustrated the wide range of efforts pursued in response to the needs of neighbors and the neighborhood.

The settlement house tradition thrived in the United States well into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, at which point its influence on social welfare policy became its downfall. The role of governments in responding to urban challenges changed the policy and funding infrastructure and left settlement houses needing to heed rules imposed from outside the neighborhood instead of being able to respond as the neighborhood saw fit. The few settlement houses from this original tradition surviving today often struggle to honor the underlying tenets of the tradition as they rely on government and philanthropic support that limits their flexibility in responding to needs.

On the other hand, the tenets of the settlement tradition took root in other forms in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. As Ira Harkavy and John Puckett argued in 1994, the idea of applied sociology which the early settlement leaders wrote about and practiced offers a moral and pragmatic framework for colleges and universities to “function as perennial, deeply rooted settlements, providing illuminated space for their communities as they conduct their mission of producing and transmitting knowledge to advance human welfare and to develop theories that have broad utility and application. Harkavy’s own work in developing a plan for the University of Pennsylvania’s work in its west Philadelphia neighborhood is a leading example of the university as urban settlement. The plan linked the well-being of the neighborhood to the university’s academic mission, which included the founding of a community school, economic development efforts, and wide-ranging links between students and neighbors.

For Augsburg, the concept of the urban settlement offers a framework for interpreting the identity and character of the college as it has unfolded over the past 145 years. Settled in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis – one of the most diverse neighborhoods between Chicago and Los Angeles – Augsburg seeks to live out its mission to educate students as “informed citizens, thoughtful stewards, critical thinkers and responsible leaders” by engaging its neighbors and neighborhood in mutually beneficial ways. The array of programs that link education, health and wellness, economic well-being, social justice, and citizen participation, is dizzying. For example, when Augsburg received President Obama’s national award for community engagement in 2010, the citation noted that the Augsburg community provided more than 225,000 hours of volunteer service in the previous year. An impressive number certainly, and simply one marker in understanding Augsburg as urban settlement. Augsburg’s work in the neighborhood is central to its identity as a college of the Lutheran church in the heart of the city. And we have come to articulate our institutional vocation in this summary fashion: “We believe we are called to serve our neighbor.” In that way, we name our commitment to the inextricable links between faith, education, place, and service to and with neighbors.

### It's all about mission: The city as classroom

The power of this vocational statement for Augsburg's saga as urban settlement has not always been embraced by the college. Though location and place are central to the college's identity, it is not sufficient to explain the integrative power of the college's character. For that purpose, it is critical that place be understood through the lens of Augsburg's academic mission and work. This integrated view of place and mission required a new way of imagining the college's core work of educating students.

As Augsburg expanded its academic programs in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century and more students enrolled, the institution touted the benefits of life in the city, including cultural resources, opportunities for work experiences, and so forth. But clear links between urban life and curriculum, for example, were not apparent as the college entered the 1960s.

Then enters an unlikely champion for a different vision of Augsburg's mission and identity. Dr. Joel Torstenson, a 1940 graduate of Augsburg College, originally came to the college from his hometown in rural Minnesota. Joining the Augsburg faculty in 1942, Torstenson, a social scientist, began systematically expanding the college's academic programs in the social sciences and social work. This certainly brought students and faculty into contact with urban life and realities, but that contact remained limited to particular departments until Torstenson returned from a sabbatical in 1966, transformed in his thinking about the promise of "The Liberal Arts College in the Modern Metropolis."

In an address to the Augsburg faculty in 1967, Torstenson argued that his decision to study the role of colleges in the modern metropolis was influenced by the emerging reality that cities are a dominant community reality in society, that Augsburg was uniquely situated to develop an educational program responsive to this emerging reality about cities, and that Augsburg had much to learn from what other urban higher education institutions had done to integrate their locations into an academic program.

This momentous address included a myriad of practical recommendations for Augsburg to embrace its urban context as a "laboratory for liberal learning and research." From the most simple and pragmatic, such as hiring faculty who have a particular interest in urban issues, to curricular innovations such as a "Metro-Urban Studies" program, to encouraging staff and faculty to live in the surrounding neighborhoods, to engaging with community advisors and partners, Torstenson's 24-page address reads like a map to Augsburg fully embracing its location as classroom and context for a distinctive academic vision.

This, then, represents the critical "hinge" in Augsburg's saga, as the college integrated urban location and academic mission in ways that infused the commitment to the city into everything the college said and did. Carl Chrislock, on the occasion of the college's centennial in 1969, suggests that this was a response to an academic revolution underway in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century and focused on new ways of learning about humans and society. Augsburg President Oscar Anderson, writing during that centennial year, claims that the city is an "unlimited laboratory where students and their teachers, through work-study programs, now have the opportunity to observe first-hand what textbooks have implied from afar." While some institutions, Anderson continues, might choose to retreat behind ivied walls, "Augsburg chooses to be of the city."

The lessons from Augsburg's saga for other communities of faith are grounded in the theological and practical work of integrating mission and location. It's not enough to say we are in this place, we must be able to say with conviction, we are of this place. It is about infusing all we say and do with this mission-based embrace of the place God has called us to in the world.

As a college of the church in the city, Augsburg stays, we accompany and settle alongside our neighbors. God has called us to be here in Cedar-Riverside, the urban neighborhood where we have been with our immigrant neighbors for almost 145 years. God has called us to educate students here who are skilled and reflective and committed to service. God has called us to be neighbor here, to do acts of mercy and to make this a place of hospitality and mutual respect. God has called us to be faithful here, to learn from those who are different from us even as we are firm and confident in our belief that God is good.

I wonder where God calls you to be and what God calls you to do? What is the saga of your faith community? Place matters. So does linking place with mission and work. And so does the abiding call to vigilance and intentionality about what God is doing in our midst and what God intends for God's good and faithful people, wherever we are located."

#### PRACTICE THIS

>>I am not your enemy<<

The Dalai Lama's visit to our campus occasioned a rebuke from the Chinese government – a reminder of an earlier situation I described in the following post from December 2010. Things have not changed...

"I had the privilege of being in Oslo, Norway for the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize ceremony earlier this month and wrote this blog post after the moving ceremony in which Chinese poet and activist, Liu Xiaobo, was awarded the prize *in absentia*.

"The chair sat empty for the first time in 75 years as the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Liu Xiaobo, the Chinese poet and human rights activist, who is in jail in China and was not allowed to attend the ceremony. In his stead – since no family or close friends were allowed to attend the ceremony either – the Nobel medal was placed in the empty chair and the Norwegian actress Liv Ullmann read Xiaobo's powerful words written as his final statement to the Chinese court and regime that sentenced him to 11 years in jail in 2009 for "speech crimes," co-authoring Charter '08, a manifesto for human rights in his native land. As Ullmann delivered his words, we learned of Xiaobo's deep love for his wife – as he says, I live in a tangible prison of cells and steel bars, while you live in an intangible prison of the heart. We heard Xiaobo's compassionate words of thanks to his jailers for the fair treatment he received – they did their job well. And, above all, we listened to Xiaobo's passionate dedication to his country as he respectfully challenged the regime to live up to its own aspirations for fundamental human rights for all its people. "I am not your enemy," he declared.

My daughter is Chinese-American – Chinese by birth, American by adoption and our daughter by the grace of God. And it is through the lens of my unfathomable love for her that I witnessed the Peace Prize ceremony. Yes, there were social and political issues to consider as a global citizen. And as an educator, I could not help but reflect on what our students might learn from this historic event. But it was as the parent of a little girl who someday will know that her life was radically changed by a Chinese regime and its policies that did not allow her parents to raise her in her native

country that I most felt the power of Xiaobo's award for peace and his meaningful words to the court. "I am not your enemy," my little girl can also say to her native land.

It is ironic that, while I was in Oslo for the awarding of the Peace Prize, my wife was in China on behalf of our kids' Chinese immersion school in Minneapolis. She was there, under the auspices of the Chinese government, as part of a program to establish sister school relationships between Chinese and American communities. It is one of the many ways the Chinese people are reaching out to the world, attempting to open themselves to the riches of life in a global community. Alongside of its remarkable economic growth, these educational and cultural efforts suggest that the Chinese regime understands that it will never play a leading role in the world without openness to the diverse ideas and values of other countries. And yet the ruthless ways in which the regime responded to the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo – restricting travel and access to international news, cutting off diplomatic talks, demanding that allies boycott the ceremony and lashing out at the Norwegians through official channels – suggest that such openness has stringent and irrational limits. "We are not your enemy," we all might say to the Chinese people.

One of the most poignant moments my wife and I experienced when we were in China to adopt our daughter six years ago was in a hotel elevator when an elderly Chinese woman turned to look at us and several other American families holding their Chinese daughters with tears streaming down her face – clearly she understood how her country had turned away from its own children and she mourned their loss. As parents of our Chinese daughter – as citizens of the world – as people who long for peace, we too mourn for the losses inflicted on these good people by their own leaders. Xiaobo's courageous efforts to proclaim and practice the links between human rights, peace and democracy – along with those of his many fellow citizens who pay a tragic price for their dreams of a free and just society – allow all of us who mourn for China's losses to stand together and proclaim, "We are not your enemy."

The Nobel ceremony concluded with Norwegian children's choir singing folk songs. It was Liu Xiaobo's only request for the ceremony – that it would include children singing. In the joyous faces of those dear children, we witnessed why those who seek peace carry on despite the sacrifices it too often demands. It was an inspiring lesson from this Chinese teacher and peacemaker. May my dear daughter grow up to know her native country – and indeed, her entire world – as places and peoples that embrace freedom, justice and peace, and that truly understand that "I am not your enemy." "

>>The moral life of downtown<<

Earl Shorris, who created the Bard-Clemente Program in the Humanities, died earlier this year. His work in teaching the humanities to poor people and thereby empowering them for lives of meaning, has had a profound influence on my own thinking about education. In his memory here is a quote from his September 1997 *Harper's* article, entitled "II. As a weapon in the hands of the restless poor."

"She paused long enough to let the change of direction take effect, then resumed the rapid, rhythmless speech. "You've got to teach the moral life of downtown to the children. And the way you do that, Earl, is by taking them downtown to plays, museums, concerts, lectures, where they can learn the moral life of downtown."

I smiled at her, misunderstanding, thinking I was indulging her. "And then they won't be poor anymore?"



She read every nuance of my response, and answered angrily, “And they won’t be poor *no more*.”

“What you mean is—”

“What I mean is what I said—a moral alternative to the street.”

She didn’t speak of jobs or money. In that, she was like the others I had listened to. No one had spoken of jobs or money. But how could the “moral life of downtown” lead anyone out from the surround of force? How could a museum push poverty away? Who can dress in statues or eat the past? And what of the political life? Had Niece skipped a step or failed to take a step? The way out of poverty was politics, not the “moral life of downtown.” But to enter the public world, to practice the political life, the poor had first to learn to reflect. That was what Niece meant by the “moral life of downtown.” She did not make the error of divorcing ethics from politics. Niece had simply said, in a kind of shorthand, that no one could step out of the panicking circumstance of poverty directly into the public world.

Although she did not say so, I was sure that when she spoke of the “moral life of downtown” she meant something that had happened to her. With no job and no money, a prisoner, she had undergone a radical transformation. She had followed the same path that led to the invention of politics in ancient Greece. She had learned to reflect. In further conversation it became clear that when she spoke of “the moral life of downtown” she meant the humanities, the study of human constructs and concerns, which has been the source of reflection for the secular world since the Greeks first stepped back from nature to experience wonder at what they beheld. If the political life was the way out of poverty, the humanities provided an entrance to reflection and the political life. The poor did not need anyone to release them; an escape route existed. But to open this avenue to reflection and politics a major distinction between the preparation for the life of the rich and the life of the poor had to be eliminated.”

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I have the late Robert Bellah’s tome, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2011). I’ve learned so much from Bellah’s work about the role of religion in our public lives and will delve into this important book soon.

For something completely different, I am exploring Joanne Soliday and Rick Mann’s *Surviving to Thriving: A Planning Framework for Leaders of Private Colleges and Universities* (Credo Press, 2013), which includes some very wise and helpful tools for institutional planning in these turbulent times for higher education.

In honor of the Dalai Lama’s visit, I have Susan J. Stabile’s *Growing in Love and Wisdom: Tibetan Buddhist Sources for Christian Meditation* (Oxford University Press, 2013). Professor Stabile teaches at the University of St. Thomas Law School, here in the Twin Cities.

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Citizenship and work
- Public work
- On the idea of being honored

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