

## NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Fifteen, Number Four (April 2014)

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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 spring, all – or, at least what now passes for spring in the upper Midwest. We have our commencement ceremonies this weekend and our fondest hope is for no snow! I hope that all is well for you and yours, and I thank you again for your abiding support for these Notes and your own reflective practice journeys.

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

>>The right time<<

I preached the following homily in our chapel during Lent – a good reminder for our community and me that how we measure time may get in the way of faithful living in the world.

Scripture assigned: Isaiah 60: 17-22 (*The Message*)

I'm co-teaching the senior honors seminar this semester with Professor Tim Pippert – a course that is exploring the dynamics of wealth and income inequality by studying those experiencing homelessness, on the one extreme, and those living with extreme affluence and wealth, on the other. Earlier this semester, we witnessed the weekly housing lottery, where those experiencing homelessness stand in line at a shelter to see whether or not their names get called for a bed that night – that night during which it was 15 degrees below zero. And those whose numbers do not come up for one of the limited number of beds are sent away without a place to sleep or a meal to eat. Brutal reality – where is the promise in that? This is a problem we should be able to solve, but we have not. What does Isaiah mean, "I'll give you only the best – no hand-me-downs"? How about a bed, a meal, some dignity?

Two weeks ago Provost Karen Kaivola and I visited our Center for Global Education campus in Cuernavaca, Mexico, where we visited an indigenous village and witnessed first hand the extreme poverty and illiteracy and unbearable living conditions of the good people in that mountain village.

Along with our students, we carried dirty and infected well water on our heads across difficult terrain, just as the women of the village do everyday. We sat in tin huts with families eking out a living by weaving baskets. We saw open sores and broken bones and rotting teeth with no relief in sight. A wrenching reality – where is the great tribe and strong nation in that? How about some justice and mercy and compassion?

Here, in the midst of our Lenten journeys, on the road to Jerusalem alongside of Jesus and his disciples, falling in love with God once again as we seek to grasp God's presence in our history, renewing our faith in the midst of the tensions of life in this mean time, we come upon this remarkable passage from the prophet Isaiah. A passage brimming with the promise of life abundant...

*I'll give you only the best – no more hand-me-downs!*

*You'll name your main street Salvation Way,*

*and install Praise Park at the center of town.*

*All your people will live right and well...*

*The runt will become a great tribe,*

*the weakling become a great nation.*

We're liking this – especially after this long, brutal winter and this arduous journey of faith. So, what's the pay-off? Let's get ready because here it comes...

*I am God.*

*At the right time I'll make it happen.*

Whaaat? At the right time? What do you mean, dear God, at the right time?

And here we stand, at the central intersection and tension of the life of faith, poised between God's promise and the reality of our human experience.

The right time? Who decides? When will it come? How long, O Lord, must we wait?

I believe, dear God, help my unbelief...

Hear then these wise words from 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who writes in his *The Irony of History*:

Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime; therefore we are saved by hope. Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history, therefore we are saved by faith. Nothing we do however virtuous can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as from our own; therefore we are saved by the final form of love, which is forgiveness.

And here, in the midst of our Lenten journeys, we are offered a new horizon for our faith – a horizon that stretches into Kairos, God's time, and away from Chronos, our time – a horizon that

offers us a wider and more expansive narrative for seeing where the life of faith leads. A horizon that leads us to be co-creators of the promise God has set before us, the promise of no hand-me-downs, of Salvation Way and Praise Park, of a country led by Peace and managed by Righteousness.

And so we will advocate for beds for those experiencing homelessness. We will volunteer to feed the hungry. We will use our education to fight for justice in our neighborhood and around the world. We will love our neighbors and fight like hell for their wellbeing. We will tell the stories of good people around the world who deserve “only the best,” just like all of God’s creation. And we will pray for God’s kingdom, on earth as in heaven.

And we will do all of that and more because we are saved by hope, despite the evidence; we are saved by faith, even when the journey seems too burdensome; we are saved by love, when love is all we have to offer; and we are saved by forgiveness because we have so, so much to learn. And in this time – our time – we will know the right time – God’s time – in which all will be made new. Thanks be to God. Amen.

>>Good and great<<

The following remarks were delivered to our annual Honors Convocation earlier this month – a moment for reflection on the nature of goodness and the aspiration to greatness.

“This is a fine and important occasion – and we’ve all gathered and dressed up to mark our pride in your many achievements, in the quality of your minds and hearts, in the passion and courage you have shown in your journeys here at Augsburg, in the ways you have made Augsburg and the world better, and in the promise you offer all of us in your leadership. We honor you – lift you up – set you apart with accolades and cords and congratulations.

At the beginning of the past several academic years, I have addressed our incoming students with a simple message regarding “What is required of you?” Perhaps you recall - I suggest three straightforward requirements: show up, pay attention and do the work! There is, of course, more than meets the eye in each of the requirements. Show up means be here, and also means be genuinely present with and for each other. Pay attention means don’t nod off, and also means attend to what it most important in the world. And do the work means get the assignment finished, and also means figure out what needs to be done and why you need to do it. You clearly have met these requirements and we are here this afternoon to honor you for inspiring us with your good minds and hearts and hands. Congratulations to you all.

Some of you may be familiar with the reference in the title of my address. The management consultant, Jim Collins, has written a series of books over the past couple of decades that address leadership and organizational wellbeing. Perhaps his best-known book is entitled *From Good to Great*, in which he argues for a sort of developmental model of effective leadership. There is a hierarchy of skills and attitudes for leaders, Collins argues, that leads you from being good - which is not necessarily a bad thing – to being truly great – which has a lot to do with your own ego strength, your humility, your willingness to let others take the credit for accomplishments – some call it servant-leadership.

My title is a conscious riff on Collins, an ethicist’s riff if you will, that claims, along with a whole line of thinkers going back to Aristotle that being good is an end in itself – good in your thinking, good

in your moral and civic life, good... In other words, we don't get to aspire to greatness. Our job is to be good and therein to believe that the rest will take care of itself. And this afternoon, I want to suggest that the rest has taken care of itself for you.

You have done good work. You are good people. You have helped others in ways that enable them to be good. And now those of us gathered here today – your teachers and mentors, your colleagues and friends, your parents and family – have the privilege to say thank you for all the good you have accomplished and perhaps to stand in awe of the greatness that is bestowed upon you.

As I reflect on all that you have accomplished these past several years, I am struck by how Augsburg is made and remade over and over again by the generations of students who have come to this campus to be educated, to meet friends and colleagues for life, to gain the skills and attitude and commitments that will make a life and shape the world, even to discern their callings and find a path forward in their vocational journeys. Our new vision statement for Augsburg says that we will be a “new kind of student-centered, urban university, small to our students and big for the world.” And there is, in this aspiration for Augsburg's future, a clear reverence for our past wherein students have always come to the college, engaged their peers, faculty and staff, and remade this community – remade it to be more mission-focused, more true to its values and commitments, more relevant to the world that so needs our care and compassion.

You've all done that for Augsburg in your time here – in the classroom, laboratory, on athletic fields and performance stages, in the neighborhood and around the world – you've made Augsburg stronger and more faithful. You've helped build up one of the most robust and successful undergraduate research programs in the country. You've won national and international recognition for your scholarship and service. You've committed yourself to our nearby neighborhoods, tutoring and serving meals and building community. You've taught us about privilege and challenged our community to name its biases and embrace otherness and difference. You've stood up for marriage equality and voter rights. You've fought for justice, on and off campus. You've delighted us with theater and music and athletic prowess. You've shared your hearts and minds and spirits with a community that now bears your marks. And that is good work – work that I believe deserves to be honored as great. Good and great.

So, what lessons have we learned from you that will continue to shape Augsburg into the future? I trust others gathered here will share why they believe you deserve to be honored, but here are four lessons I've gained from your good work here – lessons from great minds and hearts and hands.

First, you've shown me over and over again how intellect and experience cannot be separated. You embody the 20<sup>th</sup> century educational philosopher John Dewey's idea that education is not preparation for real life, it is real life. I was with a group of our students over spring break at our campus site in Cuernavaca, Mexico. We spent a couple of days visiting various sites – a bathing suit factory made possible by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), an indigenous village where the residents lived with unhealthy and unjust conditions. These were long and stressful days, full of experiences that challenged our hearts and senses and minds. And I'll never forget the moment as we were about to leave the village after a wrenching and exhausting day when one of our students asked for reflection time. And even though a few of us groaned in our weariness, she didn't want to leave the experience she had just had – as difficult as it had been – without seeking to understand, to reflect upon, to integrate into her own thinking what she had just seen and done. This integration of theory and practice that is at the heart of an Augsburg education

is not something to be taken for granted. I visit lots of other colleges and universities in my work, and students often comment that they feel “under a bubble” while in school there. There is no Augsburg bubble and we have you to thank for showing us what it means to be what MIT professor, Donald Schön, has called, “reflective practitioners,” those who practice the art of linking reflection and experience in every aspect of your life. Good and great.

You’ve also taught me how to love this place. The pride you have in this college and its place in the heart of the city is tangible in your spirit and t-shirts and good work to make this college and neighborhood even stronger. From the time you first arrived for SOAR and were assigned to a neighborhood, you have been stewards of this place in myriad ways. You have settled here and taken good care of what has been entrusted to us on this campus and in our neighborhood. There are tangible results of your stewardship of this place in a new interfaith prayer space, more and more attention to our carbon footprint, and the care you have taken to create a safer and more vibrant neighborhood. The novelist Wallace Stegner once wrote that the American psyche is in tension between what he calls “the boomers,” those who go into a place, use it up and then leave – and “the stickers,” those who settle in a place and work to renew it and make it better. You have taught me again the importance of “sticking,” of staying and settling in, At Augsburg, we accompany and settle alongside our neighbors. We pursue education in this place, equipping each other for lives of meaning and purpose. We welcome each other in this place, sustaining a community of hospitality and mutual respect. We love and are faithful to this place that has been our home for almost 145 years. Good and great.

And you’ve taught me not to be afraid of the other, the stranger. We live in a world of fear and violence and separation. We too often marginalize the stranger, retreating to what the late sociologist Robert Bellah called “our lifestyle enclaves,” mingling with those with whom we share culture and skin color and income status, trying to find safety away from the uncomfortable, the unknown. But, of course – as you have taught us well – retreating doesn’t work because the world only becomes more dangerous and polarized and frightened. Here at Augsburg you have lived into a community of hospitality and justice that embraces otherness and difference, that faces the tensions and complexities of diverse perspectives and experiences, that seeks to engage what political theorist Michael Walzer calls a “thick” sense of life together, not trying to minimize our differences but calling them into dialogue and mutuality. Your class has been at the heart of this good work here at Augsburg and you’ve challenged all of us to face our privilege and biases and fears – and some days we get it right, on others we have so much more to learn – as we embrace the richness of life together in this remarkable community. The late priest Henri Nouwen described our aspirations this way:

Hospitality is the creation of free space where a stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer space where change can take place ....The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and find themselves free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free to leave and follow their own vocations.

Good and great.

Finally, you’ve taught me to hope. For more than 30 years, I have worked at colleges and for all of the messiness that often passes for daily life on a campus, I come back each and every day because

of the hope you inspire in all of us. It is hope despite the evidence on many days. When His Holiness, the Dalai Lama was with us last month, someone asked him a question about how he could continue to follow his path toward peace when the world was so violent and there was little evidence of a way forward. His response was quick – “What choice do I have? If I meditate on pessimism, I will die. If I meditate on optimism, I will live.” It is not a naïve hope that you teach us – just wish for it and all will be well with the world. No, you are well-educated men and women, fully aware of the complexities and uncertainties of life in the world – in society, in our environment, in the cosmos even! And yet you hope and you get to work and good things happen. Good for you and great for the world you will surely change – as you have changed us in this college.

So this afternoon, you, our honorable students, have our thanks and blessings for all the good you’ve achieved – in the classroom, laboratories, stages and athletic venues, and in the neighborhoods we call home. And you have our accolades and respect for the lessons you have taught us – reflective practice, place making, embracing the other and keeping hope alive – and the ways you have made Augsburg an even more faithful and relevant place for the world. You are good and great. Congratulations.”

#### PRACTICE THIS

>>A transformative era<<

A recent column in *Harvard Business Review* (April 2014) by business executive William McComb resonated with my own experience in the past couple of years as our strategic planning process unfolded. McComb argues that, too often, the juxtaposition between transformation and incrementalism in our plans ignores the fact that transformation is not an “event,” it is more and more “an era.”

When you see transformation as an era, you lead and manage differently. McComb suggests several aspects of such transformative leadership, including:

- You figure out how to sustain a vision, knowing that the realities and evidence of day-to-day life in the organization will often require different approaches and tactics.
- You also resist being an ideologue, believing that you have the one and true answer to the world’s (or your organization’s) challenges and opportunities – instead you hold fast to your vision while also responding to the realities of the market and world.
- You must prepare people for the truth that things will often get worse before they get better – and that the team you begin with may not thrive in the conditions of ambiguity and adversity that are inevitable in a transformational era. You may need to recast your team to be “transformation-tough.”
- And your governance structures (governing boards and decision-making structures) may need more instruction in the “truths of transformation” so that they can be part of the solution rather than the problem.

Facing the truths of transformation, McComb suggests, offers a path to ringing in that new era.

>>Eight steps to integrity<<

This winter, our Board of Regents organized a comprehensive review of my leadership at Augsburg over the past eight years. It was a good and helpful process and offered me the opportunity to reflect on how I think about my growth as a leader. I returned to several themes, including the importance of integrity. The following selection, which appeared in my Notes in April, 2003, continues to be meaningful to my work and life.

“Integrity within organizations is my primary professional and academic focus these days. I found Stratford Sherman’s eight steps to integrity a helpful challenge to my thinking, and as he argues, “real integrity can be disruptive and inconvenient.” (*Leader to Leader*, Spring 2003)

The eight steps are:

- Do what you say you will do – pragmatic and so very difficult.
- Do the right thing – embody your convictions and accept the consequences.
- Take responsibility – blame no one else, accept the givens of the behavior of others, and proceed from there.
- Support your own weight – function as a whole person, take care of yourself: physically, emotionally, and financially.
- Think holistically – appreciate the interconnections and integrations in the world.
- Respect others – invoke integrity in others by respecting them – even when they don’t live up to our expectations.
- Check the mirror – when you make a mistake, pause for reflection and ask, “Is this what I really want, who I really am?”
- Define the rules and values – explicit agreement about these matters builds communities and relationships of integrity.

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

Lots of new books in my pile as summer approaches, including:

*Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible Through Palestinian Eyes*, by Mitri Raheb (Orbis Books, 2014). Raheb, a Lutheran pastor working in Bethlehem, offers a compelling picture of life in the Holy Land.

*Voices from Tibet: Selected Essays and Reportage*, Tsering Woeser and Wang Lixiong, ed. and trans. by Violet S. Law (Hong Kong University Press, 2014). Ms. Law is a University of Chicago grad, who we were privileged to host at our home for a reading of her new book and fellowship with the local Tibetan-American community (a community we came to know through the visit of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, last month).

*Peace, They Say: A History of the Nobel Peace Prize, the Most Famous and Controversial Prize in the World*, Jay Nordlinger (Encounter Books, 2012). Jay Nordlinger was a keynote speaker at last month’s Nobel Peace Prize Forum, engaging in a spirited debate with Dr. Geir Lundestad, director of the

Norwegian Nobel Institute (which awards the Peace Prize), about the meaning and role of the Peace Prize in global affairs.

*Earth In Mind: On Education, Environment and the Human Prospect*, David W. Orr (Island Press, 1994 and 2004). David Orr, distinguished professor at Oberlin College, will receive an honorary degree from Augsburg this weekend in recognition of his scholarship and leadership in linking education and the environmental movement.

>>Life as a guest house<<

Rumi's wise words invite us to hospitality in a radical way!

## **The Guest House**

This being human is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all! Even if they are a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still, treat each guest honorably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice. meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.

Be grateful for whatever comes. because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.

-- Jلالuddin Rumi (translation by Coleman Barks)

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Citizenship and work
- Public work

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