

NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Nineteen, Number Two (December 2017)

"What we have loved, others will love, and we will teach them how."

(W. Wordsworth, from "The Prelude")

NOTES FROM READERS

>>What you think<<

Holiday blessings and New Year hope to one and all. I trust that you have found time and space to reflect during this holy season. I send my warmest greetings to you and yours.

Occasionally, I (or my colleagues) refer to items from previous issues of Notes. If you have not been a subscriber previously, and wish to review our conversations, past issues of Notes are available on-line at www.jgacounsel.com. I thank my friends at Johnson, Grossnickle & Associates for their many years of abiding support for our reflective practice.

REFLECT ON THIS

>>Full of grace and truth<<

I preached this homily in the Augsburg Chapel early in November.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13 and John 1: 1-5, 14

‘A wise pastor I greatly admire often begins his preaching by proclaiming (and praying): “We don’t need another sermon, Lord – dear God, not another one – but we are deeply in need of a word, the Word. Send the Word into our midst.” And so we might pray today and everyday in our noisy, full-of-distractions, too much talking lives. Dear God, please send your Word!

We live in perhaps the quintessential world of words – a college campus – where people like to talk and talk and talk. This is my 42nd straight year on a college campus, so you have to wonder how many words I’ve spoken and listened to – and you might also ask how many I remember. Perhaps it is appropriate, then, to ask what we are doing in our university to listen to the Word, to be the Word, in the midst of so many other words.

I am the eldest child of a Lutheran minister and I recall countless Sunday mornings, sitting in the front pew with Mom, dutifully taking notes on Dad’s sermon so that we could have a discussion at Sunday dinner. “Punitive” comes to my mind when I remember my reaction to this family ritual – “of course I listen to what you’re saying, Dad!” But with plenty of hindsight, I now know deep in my heart that Dad was teaching me a lesson that has shaped my life – he was reminding me to “pay attention,” to attend to the Word, the words of grace and hope and peace, to pay attention to love breaking into our lives as God’s faithful people.

The late cultural critic, Neil Postman, has been one of my most influential guides to learning how to pay attention. In 1995, he wrote, “Like the sorcerer's apprentice, we are awash in information without even a broom to help us get rid of it. Information comes indiscriminately, directed at no one in particular, in enormous volume, at high speeds, severed from import and meaning. And there is no loom to weave it all into fabric...No stories to tell us what we need to know, and what we do not need to know...” What to do, then? “[W]e will need to consult our poets, playwrights, artists, humorists, theologians, and philosophers, who alone are capable of creating or restoring those metaphors and stories that give point to our labors, give meaning to our history, elucidate the present, and give direction to our future.”

This morning’s scripture readings offer God’s faithful people such a story – a Word that can give point to our labors, meaning to our history and direction to our future – let’s listen once again.

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians provides a still (and perhaps never more urgently) relevant blueprint of how the Living Word must be proclaimed by the community of believers. I think we can assume that the Corinthians were having their own issues in hearing and living the Word in the midst of the noisy and frightening early days after Jesus had left them. So Paul offers this remarkable hymn of love as a pattern for their lives – Paul offers the Word of Love to help the Corinthians (and us) make sense of our lives. If all I have are the words of mortals (or even angels), I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If all I have are human power and knowledge, I am nothing. Even if I give away all I have and give up my body, I gain nothing. Unless I have the Word, unless I have Love, I will not find the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Wow – this concrete word to a very real community of the faithful – just like this one – is the call to live as the beloved, to live in the midst of the world as the Living Word, the body of Christ. It is the call to pay attention.

And so the story continues – as it has now more almost 2000 years – here at Augsburg, as we seek to live as the beloved community, to be the living Word in a world that more than ever needs to know the Word.

And it continues especially in our reading from John’s gospel, which contains the original motto for Augsburg Theological Seminary, written in Norwegian, of course, but (in translation!) continues to offer us a way to consider how to hear Jesus’ call and to follow Paul’s map to faithful lives. From the 1st chapter of John’s gospel, the 14th verse, “And the Word became flesh.” And so it does – each and every day – on our campuses (in Minneapolis, Rochester, Mexico, Nicaragua and Namibia) as we seek to educate students for lives of faithful service in the world. Here is both a theological and practical claim on our lives together.

So how do we honor the call to be the Word made flesh in the city? Here are three simple, yet profound, ways that John’s gospel guides us as we seek to educate our students for vocations of service in the world and thereby live as the Word made flesh in the city.

The Word became flesh and lived among us. I have the privilege everyday to witness how faculty, staff, students and community members linked to Augsburg are embodying the Word in their work on and off campus. In a neighborhood full of immigrant diversity, we are working to be the Word by being neighbor. Two quick examples:

- *Cedar Commons*
- *Community Garden*

The Word came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. Nobody said this would be easy and that is a central message in our vocational work. Certainly John's gospel is a stark reminder that the Word is not easy for the world to hear. We kill our prophets because we are people who cannot imagine the year of the Lord's favor or love that is kind and patient. As we seek to be the Word made flesh and to listen for our calls, we also must know that faithful work, God's work, will not necessarily make us popular or comfortable. I am struck by how critical it is that we lift up for all of us witnesses to the faith and to the Word who have faced with courage and resolve and imagination the fact that the world rejects the way of love. I think Martin Luther King, Jr. – another prophet in our midst whom we rejected – whose words – his proclamation of the Word of release and freedom and sight for all God's people – still have meaning and relevance for our students today. There is room in our world for the company of witnesses to the Word and the way of love.

And we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. I love the juxtaposition of grace and truth in this passage. The Word surely is grace. It is nimble and forgiving and imaginative and surprising. It is practical and resourceful. It creates miracles of abundance where the world sees only scarcity. We see glimpses of grace everyday at Augsburg as we engage with community partners in programs like Faith in the City, a consortium of Lutheran organizations in the Twin Cities that are working together to seek the welfare of the city. We see glimpses of grace in our international work through the Center for Global Education and Experience, transforming the lives of students by teaching them about privilege and introducing them to global neighbors whose lives do intersect with ours. We see glimpses of grace as we work around our usual institutional rules to meet the needs of our Somali neighbors. We see glimpses of grace when our students spend time in one of the mosques in our neighborhood, learning about the various ways in which God's covenant is present in our world – in our neighborhood.

And the Word also is truth, a word that speaks to a way and a life that we are called to follow. It is a call to discipleship, to love beyond human understanding, to God's intention for us and all of creation. It is the word of a God who has known us forever. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you," the prophet Jeremiah reminds us. To be known and named is the promise of the Word, the truth of life abundant and eternal. This is the Love that hopes all things, believes all things, and endures all things. The glimpses of truth are also visible at Augsburg – in the classroom, in this daily chapel, in all of the ways we faithfully serve in the world, to equipping each other for lives of meaning and value. This search for the Word of truth is always incomplete, of course, for "now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part, then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known." But what a wondrous gift it is to pay attention as God shows us the way!

Here is the Word. Pay attention, for in a world so full of words, we have the Word to live, to share, and to shout from the mountaintops. Thanks be to God. Amen."

>>Hospitality and justice: higher education and the immigrant experience<<

I participated in an international conference last summer focused on the theme of "higher education and the immigrant/refugee experience." I was asked to submit an essay for the conference proceedings about our work with immigrants at Augsburg. Here are excerpts from the essay (note the UK spelling throughout, required by the journal!).

“Founded by Norwegian immigrants nearly 150 years ago, Augsburg University today is located in a thriving urban neighbourhood, surrounded by immigrants of a new generation: Somalis, Ethiopians, Mexicans, those who have come to the United States seeking a better life for themselves and their families, as our ancestors did decades ago. What does it mean for a university founded by immigrants to walk alongside the immigrants of today? How does an immigrant sensibility shape our academic mission and community engagement today? How do we extend the boundaries of our university to engage our immigrant neighbours in mutually beneficial ways? These are questions at the heart of our identity as a university in the 21st century. Perhaps our answers to these questions will help others who share our commitment to hospitality and justice.

Vocation and location: Augsburg as urban settlement

...the tenets of the settlement tradition took shape in other forms in the late 20th and early 21st century – including in leadership thinking about higher education. As Ira Harkavy and John Puckett argued in 1994, the idea of applied sociology that the early settlement house leaders articulated and practiced offers a moral and pragmatic framework for colleges and universities to “function as perennial, deeply rooted settlements, providing illuminating 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”.

For Augsburg, the concept of the urban settlement offers a framework for interpreting the identity and character of the university as it has unfolded over the past almost 150 years. In particular, Augsburg as urban settlement is grounded in four particular distinctions:

- Our core identity as an institution shaped by the Lutheran Christian faith with its focus on service to the neighbour as a central feature of our vocations (or callings) in the world. In fact, our institutional vocation is stated in summary as: “We believe we are called to serve our neighbour,” illustrating the inextricable links between faith, education and service to and with our neighbours.
- Our academic mission as an institution dedicated to the liberal arts as the most efficacious education for life in the world. Our grounding in the liberal arts demands a holistic understanding of human experience, challenging us in curricular, co-curricular and community engagement efforts to seek ever broader and deeper perspectives. Our immigrant neighbours thereby are viewed as members of our teaching and learning community—fellow learners and teachers as we engage life together on campus and in our neighbourhood
- Our distinctive location for almost 150 years in an immigrant neighbourhood where we have settled alongside neighbours, living as stewards of place and environment. We believe in hospitality and justice for all of creation and we practice hospitality and justice in myriad ways alongside neighbours whose life experiences are often very different from ours.
- Our commitment to public work, which means that hospitality is not enough and that we bear responsibility not only for serving our neighbours, but also for standing should to shoulder with them to fight against the systemic injustices that make hospitality necessary. As the American Lutheran theologian Carter Lindberg has written, “(I)o be sure, the biblical mandate to feed the poor is non-controversial. What is controversial is why people are poor and hungry”.

In this way, then, the concept of Augsburg as urban settlement in the 21st century links our institutional vocation with our location in service both to our academic mission and to our immigrant neighbours. Vocation and location are bound together. Place matters. Education matters. Faith matters. Our immigrant neighbours matter.

How Augsburg engages its immigrant neighbours

The variety of immigrant communities surrounding Augsburg's campus calls us to consider what is mutually beneficial in our work together with these diverse neighbours. This means that one size does not fit all in our engagement strategies, as each community potentially has distinctive needs and aspirations. For the sake of briefly illustrating how we have engaged specific immigrant communities, I offer two case studies of our efforts: (1) with Somali immigrants, and: (2) with Mexican immigrants, many of whom make up a substantial portion of our undocumented students today.

Somali community engagement. The influx of Somali immigrants and refugees to Minnesota can be traced to the early 1990s, when fleeing from their war-torn homeland brought them to cities like Minneapolis, where the resettlement programmes primarily led by Lutheran and Roman Catholic agencies were well-established. In particular, the Cedar-Riverside neighbourhood of Minneapolis -- in which Augsburg is located—became home to thousands of Somalis. In fact, the greater metropolitan area of Minneapolis and Saint Paul is home to the largest community of Somalis outside of Mogadishu (the capital of Somalia).¹

As the Somali community has grown and established itself in the Cedar-Riverside neighbourhood over the past 25 years, Augsburg has partnered with its immigrant neighbours in a variety of ways. Especially in recent years, as the generation of Somali-Americans born in the United States matures, the needs and aspirations of the community have evolved and have challenged us to find deeper and more authentic ways to engage each other.

One of the key strategies undertaken was the creation in 2008 of the Cedar-Riverside Partnership, an anchor institution initiative that brought together the major institutions with a stake in the neighbourhood—the University of Minnesota, UM Health (formerly Fairview Hospital), Sherman and Associates (owner of a major housing development in the neighbourhood), the City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, along with Augsburg—along with representatives of various neighbourhood organizations, such as the West Bank Business Association, Brian Coyle Community Center and the Riverside Plaza Tenant Association. Together, the members of the partnership have pursued projects that address the mutual needs of our neighbours. Among the work undertaken was a focus on community safety that brought together the various police and security forces in the neighbourhood to coordinate their coverage of the community, leading to a significant drop in crime. The partnership also focused on the needs of youth, on neighbourhood infrastructure such as roads and streetscape, and on workforce development.

Another group of strategies pursued with our Somali-American neighbours is a focus on the educational needs of young people in the community. A tutoring programme for middle and high

¹ “Somali Minnesota Photos,” <http://www.cnn.com/interactive/2017/02/us/somali-minnesota-photos/>, accessed on 29 November 2017.

school students (ages 11-18) is staffed by volunteers from Augsburg and the University of Minnesota. Augsburg's Master in Business Administration (MBA) program paired a consulting group of graduate students with young Somali girls to create a business plan for a thrift-clothing store known as the Sisterhood Boutique, now a thriving business located in space in the neighbourhood donated by UM Health. In addition, the Minnesota Urban Debate League, a programme of Augsburg University that sponsors debate programs in area high schools and middle schools, organises a special Somali Debate Initiative that coaches Somali-American youth in the skills of debate, preparing them for success in post-secondary schools.

Finally, based on the experience of our own Norwegian immigrant forefathers and mothers, who created institutions to serve their communities in America—institutions such as Augsburg and Fairview Hospital to name just two—we have worked alongside our Somali-American neighbours to help them create their own institutions. A leadership training programme is aimed at equipping emerging leaders in the neighbourhood with the skills to build and lead organisations—skills such as grant-writing, finance, public relations, government affairs, and so on, practical skills that put these emerging organisations on a level playing field with other NGOs and businesses. Another institution-building initiative is the East African Student Teacher (EAST) programme at Augsburg, seeking to educate East African teachers for elementary, middle and high schools in Minnesota, so that the growing number of East African students will be exposed to teachers who look like them and share their experiences. In this way, the teaching staff of schools in Minnesota and beyond will reflect the growing diversity of their student bodies, a key component of building institutions that meet the needs of their communities.

Support for undocumented students. The second case study of Augsburg's work with immigrant communities engages a more recent influx of immigrants from Mexico, many of whom who have come to the United States without documentation. In this community, our focus has been on the children of these immigrants—the group of undocumented young people who were brought to the United States by their parents and have grown up in cities like Minneapolis. Our work with these so-called “Dreamers”—the label that describes the aspirations of these young people—has been very different than our efforts with Somali immigrants and refugees. With Dreamers, our focus expanded from hospitality and community engagement to equity, as we have joined with higher education institutions across the United States to embrace our responsibility to educate all students of ability and to thereby secure the economic and civic prosperity of our region and country.

Our work on behalf of our Mexican-American neighbours begins with an institutional commitment to equity. Augsburg's governing board approved an institutional non-discrimination policy in 2010 that explicitly states that “Augsburg...does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religious belief, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, familial status, genetic information, status with regard to public assistance, or citizenship...”² With this commitment made, Augsburg then has pursued its work with undocumented students in two focused ways.

First, the university has made access to higher education a priority for undocumented students, with both financial and academic support. In the early part of the 21st century, Augsburg was able to

² inside.augsburg.edu/studentaffairs/discrimination-and-bias-incident-reporting/mission-statement/, accessed on 29 November 2017.

support a handful of undocumented students by combining institutional financial aid with charitable gifts from churches and other organisations in the community. There was no state or federal government support available for undocumented students, which made access to higher education very difficult for these students and their families. In 2013, the state of Minnesota legislature passed the Minnesota Dream Act, which made undocumented students eligible for state financial aid and in-state tuition rates for public universities. The Dream Act has dramatically increased access to higher education for undocumented students in Minnesota, providing up to \$5,000 in state aid to supplement institutional aid and family support, along with gifts from churches and other charitable organizations. For Augsburg, this has meant an increase in the number of undocumented students served from a handful to nearly 100. Similar increases have occurred at other colleges and universities in the state of Minnesota.

In addition to financial aid, Augsburg also has provided significant academic and personal support to undocumented students with a dedicated staff position serving Latino students along with robust academic support programmes for these first-generation college students, empowering them to develop self-advocacy skills so as to persist in school and graduate. We also have partnered with local attorneys, who provide pro bono legal services to students and their families who may be threatened with deportation. Finally, we have found a helpful partner in the Mexican consular office in Minnesota, which is committed to the academic success of these young people (who are still Mexican citizens) and has provided additional financial aid to help create even more access to institutions like Augsburg.

A second way in which Augsburg supports its undocumented students is through its public advocacy for changes in policy at the state and federal level that would provide a pathway to citizenship for these students. Efforts at the federal level to pass a “Dream Act” date back to the early 2000s and have been thwarted at every turn by partisan disputes. In 2011, the Obama administration issued new policies that allowed certain undocumented immigrants who came to the United States as children to apply for two-year work permits. The following year, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programme was put in place through executive order (though not through legislative action), providing temporary relief from deportation for eligible young adults. As mentioned above, the Minnesota Dream Act, passed in 2013, created access to state financial aid and in-state tuition rates for eligible undocumented students. Each of these various policies meant that more undocumented students (including those from Mexico as well as other nations) could have access to higher education in the United States and also could take advantage of study away, research and co-curricular opportunities so central to their educational experiences and success.

The progress we have witnessed in these policies to support undocumented students has been seriously challenged since the 2016 U.S. presidential elections, after which the new administration has threatened undocumented students with deportation and has suspended the DACA programme. But we continue to stand with our undocumented and DACA students, doing all we can to keep them safe and focused on their academic success, even as we recognise the fear and anxiety that the current political climate has created for them. And we have not stopped fighting.

[Augsburg’s call to serve our neighbour](#)

Our resolve to support all of our students in their educational aspirations is illustrated by the following text, which I sent in my role as Augsburg University president to our entire community just before the beginning of the 2017-18 academic year:

“Events in our country and around the world during the past several months have reminded us that the spectre of fear and prejudice and bigotry are very much present in our common lives. Whether it is violence in the name of white supremacy, rhetoric demonizing immigrants and refugees, policies discriminating against those of various sexual and gender identities, or the general rancor and polarization in our political discourse – all of this illustrates the need for citizens to come together with courage and resolve to fight back, to stand with love against hate and prejudice, to seek opportunities for genuine conversation and common purpose.

The Augsburg community is by no means immune from the dynamics of this volatile social situation. At the same time, however, dedicated and principled work over the past decade by faculty, staff and students has positioned Augsburg to be a model for how a community can navigate the throes of shifting demographics, progressive social mores and the polarizing fear and anxiety that characterize our public lives. In fact, it is precisely because of Augsburg’s faith, academic and civic traditions that we are poised to show a way forward in the 21st century.

And now is the time for us to lead. As inspiration for the work we must pursue as a community, I have returned to the wise words of Martin Luther King, Jr., who, in his 1963 speech at the March on Washington, said “(W)e are confronted with the fierce urgency of now”³ Now is the time for urgent reflection and action.

King’s words a year later in his speech accepting the Nobel Peace Prize were prescient:

“...our very survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant and to face the challenge of change. The large house in which we live demands that we transform the world-wide neighborhood into a world-wide brotherhood (sic). Together we must learn to live as (siblings) or together we will be forced to perish as fools.”⁴

In particular, I am struck by Dr. King’s insistence that “...we are challenged to work all over the world with unshakeable determination to wipe out the last vestiges of racism”⁵ Here, fifty years later, we must return to this very challenge, to what King called the need to celebrate our “world house,”⁶ comprising black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Muslim and Hindu – to which we might add, liberal and conservative, urban and rural, straight and gay and more.

³ King, M.L. (1963): “I have a Dream.” www.crmvet.org/info/mowmlk.htm, accessed on 6 December 2017.

⁴ King, M.L. (1964): “Martin Luther King, Jr. – Acceptance Speech”, Nobelprize.org. Nobel Media AB 2014 Web. http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-acceptance.html, accessed on 6 December 2017.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

The Augsburg community is a microcosm of “the world house.” It is our rare and compelling call to live as a people united by ecumenical loyalties, called to illustrate for all to see how love for one another, what Dr. King called “the supreme unifying principle” claimed by all great world religions, might be the path forward in a world torn to its very core by the forces of hatred, prejudice and violence. The time is now.”

Our identity as an urban settlement in the 21st century means that our commitment to our immigrant neighbours is at the heart of our mission to educating students of all backgrounds and identities to be “informed citizens, thoughtful stewards, critical thinkers and responsible leaders.”⁷ We are called to accompany and settle alongside our neighbours. We are called to educate students who are skilled and reflective and committed to serving the neighbour. We are called to understand that hospitality is not enough and that the work of justice for all is essential to the future of our democracy.

Universities and the Immigrant Experience: Lessons Learned

Though the focus of this essay has been on the experiences of one university in a specific context and location, there are lessons in our case studies that may help inform the work of colleges and universities that share our commitment to engaging immigrant refugee neighbours.

The first lesson is that place matters. The commitment to serve the neighbour is linked to particular geographies and those who occupy particular locations. Augsburg clearly has been affected by its proximity to the immigrant communities that surround its campus. Any commitment to engage with immigrants will need to be grounded in a firm sense of the institution’s whereabouts and the specific cultures, networks and values that comprise its location. As mentioned above, vocation and location are inextricably linked.

A second lesson derives from the settlement house tradition and focuses on the need for mutuality in all engagements with immigrant and/or refugee communities. Too often, colleges and universities see their role as primarily aimed at “fixing” problems, applying expert knowledge to resolve community issues. Responsible relationships with immigrant communities require a suspension of the traditional academic hubris and a humility that is open to learning from and with the other. Augsburg has learned, for example, that our work with immigrants often requires a different pace in meetings and other engagements. We also have learned that our majority perspective cannot fully understand the fear and anxiety faced by those whose lives have been disrupted through immigration. Building trust requires an empathy and commitment to mutuality that takes time and effort.

Finally, authentic engagement with immigrants means that colleges and universities must expand their understanding of academic mission. Our traditional values about excellence and rigor; our organizational structures related to power-sharing; and our sense of how teaching and learning occur – all of these are challenged by the immigrant experience. We meet immigrants in our neighbourhood who teach our students and all of us important lessons about life in the world. Are not these immigrants also members of our faculty? We meet students from these immigrant

⁷ Augsburg University (2010): “Mission Statement”, www.augsburg.edu/about/mission, accessed on 6 December 2017.

communities who do not learn in the same way we do? Are we open to expanding our understanding of what excellent scholarship and learning look like? We invite our immigrant neighbours to come to our campus and share our resources. Are we open to how they will challenge our normal bureaucratic norms?

These simple lessons – place matters, mutuality is key, and academic missions must be expanded – inform our efforts at Augsburg and offer a framework for understanding how colleges and universities around the world might explore their own relationships and engagement with immigrant and refugee experiences in the 21st century.

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Confession<<

Augsburg's annual "Advent Vespers" attract thousands of good folks to Central Lutheran Church in Minneapolis for a service of word and music. The moving service always includes provocative texts that are curated by our campus pastor, Sonja Hagander. One text in particular seems fitting as this year comes to a close.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God, we confess that ours is still a world in which Herod seems to rule:

The powerful are revered, the visions of the wise are ignored, the poor are afflicted, and the innocents are killed.

You show that salvation comes in the vulnerability of a child, yet we hunger for the "security" of walls.

You teach us that freedom comes in loving service, yet we trample on others in our efforts to be "free."

Forgive us, God, when we look to the palace instead of the stable, when we heed politicians more than prophets.

Renew us with the spirit of Bethlehem, that we may be better prepared for your coming.

Amen.

-- Keith Watkins

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- A sort of republican banquet

- Seeing things whole

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