

NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Eight, Number One (October 2006)

"What we have loved, others will love, and we will teach them how."
(W. Wordsworth, from "The Prelude")

NOTES FROM READERS

>>What you think<<

This issue of my Notes commences our eighth year – hard to believe. What a joy it is to share this work and these reflections with all of you. Thanks for your support and encouragement. We’ve just concluded a week of celebration for my inauguration as the 11th president of Augsburg. It was fun and spirited – and if you would like to see photographic evidence of our various activities, please visit our website, www.augsburg.edu/insideaugsburg, for a photo album! You’ll also find the text of my inaugural address and various other presentations on my web page, www.augsburg.edu/president.

A few notes from the last issue of Notes:

Rockford friend and civic colleague, Paul Callighan, writes: “I particularly enjoyed your "Notes" section on leadership. Besides those you mentioned, I personally keep close at hand a saying from John Wesley:

"Do all the good you can;
By all the means you can;
In all the places you can;
At all the times you can;
To all the people you can;
As long as ever you can."

Long-time friend and subscriber, Joan Flanagan (one of the leading grassroots fundraising consultants in the world!) wrote with this important reminder: “When you excerpt something from a real organization (as opposed to literature or web), it would be helpful and respectful to include that group's website. You never know how many of your readers may want to join, donate to, or learn from a terrific organization based in Montana. One of the best, which I have admired since working for the Youth Project Foundation in the '70's, is the Northern Plains Resource Council, which just keeps getting better and better. They were the original source of the Wendell Berry speech (and the 17 Rules). Next time it would be good to add their website: www.northernplains.org.” And so it is good - thanks, Joan!

Nancy Doemel, friend and colleague at Wabash College, wrote about her experiences with revitalizing small town life in west central Indiana through a combination of philanthropy,

civic discourse and community-building. She concludes by saying: “And, returning to your newsletter, I am struck by the infinite possibilities for empowerment in those communities when Wendell Berry's "17 Rules on Sustainability" bump up against the recognition that philanthropy could play a role in making their dreams become reality. It's one of those times when I love being able to translate what I know from experience in this field and what I read (and am inspired to read by people like you) into helping people make change in their lives and their surroundings.”

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

REFLECT ON THIS

I have been writing a good bit this fall as part of my public duties at Augsburg. I thought I might share two homilies that I have given during my early days here – the first was the opening chapel talk for the academic year, the second was given during the week of celebration for my inauguration. I've noted the scriptural text if that is important to you. Though explicitly Christian in their message, I think both pieces also offer you a glimpse of Augsburg College, a sense of my leadership work here, and a reminder of how reflective practice takes shape in new contexts and communities. I welcome your thoughts.

>>Credo<<

[Scriptural text: Matthew 16: 13-19]

There is a wonderful moment in the Christian Mass, when the cantor's voice declares *Credo in Unum Deum* (“I believe in One God”) – a bold proclamation of faith that rings out in the sanctuary to lead the congregation into its profession of the creed. Today I come before you with the same invitation – as we begin our academic year here at Augsburg, I call you to proclaim your faith, individually and as a college community! It is where the work of education begins...

“Who do you say that I am?” Our gospel tells of Jesus' invitation to his disciples to proclaim their credo, their faith. And as is so often the case in the Christian scriptures, the disciples offer all of us a glimpse of the range of human responses to the work of God in our midst.

The first response to the question is for the disciples to offer a summary of what other people believe. Here is what others say (you are Isaiah, a prophet). How often we find ourselves doing the same thing – let me show you what the research tells us about this question (read a few doctoral dissertations!) – I dare not take a personal stand. But that response is not good enough for Jesus – who do you say that I am, he asks?

The second response is more firm – at least for Peter – who declares his belief that Jesus is the son of the living God. Good answer, except that a few chapters later it is Peter who is betraying his faith when questioned by bystanders in the midst of a crisis... (cf. Matthew 26).

And then we have Jesus' wise words and promise to Peter: 'There is something remarkable here, he says, in your proclamation of faith, and on this rock I shall build my kingdom on earth! So how is that going, we might ask?

We could say that Jesus was naïve in entrusting his kingdom to a mortal whose faith he knew would waver. Or, we could embrace the wisdom that it begins with a bold proclamation of faith and then it proceeds, through the grace of God, in myriad paths of blessing and deceit and disorder and joy – with glimpses of salvation soon gone because of human foibles.

Jesus is clear: You begin here with an answer to the question of what you believe – the way of discipleship is grounded in the leap of faith, the credo – and from there the adventure of life is launched, to be met with all sorts of detours and disappointments but also with all fashion of forgiveness and grace and wonder.

Why is a credo important at the beginning of our academic year here in this college? Like the disciples, we too often fall back on the opinions of others and we are afraid to take stands for fear that we will be wrong or hurt or worse. And like Peter, even when we take a stand and declare our credo, we mess up and betray the faith we declare.

But the wonder of college – at least a college like ours, grounded in a faith community and willing to place faith and values at the heart of its work – is that we are able and expected to state our beliefs with conviction and then to go forward together, knowing that those beliefs must be tested by experience, by relationships, by conversations, by time, by education in the broadest sense...this is the core work of our college.

Our Lutheran heritage confirms this relationship between faith and learning – we believe but we also know that our faith is not complete – we are fallible, we are human, we are sinful. Lord, I believe, help my unbelief. And that is why we gather here as a community – in this chapel, in this college, in this city, in the midst of God's creation – to share our faiths and to know that our work as a college is to question, to educate, to strengthen, to test, to embrace, to connect our faith with our learning.

I want to know what you believe – I want to learn from your beliefs even as you learn from mine. Our conversations as a community about what we believe are at the heart of our common life, they are a critical part of the educational enterprise, and they are a central aspect of a healthy democracy. This isn't about evangelism, this is about the sort of public discourse that reflects the richness of our lives together in society – and our faith is clearly part of that rich fabric of human experience and community.

Stephen Carter, a Yale law professor, has written with great wisdom on the need to have conversations about our faith a central part of public discourse. For Carter, this is an important part of the "etiquette of democracy," a willingness to be persuaded that we can learn from others. Without such public conversations about what we believe, what we value, and what we care about, we are left to closely-held opinions and to the sort of polarization

about faith and values that characterizes life in our country right now. We won't necessarily agree – but we owe it to each other to come to what my teacher Martin Marty has called the “great, republican banquet table,” where a seat is waiting for us, the conversation is lively, and we will enjoy the company.

National Public Radio has reestablished a wonderful series entitled “This I Believe”, for which they invite all sorts of folks to write and ready essays about their faith. I could preach a sermon on each of my belief statements, but here they are in summary fashion...

- I believe in a generous and gracious God whose love for us is beyond understanding but demands of me diligent and vigilant life in the world
- I believe in the power of forgiveness and the gift of reconciliation
- I believe in democracy, the miracle of abundant life together with strangers
- I believe in each of you and the promise of your work here together – the nexus between your personal gifts and calls and the mission and vocation of Augsburg College – the wonders and grace of learning
- I believe in the blessings of the ordinary – in glimpses of salvation – they may be all we have some days, but they give us meaning and hope.

Who do you say that I am? Jesus asks his disciples. It is the question we all must answer again and again – it is the question of faith and it is where we begin, where we are grounded, where we draw our sustenance – and what better place to ask it than here at Augsburg College, in this community of learning and faith! Credo, credo, credo. Thanks be to God.

>>Generosity and whereabouts<<

[Scriptural text: John 1: 14]

We began our inaugural celebration yesterday with a story from the oldest of the canonical gospels, Mark's story of the feeding of the 5000, and we explored the ways in which that familiar tale might translate into a way of life, of abundant life. Today we turn to the most recent of the gospels, John, with its stirring philosophical and theological claims – “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...All things came into being through Him...” and we consider how to translate from the abstract to the particular. Surely here are the wonders of our scriptures, in all their evocative richness.

Our scripture this morning is the original motto for Augsburg Theological Seminary and College: “And the Word became flesh” (originally in Norwegian, of course!). And so it does, here, in our midst, God with us. Can you imagine any more generous act? Our college practices generosity most authentically when it lives as the Word made flesh – present, rooted, of service, faithful.

My teacher, Martin Marty, taught me that colleges are indigenous communities – that is, they are native to a particular place, a particular environment, a particular set of values and practices that define the institution – and that means something for the way they live their lives, it means something for the ways in which we understand the generosity of place and values and presence...

What does it mean to think about Augsburg College as an indigenous community? What does it mean that the Word has become flesh and lived among us here?

That is a question much on my mind these days as we continue to explore the relevance of our historical commitments as a college for what we plan to do going forward.

It is a question especially appropriate for this occasion, during our celebration of a new season of leadership. It is a question that bears asking as we explore the meaning the generosity – the 2nd broad theme of the inauguration week. It is a question that, it seems to me, we need to ask each and everyday of our lives here at this special college.

The poet and essayist, Wendell Berry, whose work I return to often for guidance, writes these wise words in his prose poem, “Damage” (1975) –

- “No expert knows everything about every place, not even everything about any place. If one’s knowledge of one’s whereabouts is insufficient, if one’s judgment is unsound, then expert advice is of little use.”

I sometimes think about this quote when talking with all the experts who are happy to offer their advice (for free and for a fee!) about running a college. Our responsibility, Berry tells us, is to have knowledge of our whereabouts; otherwise all the experts in the world will be of little use. If we don’t know our place, our mission, our history, how can we expect to enlist others in pursuit of our aspirations? If we don’t know and care about our whereabouts, how can we be generous?

My point is, of course, that we must know our whereabouts, our history, our values, our place in the community and in the culture, before we can seek solutions to the issues we face as individuals and as a community - before we can be generous with each other, with God’s creation, with the world...

And it is the generosity of our whereabouts that we celebrate today. It is our nature and identity and character that we lift up. Our links to this particular place and culture and set of values and practices that make us Augsburg – as we have been known since 1869.

So today I lift up for our attention three simple aspects of our whereabouts – three ways in which the Word becomes flesh here, in which generosity is practiced here - that I hope we might continue to explore in the days and months and years ahead:

- Perhaps the central focus of our whereabouts is that wherever Augsburg College is found – here in this neighborhood, in the city, in Rochester, or around the world on our international campuses – our most authentic work is learning and teaching. And the wonder of learning is that it involves acts of generosity in its every detail – from teachers who teach what they love, to students who seek to learn out of curiosity and passion, to texts that bear the wisdom of the ages for our reflection, to conversations that help us pay attention to the Word, to each other, and to the world.
- A second aspect of our whereabouts is the way in which this city, a particular place – much different now than in 1869 – is still a place that demands our attention and respect and concern. Democracy still is practiced in this place

with our neighbors. Education still happens in this place with learners and teachers all around us. Engagement and service still are at the center of our lives with each other in this place. Sustaining this urban place, this urban environment, is an act of generosity – for our diverse neighbors, for our diverse selves, for the whole of creation, now and into the future. Our presence here cannot be passive or defensive. It must embrace the challenge of an indigenous place, loving and caring for the land, the river, the environment, and the people – God’s creation in this place.

- The final aspect of our whereabouts I want to lift up is our firm grounding in the Christian faith – a confident faith that frees us to learn, to live, to practice hospitality with all of our neighbors, to be a force for good in the world, to affirm our calling as people of faith and a college of the church to be God’s people in this place and to know that grace and truth abound where the Word becomes flesh. This indigenous place we call Augsburg College is a college of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a faith community called to live in the world as people of God, to proclaim God’s love, to seek the truth, to pray for God’s good creation, to know that our call is not to be God but to do God’s work. The Word is flesh here – day in, day out – is there any greater generosity than that?

I’ll end with another brief quote from Wendell Berry, who, a couple of years after writing “Damage” wrote “Healing” (1977) to point the way:

- “The teachings of unsuspecting teachers belong to the task (of healing) and are its hope. The love and work of friends and lovers belong to the task, and are its health. Rest and rejoicing belong to the task, and are its grace. Let tomorrow come tomorrow. Not by your will is the house carried through the night. Order is the only possibility of rest.”

This morning we celebrate generosity - the Word made flesh here at Augsburg College. Today and this week we mark our indigenous character, our indigenous work, the ways in which we are grounded in our whereabouts. And on this occasion, we reaffirm the healing and generosity imbedded in our work, our place and presence, and our faith. And we recall the concluding words of John 1:14 that remind us that the Word made flesh is “full of grace and truth.” Oh, how the world needs a Word of grace and truth. And here it is! Thanks be to God.

PRACTICE THIS

>>Sustainability (continued)<<

Sustainability (especially in the city) is much on my mind these days. Though I included Wendell Berry’s “17 Rules” about sustainability in the last issue of Notes, I want to come back to this theme because I think it is central to our educational and moral work in the early 21st century. Here are three brief glimpses of recent articles on issues related to sustainability that I find provocative and helpful:

- In the October 20, 2006 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, former Cornell University president, Frank H. T. Rhodes, argues that we need to reformulate the liberal arts “in ways that will nurture the development of free-thinking men and women for the current age. The concept of sustainability could provide a new foundation for the liberal arts and sciences.” Rhodes’ argument is that sustainability – efforts to preserve with minimum disturbance earth’s bounty – would help us to honor the traditional role of the liberal arts to broaden knowledge and understanding, while also focusing on the most significant challenge we face today, namely sustaining the environment. Rhodes offers insightful thoughts on how sustainability would ground both a reinvigorated liberal arts curriculum, but also a set of practical and urgent topics and tasks for the liberally educated to tackle.
- Ann Patchett, writing on Eudora Welty for the September/October 2006 issue of *Preservation*, explains why Miss Welty “stayed put” in Jackson, Mississippi her entire life. Quoting Welty, who wrote “For all serious daring starts from within,” Patchett wonders how daring as an art – an intellectual pursuit – might come to pass in a particular place like Welty’s lifelong home in Mississippi. Welty’s life, Patchett argues, “tells us what is available to those who dig deep instead of wide.” Wise words and a powerful example.
- On the same theme – and in the same issue of *Preservation* – Wendell Berry comments on a photographic essay on historic Kentucky by James Archambeault. He writes: “Our idea of an economy is to turn wealth loose to destroy whatever stands between it and great wealth... There is, however, another kind of economy: an economy made in the likeness of what we used to call “the household economy.” This would be an economy oriented to local domestic life, and based upon thrift and care. Its purpose would be to protect and use well all things of value. It would be a truly conservative economy. Under such an economy the rate of change would be set by time and wear, not by economic vandalism.”

>>International fundraising ethics<<

In my service as a member of the Ethics Committee for the Association of Fundraising Professionals, I have kept informed of progress being made by a group of more than 30 international philanthropic fundraising associations, that have come together several times to craft The International Statement of Ethical Principles. I am pleased to know of these efforts, both for the importance of such a process to find common ground in our moral systems and for the resulting outcome, the initial international statement that has just been issued.

The statement contains five universal principles that help outline and guide the behavior of all fundraisers:

- **Honesty:** Fundraisers shall at all times act honestly and truthfully so that the public trust is protected and donors and beneficiaries are not misled.
- **Respect:** Fundraisers shall at all times act with respect for the dignity of their profession and their organization and with respect for the dignity of donors and beneficiaries.

- **Integrity:** Fundraisers will act openly and with regard to their responsibility for public trust. They shall disclose all actual or potential conflicts of interest and avoid any appearance of personal or professional misconduct.
- **Empathy:** Fundraisers will work in a way that promotes their purpose and encourage others to use the same professional standards and engagement. They shall value individual privacy, freedom of choice and diversity in all forms.
- **Transparency:** Fundraisers stimulate clear reports about the work they do, the way donations are managed and disbursed and costs and expenses, in an accurate and comprehensible manner.

A key aspect of the statement is the six standards of practice agreed to by fundraisers and fundraising associations around the world:

1. Fundraisers' responsibility regarding donations
2. Relationship with stakeholders
3. Responsibility for communications, marketing and public information
4. Management reporting, finance and fundraising costs
5. Payments and compensation
6. Compliance with national laws

According to the press statement included with the document, “these standards are presented with the recognition that fundraisers are subject to many different jurisdictions, and that they must observe the law of the jurisdiction in which they work. Use of words “will” and “must” indicate what is a mandatory requirement for fundraisers, and “should” indicates what is regarded as best practices by all organizations endorsing the statement.”

This is good and important work that we all should watch carefully as it continues to evolve. It offers us a glimpse of efforts to seek common moral ground where it normally is all too easy to find only differences. For more information, see the AFP website, www.afpnet.org.

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I support the Southern Poverty Law Center (www.splcenter.org) and receive as a member benefit a fine and instructive magazine, *Teaching Tolerance* (www.teachingtolerance.org).

I'm overrun these days by new publications related to my work in a church-related institution. Among the best of these various pieces is *Intersections*, a publication of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) intended for the academic communities of the colleges and universities associated with the ELCA. If interested, either let me know and I can send you a copy or check out www.elca.org and visit the Vocation and Education division.

I commend to you once again the Fetzer Institute in Michigan (www.fetzer.org), both for its programs and its publications. I've recently received an issue of Fetzer's "Essays on Deepening the American Dream," this one an interview with historian, Howard Zinn. There are many essays in the series, many of which seem to resonate with much of what we consider in these Notes.

>>Republics and conscience<<

I had the great pleasure of hearing a recent speech by Mary Robinson, the former president of Ireland and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. She closed her remarks with excerpts from this stunning poem by fellow Irish citizen, Seamus Heaney. Heaney gave the poem to Amnesty International, which now uses it to honor good work around the world. Note especially the lines about halfway through about the inaugurations of public leaders – I take Heaney's words very seriously.

From the Republic of Conscience

by Seamus Heaney

When I landed in the republic of conscience
it was so noiseless when the engines stopped
I could hear a curlew high above the runway.
At immigration, the clerk was an old man
who produced a wallet from his homespun coat
and showed me a photograph of my grandfather.
The woman in customs asked me to declare
the words of our traditional cures and charms
to heal dumbness and avert the evil eye.
No porters. No interpreter. No taxi.
You carried your own burden and very soon
your symptoms of creeping privilege disappeared.
Fog is a dreaded omen there but lightning
spells universal good and parents hang
swaddled infants in trees during thunderstorms.
Salt is their precious mineral. And seashells
are held to the ear during births and funerals.
The base of all inks and pigments is seawater.
Their sacred symbol is a stylized boat.
The sail is an ear, the mast a sloping pen,
the hull a mouth-shape, the keel an open eye.
At their inauguration, public leaders
must swear to uphold unwritten law and weep
to atone for their presumption to hold office –
and to affirm their faith that all life sprang
from salt in tears which the sky-god wept
after he dreamt his solitude was endless.
I came back from that frugal republic

with my two arms the one length, the customs
woman having insisted my allowance was myself.
The old man rose and gazed into my face
and said that was official recognition
that I was now a dual citizen.
He therefore desired me when I got home
to consider myself a representative
and to speak on their behalf in my own tongue.
Their embassies, he said, were everywhere
but operated independently
and no ambassador would ever be relieved.

"From the Republic of Conscience," from *Opened Ground: Selected Poems 1966-1996* by Seamus Heaney. Copyright © 1998 by Seamus Heaney. Reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, LLC.

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>>Topics for the next issue (December 2006)<<

- The moral biography of wealth: what we might learn from the Buffett gift
- Giving that is regular, intentional and proportionate – lessons from a stewardship campaign
- The communion of saints – religious practices that link us together

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