

## 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<<

I write this month with a deep sadness for the loss of our friend and colleague, Timothy Burchill, who died unexpectedly a few days ago. Tim, who led the Hendrickson Center for Ethical Leadership at St. Mary's University, Winona, Minnesota, and who helped found St. Mary's remarkable graduate program in philanthropy, had a sense of passion and integrity for the work of philanthropic fundraising that was both admirable and contagious. He was deeply involved in the work of the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP), where I first met him. He promoted research and ethics in our common work. He had a huge influence on leadership in our profession through his mentoring of the St. Mary's graduate students (many of whom are subscribers to these Notes because of Tim). And he was a friend of great, good spirit and faith. Let us remember him well by continuing in the example he has set for our personal and professional lives.

A couple of items to share from faithful readers:

Gene Scanlan, a regular correspondent, offered these comments on the last issue of Notes:

"As usual, your latest Notes got me thinking - and reflecting - on a few recent occurrences:

Recently, my prep school received a \$20 million gift from an anonymous donor. I sent an email to the school Head congratulating him and the school on the gift. He replied with an interesting challenge he faced and also repeated it in a personal conversation with me. The challenge was that several students at the school could not understand why anyone would give a gift of that magnitude and not want to be known. The school Head passed that question on to the donor, who apparently replied to the effect that "I wanted this gift to be about the school, not about me -- that's why it is anonymous." Interesting way of seeing things.

My wife Joanne and I were talking with some people about the Buffett gift to the Gates Foundation and her comment was "Warren Buffett is an investor and this was really just his investment in what he sees as a good foundation serving good causes. It's really the way he always operates -- no different, except it's philanthropy."

Finally, related to your comments about time and the future, I once heard a story -- not even sure if it's true -- that one of the college's dining halls at either Oxford or Cambridge had huge oak beams in the ceiling that were beginning to show their age after 500 or so years.

The college's head became alarmed and concerned about how the beams could be replaced. He consulted with the head of maintenance for the college, who, after, the college head expressed his anxiety, smiled and said something like: "No need for concern. When the dining hall was built 500 years ago, the builders also planted a grove of oaks nearby so the beams could be replaced when new ones were needed!" Talk about long-range planning!"

Also, Sister Sarah Naughton from Edgewood College in Madison, WI, added these thoughts:

"I have just finished ENJOYING every piece of this Edition of the Reflective Practitioner (a term and reality I learned well during my days at the University of St. Thomas).

This one especially has re-surfaced two of my Core Questions:

- 1) How much is enough? Why can't we figure out an American Economic System that automatically sends all surpluses back to the Common Store?
- 2) When/how/where can we create conversations among and between men and women of Faith, all Faiths, to seek Peace, Equity, Joy, Love?"

Good, core questions for us all.

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

>>A parable of ashes<<

It was shortly after lunch, now more than five years ago, when our plane landed in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam – it was a clear and not too terribly warm day...and as our plane taxied to the terminal, we had our first glimpse of the ashes...along the runway were rusted gunnery positions and burned out hangars, remnants of a time we might wish to forget...the ashes of nationalistic pride and war and violence and suffering.

As we pushed our way out of the airport, and climbed into vans to begin our trip into the city, the teeming masses of people crowding the sidewalks and streets were a blur of activity, but there was another glimpse of ashes...the soot and dust hung in the air, those who cared and knew better wore masks, others were oblivious to the palpable signs of human progress and of their own disease...fossil fuel, spewed into the air, obscured our views...the ashes of greed and progress and pollution and sickness.

That evening as we walked from dinner near our hotel, we had our first encounters with the poor who looked to us for hand-outs, crisp dollar bills were the ticket – for some, nearly a

month's wage – but their pleas did not hide their circumstances, open fires on the city sidewalks, preparing the little food they could gather, the smells and sights of making do, getting by, surviving if they could...the ashes of poverty and injustice and hunger.

The next morning we were up very early, on our way out of the city by 3 am, and the fires blazed on street corners and alongside the road as we drove south toward the Mekong River...open fires to battle the darkness, to offer security, to mark a place – a country awake while we dozed in our comfortable vans, a country fighting to keep the lights shining, to hold off the darkness...the ashes of the night and the frightening and the unexpected.

And six hours later as we pulled into the hidden driveway and parked near the public entrance to the orphanage, we were face to face with the children who had been left behind, children of all ages whose parents were too poor or too sick or too tired to care for them properly – this was our destination – and after a few minutes of governmental formalities, five screaming children appeared from behind a closed door...the ashes of love that did not survive the realities of life, the ashes of our souls.

And then we saw his face – the face we had seen before only in a few sketchy photographs – and he screamed for all of his life as he clung to his new mother's neck – and we cried and laughed and kissed him and comforted him...and told him how much we loved him...and a few days later when he awoke in our bed, back in the city, and laughed at my funny face and let me hold him tight, I knew that the ashes would never overcome the love we know in the smile of a child...the ashes are the inevitable and messy stuff of our lives, they are always there with their smells and stains and reminders of darkness and sin, but they will never win as long as we believe that God loves us and sends us children to share our lives.

>>A commonplace on work<<

Most Notes readers know of my interest in the concept of vocation, the idea that our work in the world has meaning and coherence because we understand it as a calling (from God, perhaps, or some other significant source). I have found it important in my study and practice of vocation to pay attention to those whose work is not necessarily meaningful or purposive. There are many who work only because they must. Others segment work from more significant aspects of their lives (e.g., play or service). I thought it might be helpful to consider – through this commonplace – some of the variety of opinions about work that are emblematic of our culture.

Personally, I have nothing against work, particularly when performed, quietly and unobtrusively, by someone else. I just don't happen to think it's an appropriate subject for an "ethic." (Barbara Ehrenreich)

I long to accomplish great and noble tasks, but it is my chief duty to accomplish humble tasks as though they were great and noble. The world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker. (Helen Keller)

The society which scorns excellence in plumbing because plumbing is a humble activity, and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because philosophy is an exalted activity, will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy. Neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water. (John W. Gardner)

Don't waste life in doubts and fears; spend yourself on the work before you, well assured that the right performance of this hour's duties will be the best preparation for the hours and ages that will follow it. (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

This is what I have seen to be good: it is fitting to eat and drink and find enjoyment with all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of the life God gives us; for this is our lot. (Ecclesiastes 5: 18)

Work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed. (Vaclav Havel)

We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give. (Winston Churchill)

The good worker will not suppose that good work can be properly answerable to haste, urgency, or even emergency. (Wendell Berry)

One of the symptoms of an approaching nervous breakdown is the belief that one's work is terribly important. (Bertrand Russell)

Work is love made visible. And if you cannot work with love, but only with distaste, it is better that you should leave your work and sit at the gate of the temple and take alms of those who work with joy. (Kahlil Gibran)

So much of what we call management consists in making it difficult for people to work. (Peter Drucker)

The important work of moving the world forward does not wait to be done by perfect men. (George Eliot)

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PRACTICE THIS

>>The world house<<

The committee that organizes our annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Convocation here at Augsburg decided this year to expand our conversations about Dr. King by organizing three campus forums informed by what is known as the World House essay – an edited version of Dr. King's speech accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in 1963 (you can find the essay at <http://www.theworldhouse.org/whessay.html>). I read the essay a couple of years ago, at which point I wrote this still relevant piece that appeared in Notes 6:4 (April 2005).

“I have explored the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. over the years, but had overlooked the powerful last chapter of his final book, *Where Do We Go From Here?: Chaos or Community?* (Beacon Press, 1968) until I was reminded by Robert M. Franklin, ethics professor at Emory University (in *Sightings*, 3/31/05, [marty-center.uchicago.edu](http://marty-center.uchicago.edu)) of King’s description of “The World House.”

In the chapter, King uses the metaphor of a dysfunctional family inheriting a house in which they must live together to describe his sense of the problems faced by humankind in our age. “We have inherited a large house, a great world house in which we have to live together – black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Muslim and Hindu – a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace.”

Franklin suggests that King’s metaphor is more urgent and relevant today than ever before and he draws three conclusions about what we must do to follow King’s example and thought in regard to the world house:

- Practice our commitment to eradicating racism and its many subtle manifestations. We must each engage in a “diversity inventory” of our institutions and exercise our voice and votes where we find continuing discrimination.
- Eschew xenophobia of other religions. Seek tolerance and understanding of others’ beliefs and traditions, and be resources for communities that need assistance in viewing all faith traditions as manifestations of a good and generous God.
- Demonstrate moral stewardship – especially those of us who are more affluent – so that our poor neighbors might have opportunities to transition to self sufficiency. Condemn those who exploit the poor at the expense of the poorest.

I needed this challenge and reminder of our core commitments in the world house we all inhabit.”

>>Exercise your civic muscle<<

I spend a good bit of time in St. Paul and Washington, DC, lobbying our legislators about important issues related to higher education. I enjoy these interactions and know that it is important to cultivate relationships with our elected officials so that they know what is on my mind and what is important to our work as a college. It is a joyful part of my duty as a citizen. As we have worked with our students to have them involved in similar lobbying efforts, I am reminded how alien this sort of effort is to the average citizen. And how sad that is, given the importance of communicating with and holding our public servants accountable to the public they serve!

I’m a proud new member of an organization here in the Twin Cities called the Citizens League ([www.citizensleague.net](http://www.citizensleague.net)), which does a great job of educating and engaging citizens in the public and political work that belongs to us all. A recent issue of the *MN Journal*, the Citizens League newsletter, included these practical tips for exercising your “civic muscle.”

- Plant idea seeds – write opinion pieces or letters to the editor for your local newspaper, start a blog and link to other blogs with similar ideas – “plant” your policy ideas and see if they begin to grow.
- Connect without meetings – use your email distribution list, not to send along partisan babble, but rather to send along news and ideas that people can use about policy ideas you care about (see my examples about Bill Moyers essays below – I received them from someone who thought it was important for me to have Moyers’ perspectives on big social issues).
- Open a policy lab – invite friends for lunch or breakfast with the purpose of sharing ideas about public policy. Pick a policy, design a better way, take on alternative opinions and then share your ideas with others.
- Take ideas to market – decide how your idea group can become advocates for your policy ideas – through websites, community meetings, visits to your elected officials – don’t be afraid to engage a wider audience with your ideas about how to make your neighborhood safer, your schools stronger, your elections fairer...

As the Citizens League likes to point out, we have immense power to shape ideas and engage others in solutions. Expertise is not the ticket – public-mindedness, resourcefulness and passion are. There is important, common work to be done and who better to take it on than you and me?

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#### PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I am a big fan of Bill Moyers, whose life of public service and journalism offers him a distinctive perspective and, we might say, a heartfelt call, to address the big issues of our common lives. Two recent speeches/essays are particularly compelling. Please read “For America’s Sake” ([www.thenation.com/doc/20070122/moyers](http://www.thenation.com/doc/20070122/moyers)), an address Moyers gave after the November US elections, and “Message to West Point” ([www.tompaine.com/message\\_to\\_west\\_point.php](http://www.tompaine.com/message_to_west_point.php)), which is excerpted from the Sol Feinstone Lecture, delivered to the cadets at West Point in November, 2006.

We’re working on diversity planning here at the college and our good steering group has been recommending helpful background readings. Check out “Rethinking Political Correctness” (*Harvard Business Review*, September 2006), by Robin Ely, Debra Meyerson and Martin Davidson.

>>To be of use<<

Continuing our theme of work for this issue of Notes, I am happy to share this wonderfully evocative poem by Marge Piercy.

## To be of use

(by Marge Piercy from *Circles on the Water*. © Alfred A. Knopf. Reprinted with permission. )

The people I love the best  
jump into work head first  
without dallying in the shallows  
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.  
They seem to become natives of that element,  
the black sleek heads of seals  
bouncing like half-submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,  
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,  
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,  
who do what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge  
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest  
and work in a row and pass the bags along,  
who are not parlor generals and field deserters  
but move in a common rhythm  
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.  
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.  
But the thing worth doing well done  
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.  
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,  
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums  
but you know they were made to be used.  
The pitcher cries for water to carry  
and a person for work that is real.

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>>Topics for the next issue (April 2007)<<

- Peace education
- The needs of strangers

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