

NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Eight, Number Five (June 2007)

"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 summer. I have just finished my first year at Augsburg College and am reflecting a good bit on our work together this past year. It has been fast-paced and energetic work, grounded in mission and oriented to action – just the sort of environment that makes me joyful. I give thanks this month for good colleagues, a healthy community and fun work.

Dr. Bill Enright, head of the Lake Family Institute on Faith and Giving in Indianapolis, writes to comment on my homily about Lazarus and practicing resurrection in the last issue of Notes: "In particular I appreciated your homily. I'm saving it as it is also apropos for people struggling to discern how they will use their wealth in ways that are redemptive. Practicing resurrection for people of wealth may (and perhaps should be) - as you well know - a "wrenching, disorienting, frightening" experience. Money can bind us but, as you suggest, the gospel seeks to unbind us and free us to chase resurrection and find our self in our calling." I am grateful to know of the ways in which my various missives help with your good and diverse efforts in the world.

I also received an important note of correction from Bill Hamm, President of The Foundation for Independent Higher Education in Washington DC, who wrote to let me know that my claim that there are "five Norwegian-American colleges" in the country is inaccurate. Waldorf College in Forest City, Iowa is also proudly Norwegian in its heritage – and deserves a spot at the banquet table of Norwegian delights! I stand humbly corrected!

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

>>Seeing things whole<<

As part of our transition work between my first and second year at Augsburg, we have become engaged with the work of an organization called “Seeing Things Whole” (STW) (www.seeingthingswhole.org), which was founded at Andover-Newton Theological Seminary, in partnership with the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership. Seeing Things Whole provides an organizational framework for planning and problem-solving that is grounded in a compelling and evocative theology of institutions.

The groundwork for the program is found in an essay entitled *Toward a Theology of Institutions* (Greenleaf Center, 2003, by David Specht, with Richard Broholm). The authors extend Robert Greenleaf’s call for a servant-leadership perspective on organizational life that could be relevant to any type of institution – secular or religious. The results are engaging and practical, tangibly grounded in organizational life and clearly informed by theological perspective. Here is the background...

There are five theological premises for those who would hold organizations in trust:

- (1) Institutions are part of God’s order
- (2) God loves institutions
- (3) Institutions are living systems
- (4) Institutions are called and gifted, they are fallen, and they are capable of being redeemed
- (5) Faithfulness in institutional life is predicated upon the recognition and management of multiple bottom lines

Within this theological framework, there are three dimensions of organizational life which are interdependent:

- (1) The identity dimension, primarily concerned with healing, wholeness and the well-being of the gathered life of the organization. This dimension primarily involves those who work for an organization. This dimension is preoccupied with how the organization structures the character and quality of its gathered life, how it creates an environment that reflects its core values, and how it draws members of its workforce toward their fullest potential. If this dimension is healthy, the organization will be values-based; populated with workers who resonate with its values; illustrating organizational values through its private and public lives; and self-reflective about the links between values and work.
- (2) The purpose dimension, primarily focused outward with a compelling vision and the corollary critique that recognizes dissonance between the “is” and the “ought.” This dimension primarily involves those who interface with an organization from its external environment – customers, clients, suppliers, competitors, and the natural and human communities in some way affected by the organization. This dimension is preoccupied with the clarity of mission and vision, the processes by which goods and services are produced or offered, marketing, and service to the individuals and communities it engages. If this dimension is healthy and faithful, the organization will have a mission that serves real needs in the world; accountability to the world for advancing its mission; and a commitment to service that empowers others and makes them less dependent on the organization.

- (3) The stewardship dimension, primarily focused on leadership that serves, empowers, facilitates and persuades. This dimension primarily involves management, owners and trustees. This dimension is preoccupied with how the organization secures and uses its various resources (people, funds, etc.) in order to sustain its viability while balancing the needs of its stakeholders and the wider community. If this dimension is healthy, the organization will make decisions and take action with confidence in the long-term sustainable future of all stakeholders; its governance will be inclusive; and structures and systems will evolve to sustain the capacity of the organization to use its unique gifts in service to the world.

Within and between these dimensions of organizational life, STW allows institutions to understand and practice their work with a perspective of wholeness and interrelatedness. Organizational dilemmas, then, become opportunities for stakeholders of the organization to hold its needs in trust. There are additional lenses within each of the dimensions (see the website for more information) that help organizations gain a deeper understanding of their critical issues and potential ways to respond.

Here at Augsburg, we have used the STW framework to think about the transition between the first year of my presidency full of promise and energy and the continuing work that we must do to sustain the mission-grounded energy and momentum even as we address pressing and sometimes contentious issues. The gathered life of Augsburg, then, is held in trust as we focus on this transition. Through the STW process, we focused attention through a specific lens – governance. Our leading question was “How to hold our organization in trust, balancing contending interests that grow from mission, vision and core commitments?” Our responses to that question ranged from provocative claims about power to assumptions about contending interests to issues of distrust and mistrust to strategies related to communication and participation. We walked away from our conversation with a clearer understanding of our central issue and some concrete ways of responding. Reflective practice, at its best!

>>Sanctuaries: Religion and Public Life in America<<

My teacher and friend, Martin Marty was on campus last week as our commencement speaker and an honorary degree recipient. It was a privilege to have him here and I was reminded of the important lessons he has taught me (and so many of us) about religion and American public life. Here are some reflections I’ve compiled that show how Marty’s perspectives have informed my own views.

I once heard Princeton theologian Cornel West indict our society and culture for their many failings and make the claim that he was not optimistic about the future; he saw no evidence for optimism. But then he paused and said that he had hope...it is in the spirit of hope that I challenge all of us to imagine the wonder of genuine common purpose and interfaith action in pursuit of a more humane and just world.

There is a wonderful opening section in Norman MacLean’s short story, “A River Runs Through It” that captures one of my guiding assumption about religion and American public life: “In our family, there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing. We lived at the

junction of the great trout rivers in western Montana, and our father was a Presbyterian minister and a fly fisherman who tied his own ties and taught others. He told us about Christ's disciples being fishermen, and we were left to assume, as my brother and I did, that all first-class fishermen on the Sea of Galilee were fly fishermen and that John, the favorite, was a dry-fly fisherman."

MacLean goes on to explain that the religious instruction he received from his father always began with the first question in the Westminster Catechism: "What is the chief end of man?," to which MacLean and his brother would answer in unison, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever," and often things would end right there because that pretty much summed it up. Fishing was a metaphor for life in the world glorifying God.

My own history bears some resemblance to MacLean's perspective on the links between religion and life in the world. My father is a Lutheran minister, and I am the eldest of six children in the family. I learned about religion in the churches and parsonages of my youth – and there were many. I remember those many churches – there were seven or eight before I left home – and their range of styles – from Gothic grandeur to a simple country frame building. But I don't remember them simply as buildings; I remember them as sanctuaries, in the broadest sense of that word. I remember them as places (safe places, harbors, sacred spaces) in which I learned important lessons, lessons of faith that defined for me a life in the world – in our family there was no clear line between religion and the lives we were called to live in the world.

My lessons are tied to religion – my religion – but I believe that these lessons also are of value to all of us who live together in the world. And this claim leads to my second assumption: religion is a constructive and meaningful force in our world. To believe that my sanctuary lessons have relevance to others in the world, I must also believe that religion is a force for good, not simply in the sectarian settings and communities where it is practiced, but also in the wider society. I borrow Patrick Keifert's notion that we must engage in a public evangelism, a genuine belief that the lessons of faith we have learned have meaning and relevance to those who may not share my belief because those lessons are at their core life-giving, inclusive, human lessons.

Cornel West further has suggested that the aim of religion is precisely this sort of life-affirming force, dedicated to bringing people together in pursuit of common purposes. This is not to deny the historical particularities of our own religious communities; this is where we learn our lessons of faith, where we become parts of communities of memory and meaning, where our sanctuaries offer us a sacred space to learn and to pray and to worship. But this understanding of the aim of religion also carries with it the strong claim that these lessons of faith have relevance in a world so in need of the substance of those lessons, so in need of healing and wonder and community and common purpose, so in need of prayer and meditation, so in need of worship and reverence, so in need of forgiveness and grace, so in need of a peace that passes all human understanding.

Paul Woodruff in his *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue* suggests that reverence is the virtue that is present in human experience that allows each of us, no matter our faith tradition, to admire and learn lessons from the faiths of others. He points out how reverence is present in the most ordinary of circumstances – in rituals, relationships, and education – and he

suggests that if we want peace in the world, the faithful will not pray that others would share their beliefs, but rather that they would share a commitment to reverence.

So, in the spirit of reverence that guides my two assumptions: that religion and life in the world are inextricably bound together, and that the aim of religion is to be a force for common good in the world – please allow me to share just a few lessons of faith from my own tradition that perhaps offer a glimpse of the sorts of lessons each of us, all of us, find in our sanctuaries that have relevance and meaning for our common public lives... (I've listed the scriptural passages if you want to review the stories!)

The Road to Emmaus – [Luke 24] – in this story we find several lessons of relevance to life in the world:

- The company of strangers who join us on the roads of our lives may well be the sources of wisdom, of salvation even, that we so need – how do we make ourselves available to strangers, how do we seek them out, welcome them in, learn about their needs and aspirations, develop a language and conceptual framework to embrace strangers in our lives?
- At table, in fellowship, as part of a community, our eyes are opened to who we really are, to what we have been called to do, to a plan for the world that transcends human imaginations and machinations. Are we willing to sit together, to share the meal of fellowship and sustenance, to be open to the lessons of grace and meaning that come from such intimacy and connection?

The good Samaritan [Luke 10: 29-37] – the lessons of the story:

- I once stood outside my small church in Indiana with a fellow congregation member, where we were approached by a stranger who asked for financial help to fix her car. I gave the woman some money and after she left, the man I was with asked me why I had “fallen” for her story. Why did I give, he asked? Because she asked for help, I queried back? Or perhaps because I could imagine myself in that same position – and I would want someone to help me?
- Such a difficult challenge in our complex world, but the lessons of the parable are about common need...and common aspiration
- Why is the Samaritan the only one who will help (he was not supposed to be the hero in a story told to Jews and early Christians)?
- It is about recognizing our common burdens, and then recognizing our common aspirations as those burdens are resolved and shared, looking for what we have in common and what we share, not just what separates us
- So much of our lives seem to be spent worrying about what separates us that we overlook the incredible richness of our common needs and aspirations

The feeding of the 5000 [Mark 6: 30-44] – the lessons of this story:

- Rest is important in doing the Lord's work in the world!
- The disciples wanted Jesus to accept their solutions: Self-help, throw money at the problem – these are not acceptable ways to respond...
- Instead, Jesus says, break the group into companies of 50 and 100, redistribute the bread and fish, and a miracle may happen – the loaves and fishes previously hidden are shared when you know who you are sharing with

- Miracle is in the lens of abundance, rather than the lens of scarcity
- Do we have the imagination and resolve to not let scarcity dominate our perspectives? Do we take good care of the gifts we have been given, see stewardship as a way of life, not just holding on to what we have, but using it well in service to a greater good? This is the miracle of this story.

To forgive, divine [Matthew 18: 21-35] – lessons abound here:

- I once was leading an adult class on Luther’s Small Catechism and when we got to the petition in the Lord’s Prayer about “forgive my trespasses as I forgive...” Dorothy chimed in, saying “This is all well and good, but sometimes I just can’t forgive!” Perhaps all of us know this feeling.
- Essayist Anne Lamott tells us: “I went around saying for a long time that I am not one of those Christians who is heavily into forgiveness – that I am one of the other kind.”
- Forgiveness may be the most difficult lesson to learn and perhaps the most important – so many of us are like Dorothy – or perhaps like Peter – unable to forgive or slavish to rules about forgiveness
- Are we able to live as forgiven people who forgive freely and courageously and graciously? Are we willing to face the pain and difficulties as we seek to find the peace that comes with lives of forgiveness – lives like Jesus, Muhammad, Moses, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and countless other prophets and saints who show us a path for genuine life in the world?

Consider the various sanctuaries in our midst: a Lutheran church (where we may learn how Martin Luther sinned boldly so that grace might abound!), a Jewish synagogue (where we may learn to “be still and know that God is present with a plan for our lives”), a Muslim community center (where we may learn that God makes promises to his people, and that the covenant of divine promise offers us a pattern for our lives together), or a Buddhist temple (where we may learn that peace is a simple and profound claim on human existence). As we explore these and so many other sanctuaries, may ours be a journey of reverence, of openness to the lessons of faith we shall discover in those sacred places, and may it also be a journey of resolve that our common efforts as people of faith will be to share with each other in this public evangelism, this joint project to bring the lessons of faith grounded in our religious communities to bear on the well being of the world we share.

My teacher and friend, Martin Marty, has suggested that one way to imagine this sort of public evangelism is to borrow William James’ wonderful phrase, “a sort of republican banquet” as a metaphor for how reverence brings people of faith together, at a banquet table to share in the fellowship of the faith lessons we have to learn from each other. Will you come to the table?

PRACTICE THIS

>>Brands: promise or reality?<<

We have been working on a branding campaign for the college during the past year and are about to launch a new experience and image program. Entitled the Augsburg Promise, the campaign has focused lots of attention on the promises we make to various audiences – students, neighbors, alumni, and so forth – with a keen eye on how well we keep our promises.

A recent article in *Preservation* (November/December 2006) entitled “Promised Lands: What We Do We Lose When the Promotion of Places Tampers With Reality?” (by Christina Le Beau) hits hard on the need to be vigilant about links between promises and reality. Reflecting on an upcoming trip to Vermont, Le Beau predicts what she will encounter on her visit based on what promotional brochures have promised. Though she hopes that image and reality align in her experience, she points to many instances where such alignment is fragile at best. The veneer of gentility and refinement associated with New Orleans was ripped apart when Katrina witnessed to the vast impoverished communities in that city ravaged by hurricane winds and broken levees. Las Vegas once positioned itself as a place for families (remember), now slinking back to its “What happens here, stays here” slogan.

But more to the point, Le Beau focuses on how our real places, places where we live and build communities, can be cast in an unreal light, and how the promises of promotion hurt not only those who visit not knowing that the image does not match reality, but also those of us in that place who are left demoralized and disengaged by unrealistic promises.

Le Beau suggests that the hope for linking promise with reality comes not by hiring better marketing consultants (at least not to begin with!), but by asking local communities what makes them distinctive – what promises do they make and keep – and then marketing the reality, knowing that it will draw those who are intentional about the experience they expect, the promises they would ask us to keep. She points to civic tourism and ecotourism movements as examples of marketing places in authentic and genuine ways. People want to visit places not just steeped in reality, but marketed that way. “Places we all might want not to just visit but to live in.”

Is your place such a place?

>>Serendipity and spontaneity<<

We are completing two new capital projects here at Augsburg and have two renovation projects underway, which means that I spend a good bit of time thinking about space and how it is designed, organized and furnished to serve the needs of our students. I have returned time and again to my reflections in Notes 5:3, February 2004, which are more and more relevant!

“... I find myself focused on the gifts of location and place. Two interrelated themes are in my thoughts.

I am intrigued, first, by the concept of serendipity. A recently published volume by the late sociologists, Robert Merton and Elinor Barber (*The Travels and Adventures of Serendipity: A Study in Sociological Semantics and the Sociology of Science*, 2004), opened my eyes to the origin of the concept and its evolution as an explanatory tool in science. Merton and Barber describe

how, in contemporary popular culture, serendipity has become a way to describe a talent for being lucky – a definition that helps a suspicious democratic public explain away elitism. The book itself, however, offers a fascinating tale of the source of the concept and helps to correct our misconceptions of serendipity. The folk tale of “The Three Princes of Serendip” tells a story of how the accidental spurs insight. The authors suggest that the process of examining the accidental is itself serendipity – and through that process knowledge is gained. What a wonderful way of describing what happens in a college. Our accidental discoveries become the essence of our knowledge.

As we plan space for our college, what we are seeking to do is create opportunities and contexts for serendipity to occur. The way that lounge furniture is arrayed, the informal arrangements of tables and chairs at the intersection of classroom hallways, the gathering places alongside busy sidewalks become opportunities for accidental interactions to be the source of insight, for relationships to be born, for conversations to occur, for ideas to be hatched.

In a similar vein, I also wonder about how a plan for space helps to encourage what I call spontaneous engagement, those rare moments when there are no plans, no predetermined outcomes, no stake in accomplishing an objective. I have been worrying lately about how my leadership team can be more present at events and gatherings on campus, thus illustrating our common interest in students and faculty and the wider community. We occasionally review upcoming events and essentially make assignments to ensure that one or more of us will be at key gatherings. This makes me crazy (as important as it may be) because the wonder of a small college community should be the opportunities we have to interact and participate together in a wide variety of community activities - spontaneously. Planning for our presence takes away the surprise and wonder of spontaneous engagement.

Though we all are busy with significant institutional projects, what I have come to see is that those moments of spontaneous engagement point to some essential characteristics of a healthy community. They are *moments of trust* – where a student trusts me enough to cross over the natural divide between him or herself and the president (or where I trust enough to do the same!). They also are *moments of personal and institutional growth* because when we engage each other we share something of ourselves, risking that the other will do the same, and in our engagement we create something more than ourselves – the work of abundance. Finally, they are *moments of genuine love* because when we trust and grow through such engagements we are expressing a regard for each other that is at the heart of healthy relationships. I can plan to attend an athletics event, but my love for this institution is genuinely expressed when I engage the parent seated next to me about how her daughter is doing in a tough chemistry class.

How does space help to create and sustain trust, growth and love in our community? That is the accidental dynamic we are exploring in our search for insight about how best to plan and steward the facilities, grounds and location that have been bequeathed to us. Our emerging ideas and practices are the stuff of leadership in this important aspect of our college’s life.”

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

Garrison Keillor has a new bookstore here in the Twin Cities – a must visit when you come to town! On a recent trip there I picked up two volumes on city life by James Howard Kunstler: *The City in Mind: Notes on the Urban Condition* (The Free Press, 2001), and *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape* (Touchstone, 1993).

I'm tracking on a few helpful blogs and website on civic engagement. Check out Peter Levine's site at www.peterlevine.ws, which has a weblog, bibliographic resources, and links to Levine's work at CIRCLE (the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement), which he directs. Also, Smart Communities, guided by Suzanne Morse of the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, at <http://smartcommunities.typepad.com>. There are many more, of course – do you have favorites?

>>Simple as your ABCs?<<

Here is a playful poem with a pointed message – for your summer reflections.

"A Primer of the Daily Round" by Howard Nemerov, from *New and Selected Poems*. © University of Chicago Press. Reprinted with permission.

A Primer of the Daily Round

A peels an apple, while B kneels to God,
C telephones to D, who has a hand
On E's knee, F coughs, G turns up the sod
For H's grave, I do not understand
But J is bringing one clay pigeon down
While K brings down a nightstick on L's head,
And M takes mustard, N drives into town,
O goes to bed with P, and Q drops dead,
R lies to S, but happens to be heard
By T, who tells U not to fire V
For having to give W the word
That X is now deceiving Y with Z,
 Who happens just now to remember A
 Peeling an apple somewhere far away.

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

- A view from the balcony
- Meeting the needs of strangers

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