

NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Twenty, Number Five (June 2019)

"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, friends. I have just returned from a lovely week in (warm, even hot!) France, having attended a meaningful global conference on academic freedom and institutional autonomy in Strasbourg, followed by a few days in Paris. The rest of the summer is organized around welcoming Augsburg's largest entering class in history (which includes my son, Thomas!) and getting ready for the launch of our Sesquicentennial celebrations in September. I hope that you will find time in your busy lives for moments of reflective practice and renewal.

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

>>Called to do well and be good<<

I was asked earlier this year to write this short essay for *Advancing Philanthropy*, the magazine of the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP), for an issue on the ethics of our profession. You will recognize the themes I chose to write about as I continue to urge my colleagues to imagine the ethics of our work in a much broader context.

"The mission of the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) to promote "effective and ethical philanthropy" is inspiring, even as it challenges fundraising professionals to pursue in their work the sometimes challenging tensions between what it means to do well – that is, to meet our goals of raising funds to support the missions and causes of our organizations – while at the same time, to be good – that is, to live out the core ethical values and precepts found in the "AFP Code of Ethics."

Where do we experience these tensions? Perhaps it's when we are getting close to an important fundraising goal and we are tempted to count gifts that are restricted for other purposes. Or maybe it's when a relationship with a potential major gift donor is threatened when the donor's children question your motives.

So, how do we navigate these seeming tensions in our professional lives?

In my own career as a fundraiser and in my scholarship on the ethics of our profession, I have come to value a concept that I first learned from my faith tradition – a concept called vocation or what it means to be called to the work we do and the life we lead.

What does it mean to be called?

It is a holistic understanding of human life; it is about how we make a life. My calling includes my roles as a professional, a parent, a child and sibling, a citizen, and so on. All of these aspects of my vocation have meaning and purpose. Perhaps the most famous statement about this concept of a calling comes from the theologian Frederick Buechner, who writes that your calling is that place where “your deepest gladness meets the world’s most pressing needs.”

Though I believe that my call comes from God, I know that many of my fellow professionals do not share my faith tradition. That is why I have developed a more expansive understanding of vocation that focuses on the many sources of a call. Perhaps the call comes from your lived experience in the world or from a community of shared values or from your own conscience. In this way, your calling helps you to imagine your life as the integrated whole of your various roles – roles that combine to make a life.

This understanding of vocation or calling has several important themes.

First our vocation – our calling – may very well be found in the messy, mundane details of daily life. This not some sort of mysterious, supernatural phenomenon (though I might argue it can be a miracle!) Instead, we listen for our call in the everyday experiences and relationships that comprise our work and life

Second, our calling has a history, which unfolds like a story with twists and turns, where there is no one single destination but many stops on a life-long journey. The narrative quality of our vocations means that even if we don’t find success in one professional or personal venture, we still learn lessons and have experiences that shape our story.

Third, our vocation is not a solitary undertaking, but is inextricably bound up with those whose own callings complement and inspire ours. We are not in this alone.

And finally, there may come a time when the call you receive demands of you sacrifices the like of which you cannot imagine. Perhaps it is a surprising call to take up a controversial public role or to leave a safe job for one that will test your abilities. Our calls are not necessarily always upwardly mobile trajectories.

For me, this understanding of our vocation is about moral formation, helping us to live more authentically in the tensions of our lives – tensions like being both effective and ethical fundraisers. Instead of seeing these values in conflict, we live as whole individuals, navigating the tensions with a sense of purpose and direction.

So how do we learn to listen for our calls and to live out our vocations as effective and ethical fundraising professionals? Two simple exercises are a good way to begin.

Philanthropic autobiography

The late Robert Payton, founding director of the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University (now the Lilly School of Philanthropy), taught his many students the power of philanthropic autobiography in discerning your calling in the world. Philanthropic autobiography is an exercise that asks us to identify the people, the circumstances, the institutions, and the experiences in our lives that have taught us to be philanthropic. It then challenges us to connect that autobiographical material with our current philanthropic work and the rest of our lives – personal and professional.

In my own effort at philanthropic autobiography, I remembered a day when my dad and I drove from farm to farm in our community collecting contributions of grain from farmers as part of the Church World Service CROP Program. That day I was a grain gatherer and that day I also participated in the common work of philanthropy alongside the donors (the farmers), the brokers (the grain elevator operators) and the hungry of the world (the recipients of aid). Throughout my professional career, my moral compass has been informed by this understanding of my calling. I have practiced the common work of philanthropy by always seeking to honor and include all participants – my work as the professional fundraiser has been to facilitate the important roles of students, faculty and staff, board members and donors in the philanthropic community we share.

What is your philanthropic autobiography?

Finding your center

One of the great myths the world seeks to impose on us in our lives is the sense that we must learn to “balance” all of the competing claims we will face. The balanced life demands keeping work and family, private and public, personal and common in some sort of eternal symmetry. We long to find the balance in our lives that makes all right with the world. But this is a futile longing, as we all know and experience.

Instead, we must seek the centered life. Finding our center holds us in a different orbit, one where our core beliefs and values are a hub around which all of our various roles and commitments are arrayed.

I often tell the story of finding my own center as a father to two young children. Having them as my center did not mean that I didn't pursue my professional duties or my civic responsibilities. Instead it meant that my many important roles needed to honor my center. It wasn't always easy. A concrete example is how I managed all my travel as a fundraiser. The demands to travel increasingly took me away from my children at important times in their lives. It was only when I realized that the center of my life was my role as parent that I was able to arrange my travel so that I could be present when they needed me. The centered life is way to live into the inevitable tensions we face in our work.

What is your center?

As professional fundraisers, we are called to do well and be good. Following your calling means that effective and ethical fundraising is not two separate undertakings but an integrated and authentic life. This does not mean we will avoid the tensions in our work as fundraisers, but it does mean that we will navigate those tensions with a sense of purpose and direction found in philanthropic autobiography and in the centered life.”

>>Vocation and location again<<

I was honored to be asked to deliver a keynote address at a banquet celebrating the 100th anniversary of Central Lutheran Church in Minneapolis. It is our home church and also a faithful partner in ministry with Augsburg. The address (here sketched out in rough form) was accompanied by some wonderful historic slides of Central's life together over 100 years

“I am so grateful to be with you this evening as we continue our celebration of Central's 100th anniversary. In my remarks tonight, I want to weave together several scriptural, theological and experiential threads that I hope will both honor our first 100 years and at the same time point to our next century.

Growing up, I had (as the eldest son of a Lutheran minister) many opportunities to explore the various churches my dad served – small country churches, grand Lutheran cathedrals, suburban parishes – since then I have cultivated this abiding interest in these places we call church – I love narthexes and sacristies and sanctuaries; I love church offices and Sunday School rooms; I love church basements and kitchens and choir rooms – these are mystical, ordinary places – like this place.

Anton Bruckner, the great Austrian composer, wrote a series of liturgical choral anthems, including one that I have sung and heard sung at events just like this – moments of great celebration for churches – that anthem, *Locus iste*. *Locus iste a Deo factus est; Inaestimabile sacramentum; Irreprehensibilis est* – translated as: This is a place made by God, priceless mystery, beyond reproach.

Tonight I sing this glorious anthem in my heart and soul for this place – Central Lutheran Church – I sing of a place that God has made, a mystical, ordinary place, a place where God's people have gathered for 100 years to hear the gospel, to sing and to cry, to mourn and to celebrate, to break bread and to settle conflicts – and I invite you to join me for a few moments this evening to consider the people and the promise that give this place – our place, God's place – richness and meaning...

(Ephesians 2: 1-11) The apostle Paul knew a good bit about the people of the early Christian church – as his namesake I see my early adventures in exploring churches as parallel to his travels visiting and preaching to and counseling the small Christian communities in Rome and Philippi and Corinth – he was fascinated by these people and he knew them well.

As is obvious in our reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians...Paul had these good folks dead to rights – the way of the flesh, the way you have lived your lives, has been redeemed by the mercy of our God through his son, Jesus Christ – your sins have been forgiven by the grace of God and now you have the blessings of life in the spirit.

Think of what Paul is doing here for the Christians at Ephesus – he's recounting in summary fashion the story of their lives, a story that has all sorts of ups and downs, a story of the flesh and the spirit in a tension that we all know well.

One of the dangers of a celebration such as ours here today is that we focus only on how far we've come, how much we've done, the blood, sweat and tears of our ancestors on whose shoulders we have the privilege to minister in this place – but Paul's got us dead to rights, as well – he's got the rest of the story and he encourages us to testify not just to the good, the gracious, the spiritual – but also to the ways in which the flesh still distracts us from our calling, from doing the Lord's work.

Martin Luther saw in Paul's insightful story-telling some powerful theological themes – *simul Justus et peccator* is a remarkable way to describe the tension in which God's people here at Central live day in and day out – justified, redeemed through grace by faith alone, but still in the world and vulnerable to the ways of the flesh.

So how do we move forward, living in this tension, simultaneously saved and sinner?

I once had a Board chair at Augsburg whose entire career had been in real estate – and he had his real estate rules (which applied to all sorts of situations!) – “time kills all deals” and “location, location, location” – I want to add my own real estate rule tonight – my rule for God's real estate, it's all about “vocation and location”!

What does it mean? Called a “place” – not only geography, but a network of relationships and values and commitments – a deeply Lutheran concept – theological and practical (John 1: 14)

Learned these lessons at Augsburg – a 21st century urban settlement – Stegner on boomers and stickers – we always live in the tension between using a place up or making it better

Central has a remarkable saga of living out its call in this place – those of us who walked the warren of rooms in the lower level of the old church building witnessed evidence to a church that found ways to be relevant to the needs of its community – recording studios, parlors, kitchens, furniture from every era dating back to our founding

A saga, however, is not meant to serve nostalgia – it is meant to chart a path forward

So what are the threads in Central's saga that now come together in our 100th year to show us the way? What is God calling us to be and do in this time and in the place? What is God up to in our midst?

In this place, God's people lift up for all to see not only our aspirations to live faithful lives, but our honest and candid admission that we can't do it alone, we stand here seeking to be little Christs to the world, but we need Christ to keep us strong, to show us the way, to pluck us from the deep waters when we don't believe enough – Lord, I believe, help my unbelief, we pray...

And God's answer to our prayer is sure and steadfast – it is the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the promise of the life of discipleship...

And so we turn this evening to the promise of the gospel as recounted so powerfully in Mark's story of the feeding of the 5000 – God's redeemed yet sinful people in this mystical and ordinary place turn to the story that offers us a promise for our future...(Mark 6: 30-44)

- Allow me to lift out of this familiar story a few ideas that may not be apparent to those of us who have heard it again and again:
 - An aside on the need for rest and time alone

- Set the scene
- Role of disciples – just like us!
- Send these people home – self-help
- Throw money at the problem
- Jesus’ response: collect the bread and fish, break into companies of 50 and 100, redistribute....feed the hungry...there is plenty left over
- Here is the miracle (Wendell Berry on “reading scripture out of doors”) – trust and personal attention means that people are willing to share what they heretofore were hiding for themselves

This is the promise of abundance in a world of scarcity – this is the promise into which we are called as Christ’s people in this place – this is the promise of grace and hope and peace that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord

Think about what this promise means to our lives of faith and discipleship as we enter our 101st year as God’s people in this place:

- The abundance of this place – a place that has served this city for 100 years with imagination and resolve and courage and faithfulness – an abundant place – what more do we have to give to live abundantly in this place?
- The abundance of our people – the many gifts (loaves of bread and fish) that have been shared for the sake of God’s work in the world – and yet what are we still hiding because it is hard to trust and believe?
- The abundance of the promise – what does it mean to be a community of abundance in a world of scarcity? Where others say there is not enough, we say there is more than plenty if we believe and bring resolve and courage and imagination to our efforts to feed the hungry, clothe the poor, meet the needs of strangers....

Allow me to suggest three ways in which our place, our people and God’s promise come together as we make sense of our vocation in this location in the 21st century, of our calling in this place, of what God calls us to be and do for the neighbor and the world God loves so much...

- An urban cathedral – three roles for a cathedral: symbolic (a beacon, carillon), religious (equipping practices of faith and mission) and civic (building and supporting community)
- A contemporary synagogue – a place that feeds souls and minds – a place that combines worship and learning (Douglas John Hall reference to the 21st century church)
- A public church – Martin Marty’s phrase to describe stepping outside the walls of our churches to accompany God’s people in their daily lives – linking faith to the causes and concerns they most value

Cathedral, synagogue and church - here are the threads of our saga at Central Lutheran – and together we will explore in the years ahead how our calling in this place, our vocation in this location, will proclaim to the world that God is faithful, that God is present in our midst, and that God calls us to love and serve our neighbors and all of creation with abundant hearts and minds and hands!

Locus iste a Deo factus est – this is a place that God has made for his faithful people – thanks be to God for 100 years of discipleship and the promise of life abundant and eternal in the years to come.

PRACTICE THIS

>>Culture change<<

As we pursue our strategic planning work at Augsburg, we have more and more been drawn to the important work of culture change as a parallel effort to successful planning. As management guru Peter Drucker once said, “culture eats strategy for breakfast!” That said, paying attention to culture is essential to ensuring that our strategy will be successful in living out our mission.

A helpful article in the *Harvard Business Review* (January-February 2018) entitled “The Leader’s Guide to Corporate Culture: How to Manage the Eight Critical Elements of Organizational Life” (B. Groysberg, J. Lee, J. Price and J. Cheng) has been our guide in these culture conversations. The article is worth your time to explore the various forms of culture the authors identify – and to consider both current organizational culture and aspirations for culture change.

For our purposes, however, equally helpful has been the article’s naming of four levers for evolving a culture. They include:

- Articulate the aspiration: analyze current culture, engage conversations about how culture operates in the organization, and name how an aspirational culture might align with tangible problems and opportunities.
- Select and develop leaders who align with the target culture: leadership is critical to culture change, ensure that both new and existing leaders understand the important relationship with culture and strategic direction.
- Use organizational conversations about culture to underscore the importance of change: ongoing conversations are critical throughout the evolution of culture as shared norms, beliefs and implicit understandings shift.
- Reinforce the desired change through organizational design: though structure is not the only factor in successful culture change, it is critical to pay attention to how organizational design aligns with the aspirational culture.

As the authors conclude, “Leading with culture may be among the few sources of competitive advantage left to companies today. Successful leaders will stop regarding culture with frustration and instead use it as a fundamental management tool.” Amen.

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Cathedrals of pluralism<<

As we continue to pursue our various interfaith efforts at Augsburg, I am returning to key moments in my time here that have set a foundation for our work together. One such moment was at the conclusion of my first year, when our friend Eboo Patel, founder and leader of the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), delivered our commencement address. Entitled “The Faith Line: On Building the Cathedrals of Pluralism,” he concluded with these beautiful words:

“I believe each one of us is born with (a) cathedral inscribed in our soul. Our imaginations know its architecture intimately. Our hands recognize the cut of each stone. As J.M. Coetzee says, “All creatures come into the world bringing with them the memory of justice.” We Muslims call it being

born in a state of fitrah, naturally inclining towards that which is good, because God gave us the gift of his ruh, of his breath.

It is from breath that we get life, and from breath that we get song, and the most beautiful thing we do in cathedrals is sing.

Earth is not always an easy place to imagine cathedrals, or to build them, or to fill them with song. There are times when you will feel like there is a conspiracy against your clarity; like the loneliness is freezing and the darkness is deep and the silence is unbreakable. Go back to your breath. Know its source. Know its purpose. Know that sometimes the order is upside down – that instead of going from imagination to building to song, you have to begin by singing.

And as you get accustomed to the sound of your own voice, you may discover it is not alone. You may discover that a group of strangers had gathered, and they are humming, harmonizing, taking your lead, singing along. You may realize that the darkness has been broken by a soft glow. You may know exactly where you are. You may look around and see stained glass, you may look up and find yourself staring into the forever spire of a majestic cathedral.

And then you will know the truth of the world of the poet Li-Young Lee: “You must sing to be found; when found, you must sing.”

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Sesquicentennials and thinking institutionally
- Big ideas!

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