

NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Twenty-Two, Number Six (August 2021)

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

NOTES FROM READERS

>>What you think<<

When I last wrote in June, it seemed full speed ahead for a return to normal, but here we are on the cusp of a new academic year and all of us are struggling with mask and vaccine mandates, the delta variant, and lots of uncertainty about what the fall will hold – even as we have welcomed students, faculty, and staff back to campus. In the midst of this liminal space – this time when we know what we’ve been through but can’t see all that is ahead – there is perhaps no more urgent moment for our reflective practice, for our thoughtful engagement with each other as we navigate these still convulsive times.

As we conclude the 22nd year of these Notes, I celebrate the community that has been formed (even if virtually) around our shared commitments to ensure that our reflection and our practice are integrated and focused on the pressing issues of our time.

Stay strong, my friends!

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

>>Gravity and grace<<

When I was in graduate school at the University of Chicago Divinity School (a long time ago!), I had the privilege of witnessing the teaching and preaching of Lutheran theologian Joseph Sittler. Professor Sittler was, at that point, blind, but I don’t know that I’ve ever since known someone with such “insight” about the church, the world, and our calls as faithful people.

A few years back, some of Dr. Sittler’s students pulled together a collection of some of his writings, entitled *Gravity and Grace: Reflections and Provocations* (Augsburg Fortress, 2004). I have recently uncovered the volume again and want to share just a couple of passages that have resonated for me at this point in my life – more than 40 years since I first met this remarkable man.

On preaching the parables

“I’ve preached the parables for fifty-five years now, and I’m sure that I haven’t reached the bottom: in fact, I’ve begun to doubt that there is a bottom. Every generations reads those parables over and over again in terms of its own questions, and in every case the freshness, the shock of Jesus’s teaching, rocks us over and over again. There have been at least ten new books on the parables in the past two or three years; why is that? Not because the parables have to be put into modern English. No matter what kind of English they are in, you can’t reduce their puzzling depth.

Take the old Jewish father, reared traditionally, who does what was an incredible thing in a Jewish family: he runs down the road to meet his son who had demanded his part of the boodle and gone off. And now the son comes, full of pot as it were, up the road; and the old Jewish father does a shocking thing that reversed the traditional reverential distance between father and son. He leaves the religious dignity of his role as head of the family and rushes down the road. He seizes the child and calls over his shoulder. ‘Put on a roast. Get him a ring for his finger and a garment.’

Every Jew who read that said, ‘Come on, that’s no way for a Jewish father to behave.’

But that’s exactly the way Jesus wanted it. He said, ‘No, that isn’t the way it is in life; but I’m talking about the kingdom of God, not about the kingdom of Judea. Cherish your discomfiture.’

Do not therefore read the parables as slick little stories of the ordinary; read them rather as they turn the ordinary upside down.”

On aging

“Old age is a time of gathering diminishments. The maturation of hope and expectation into experience reverses in aging...”

We respond with a combination of rejoicing and melancholy. One would think that to talk of aging in true and realistic terms of diminishment, of passingness, would be depressing to the aged. Take it from me, the very opposite is the case. When I appear among my peers – old people who ask me sometimes to come because they know of my special interest in them – when I come and give them bits of the literature on aging, which I know by heart now and can recite to them, I find that they both weep and are consoled, because they know they are not alone. This is the human condition; this is the company toward membership in which we all are moving.

In Romans, the most mature of Paul’s epistles, he says, ‘If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s’ (Romans 14: 8). Period! That is the fundamental and absolute word of Scripture. But that word is immensely satisfying to old people. I never try to give any blueprints of eternity or heaven or eternal life, since by definition it is utterly impossible.

I think instead of trying to answer all the questions about death, we ought to follow the example of Paul and the New Testament and say, ‘Eye has not seen nor ear heard’; ‘By faith we are saved.’

By faith we are saved.”

>>The new normal?<<

I write a column for our university magazine and penned this reflection for our summer issue on what normal looks like in these times. You can find the magazine here:

<http://www.augsburg.edu/now/>

“As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and plan for our return to campus for our 152nd academic year at Augsburg, I am often asked what we have learned during the past 16 months that will be part of a “new normal” for our community.

And certainly there is much that we have learned about the use of technology for teaching and learning, and for doing our administrative work – technology that will be an abiding and effective tool for the ways we work into the future. We also have learned important lessons about public health and not taking for granted our individual and common well-being. And then there are lessons about the fragility of our economic lives and the need to be laser-focused on our mission as we make decisions about revenue and expenses.

But perhaps the most important and striking lesson we learned during the pandemic is that all of the work we have done over the past few years to chart a strategic path for Augsburg – work that culminated in the creation in fall 2019 of *Augsburg150: The Sesquicentennial Plan* – provided us with a framework for both navigating through these unprecedented times and for pursuing a sustainable future for our university. In other words, our planning deliberations, grounded in Augsburg’s mission to educate students to be “informed citizens, thoughtful stewards, critical thinkers, and responsible leaders,” got it right as we named our highest aspirations and our strategic priorities.

In particular, I am proud of the vision we cast for our future, which says that “As a new kind of urban, student-centered university, we are educating Auggies as stewards of an inclusive democracy, engaged in their communities and uniquely equipped to navigate the complex issues of our time.”

Consider the claims we make in this vision statement: to embrace our urban setting; to keep students at the center of our lives; to pursue democratic engagement; and to equip our students to take on the most complex problems we all face. And honor those vision claims we did as we lived through the pandemic: responding to the many needs of our students and neighbors as we kept each other safe and healthy; focusing on the flexibility our students required as they pursued their education primarily on-line; working together as a community of faculty, staff, and students to navigate an uncharted path; and leaning into the incredibly complex issues raised by the pandemic so that we might all learn from them.

As I begin my 16th year as Augsburg’s 10th president, I am so proud of our community and excited about the future we will create together. It may not be normal, but it will be grounded as always in our mission and vision.”

PRACTICE THIS

>>Fundraising and spirituality<<

The late Father Henri Nouwen is an inspiration to many of us in many aspects of our lives – our worship, our prayer life, our commitment to radical hospitality, and so forth. I recently uncovered

(lots of that going on!) his *A Spirituality of Fundraising* (Upper Room Books, 2010), which resonates so deeply with my own beliefs about the fundraising vocation. Here are a few insightful passages:

Fundraising as Ministry

“From the perspective of the gospel, fundraising is not a response to a crisis. Fundraising is, first and foremost, a form of ministry. It is a way of announcing our vision and inviting other people into our mission. Vision and mission are so central to the life of God’s people that without vision and without mission we lose our way. Vision brings together needs and resources to meet those needs. Vision also shows us new directions and opportunities for our mission. Vision gives us courage to speak when we might want to remain silent.

Fundraising is proclaiming what we believe in such a way that we offer other people an opportunity to participate in our vision and mission. Fundraising is precisely the opposite of begging...

Fundraising is also always a call to conversion. And this call comes to both those who seek funds and those who have funds...[W]e are drawn together by God, who is about to do a new thing through our collaboration.”

May it be so!

>>All well and good<<

I have recently been asked to join a small group of fundraising practitioners and scholars to explore possible revisions to the Code of Ethics for the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP). It is an honor to be in these conversations as we consider the relevance of our code for this moment. In all of this exploration, however, I continue to believe that this “case” for the ethics of the fundraising profession (originally drafted in 2014) stands as a guide to whatever we conclude should be included in the code.

ALL WELL AND GOOD: A Case for the Ethics of Philanthropic Fundraising

The premise

- Society’s most deeply held values are expressed in the work of nonprofit organizations.
- Philanthropic support for these organizations thus is critical to a vital nonprofit sector and healthy democracy.
- Those charged with raising this support – both professional fundraisers and other paid and volunteer organizational leaders – thus have dual obligations: to effective fundraising to support mission-based organizations and to ethical practices consistent with mission-based values and the demands of serving the public trust.
- The Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) has long stated its commitment to ethical and effective fundraising.
- It now is vital that this dual claim - that we must simultaneously do well and be good – be proclaimed as central to the work of philanthropic fundraising on behalf of the public goods we serve and support.

The logic

- The AFP mission statement aspires to promote fundraising practice that is both ethical and effective in service to the public trust and a healthy democracy
- The obstacles to the mission are many: from messy scandals that taint us all to public perceptions that fundraisers are used car salespeople or pickpockets.
- Beyond scandals and misperceptions, there also is the reality that the work of philanthropic fundraisers often involves matters of personal relationships, intimate knowledge and financial resources – all sources of potential trespass – and that the work of fundraising also extends to other organizational leaders (both paid and volunteer) who may not be aware of the links between effective and ethical practices.
- The claim that we can do well and be good at the same time first requires a reframing of the work of philanthropic fundraising.
- Philanthropic fundraisers (and other nonprofit leaders) serve the public good – they are, in that way, public servants. The work they do serves causes that reflect society’s most deeply-held values – education, health, justice, environmental well-being, vital arts and culture, and so on.
- The organizational missions fundraisers help promote and support thus are critical to our ability as a society to achieve our highest aspirations.
- *If our fundraising is not effective*, then our highest public values may languish.
- *If our fundraising is not ethical*, then our highest public values will be tainted by misbehavior, again threatening our ability to further those values.
- *And thus, we embrace the inextricable links between effective and ethical fundraising on behalf of the public trust.*
- For more than 50 years, the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP), formerly the National Society of Fundraising Executives (NSFRE), has been vigilant and focused in its commitment to ensuring that its member fundraisers live up to the highest ethical standards. The self-regulation of the profession by its membership has aimed at securing the public trust.
- That self-regulation has evolved to a dual focus: on ensuring that ethical principles and standards for practice set a high bar for professional behavior, and at the same time, offering a vision of individual and common professional character.
- We believe that our commitments to ethical and effective fundraising must be embraced by all who seek to serve the public trust through non-profit, mission-based organizations.
- To that end, we invite all those engaged in philanthropic fundraising to embrace the commitments of AFP members, who are guided in their ethical decision-making by the AFP Code of Ethical Principles and Standards, which in turn is grounded in a set of values that fundraisers aspire to honor in their lives and work.
- We contend that those engaged in effective and ethical fundraising aspire to: observe and adhere to the AFP Code and all relevant laws and regulations; build personal confidence and public support by being trustworthy in all circumstances; practice honesty in relationships; be accountable for professional, organizational and public behavior; be transparent and forthcoming in all dealings; and be courageous in serving the public trust.
- These values are at the heart of our public character as those engaged in philanthropic fundraising – and essential to our doing both well and good. We are committed to

supporting the continued growth of all our members and their organizations in ethical understanding and practice – on behalf of the public trust we have the privilege to serve.

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

Two books by University of San Diego sociologist Lisa Nunn have been important guides as we launched our 152nd academic year at Augsburg. [*33 Simple Strategies: A Week-by-Week Resource for Teaching First-Year and First-Generation Students*](#). (Rutgers University Press, 2018) provides practical tips for all of us striving to help our students succeed. And [*College Belonging: How First-Year and First-Generation Students Navigate Campus Life*](#). (Rutgers University Press, 2021) explores the various ways in which student are given the gift of belonging on our college campuses – while also pointing out the barriers we create to their receiving the gift.

I read many magazines (too many, probably), but have recently added a new subscription to *National Geographic History*, a rich resource for my life-long learning! Here is a link:
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/history-magazine>.

>>Forgetfulness<<

Perhaps this favorite poem by Billy Collins is fitting given my earlier focus on aging...

Forgetfulness

The name of the author is the first to go
followed obediently by the title, the plot,
the heartbreaking conclusion, the entire novel
which suddenly becomes one you have never read, never even heard of,

as if, one by one, the memories you used to harbor
decided to retire to the southern hemisphere of the brain,
to a little fishing village where there are no phones.

Long ago you kissed the names of the nine muses goodbye
and watched the quadratic equation pack its bag,
and even now as you memorize the order of the planets,

something else is slipping away, a state flower perhaps,
the address of an uncle, the capital of Paraguay.

Whatever it is you are struggling to remember,
it is not poised on the tip of your tongue
or even lurking in some obscure corner of your spleen.

It has floated away down a dark mythological river

whose name begins with an L as far as you can recall

well on your own way to oblivion where you will join those
who have even forgotten how to swim and how to ride a bicycle.

No wonder you rise in the middle of the night
to look up the date of a famous battle in a book on war.
No wonder the moon in the window seems to have drifted
out of a love poem that you used to know by heart.

Billy Collins, "Forgetfulness" from *Questions About Angels*. Copyright © 1999 by Billy Collins.

>>Subscription information<<

Subscriptions to Notes are simple to establish. Send me an email at augpres@augsborg.edu, ask to be added to the list, and the listserv will confirm that you have been subscribed to the list. Please feel free to forward your email versions of Notes to others—they then can subscribe by contacting me. The current and archive issues of Notes are available on-line at www.jgacounsel.com.

>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Trusting institutions - again
- Stories we tell to ourselves and each other
- Big ideas!
- How the gifts of our faith helped us navigate the pandemic!

(c) Paul Pribbenow, 2021