

## 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

Happy summer, friends. I am just back from an intense month of travel, which took me from Minneapolis to Oslo and Larvik, Norway; Derry and Belfast, Northern Ireland; Dublin, Ireland; San Francisco and Monterey; and Mackinac Island. Each stop (and the many hotel rooms!) brought experiences and learning that fill me with wonder and joy for the promise of our common lives - despite the many headwinds we know surround us. May your summer be a time of reflection and renewal as we head to a tumultuous fall!

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). 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

>>Abide in my love<<

Here is the sermon I preached at our University Baccalaureate Service in May.

*As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.*  
(John 15: 4)

It is a wonderful privilege to be with all of you this morning – our graduates, your families and friends; honored guests; our faculty, staff and Regents; other members of the Augsburg community; and the members of Trinity Lutheran Congregation, the congregation that brought Augsburg to Minneapolis 152 years ago!. This is a splendid day for all of us as we mark your great achievements and celebrate the mission-based work of Augsburg University. You, our graduates, are our epistles to the world, and we look forward with great anticipation to all of the ways in which your work, commitments, relationships and faith will make God's world an even more fair, just and compassionate place for all God's creatures.

This morning, I invite you to join me in exploring what it means that we are called to abide in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, just as he abides in us; this simple idea of thanksgiving for the gifts that abide, that are ours as they have been for generations of those who have gone before us as God's faithful people in this place we call Augsburg.

My inspiration for this morning is in our reading from John's gospel, where Jesus is teaching his disciples to consider what grounds them, what is the foundation for their work in the world. His point is clear. The call the disciples receive – to bring the gospel to the wider world – is a call from God to do God's work. Jesus is teaching his disciples – he is teaching us – how to make sense of our various calls as they fit into a larger plan – God's plan – already in motion in the world. Jesus is teaching us to abide – perhaps one of the most beautiful words in the English language – to abide in his love!

For those of us gathered here some 2000 years later, this notion of the call to abide may strike us as fairly obvious. It is, of course, the gift of our vocations, the gift at the heart of an Augsburg education. But, of course, the point is that it is a gift you will never stop receiving because it is at the heart of your life of faith and work; it is the gift of education and service.

I've long been a student of vocational journeys – even before I came to this “V-word” school. And I'm always looking for stories of how various people come to hear and follow a call. Perhaps the most compelling stories of vocational journeys are found in the lives of Jesus' disciples as depicted in the Christian scriptures. Think about Simon Peter and John and Thomas and Paul and Mary and Miriam and Tabitha– and all of those invited by Jesus to follow – in many ways, the disciples offer us a mirror to our own experiences of trying to live faithful lives in the world. I'm struck by how relevant their experiences of some 2000 years ago still are for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In these days after Easter, I wonder if we might find a few lessons from the disciples during Jesus' ministry and in the early days after his death and resurrection? In fact, what if we looked at the disciples as 1<sup>st</sup> century college students to see how their experiences might inform our own vocational reflection, our exploration of what it means to abide?

A few thoughts come to mind. First of all, what about that admissions pitch Jesus used? He's on the road, recruiting a few good souls for his entering class. Not much financial aid to offer. No fancy new campus buildings. And he wants them to drop everything – their families, their livelihoods, their homes – to follow him and become fishers of people! Are you kidding me? But Jesus wasn't kidding – and neither are

those of us who continue to believe that the call to be educated is above all a moral, and even a spiritual, call.

And then there are all those life lessons along the way. There are the classroom lessons, the good news often offered by Jesus in parables that cause the disciples to think differently, to see the world with fresh eyes. Sound familiar? And there also are experiences that can't help but challenge and shape their understanding of the world. The sick who want to be healed. The hungry who want to be fed. The dispossessed who want a voice. The religious who are scandalized. The women who wash Jesus' feet with their tears. I've seen many of you involved in similar experiences in our neighborhood, in the city, around the world.

And the disciples, like all of us, don't always know how to react to Jesus' curriculum and to the life-changing experience they are having. So what do they do but clamor for access and position (who is the greatest among the disciples)? They ask lots of questions (how many times must I forgive?) They gawk at miracles at wedding banquets. They run around trying to figure out how to feed 5000 hungry pilgrims. They chastise their teacher for wasting his time with sinners. They are frightened by storms (of all sorts) and they try to emulate their teacher walking on water – don't try this at home! – only to learn that their faith is not strong enough.

And then there are the final days in Jerusalem – days leading up to what they clearly believed would be a great commencement of Jesus' reign. Triumphant marches into the city – sort of like an honors convocation. Remarkable moments in upper rooms, where Jesus breaks bread and offers the cup, and washes their feet. Perhaps you've had meaningful lunches or dinners with your teacher or even the president! The frightening moments of prayer outside the city – why is our teacher crying out to God? Do teachers cry – are they human?

And then the violence begins. One of the disciples betrays Jesus – have you ever betrayed a teacher? One denies knowing Jesus. Now Jesus has been condemned. He is crucified. A few of us stand at the cross, grieving. And now he has died, taken away to be buried. And we are hiding away, hoping that we won't be next to die. This is not the education we expected. This is scary stuff. This is not what we were promised when Jesus called us to follow him.

And on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day the women come and report that the tomb is empty. There are witnesses to the resurrection. He is risen; risen indeed. Do you believe? And we realize that our education is just beginning; our vocational journey is ahead of us; God has a plan for us.

And so God does have a plan for us. Just as God had a plan for Peter and James and John; for Paul and Miriam and Tabitha – disciples all. A plan that our teacher(s) have prepared us to live out. A vocational plan, if you will – a call to love and serve. A call to follow even when – like for disciples throughout the ages – the stakes are high, the rewards perhaps uncertain, the terrain uncharted, the future murky at best. A call to abide in our awesome and loving God, You're not alone with these vocational feelings!

"Where I am going," Jesus tells his disciples in the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of the gospel of John, "you cannot come." But you will not be alone. I leave you this new commandment, by which the world will know that you are my disciples. "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." By this, they will know that you are mine, if you have love for one another. You are known by how you love – how you love God, each other, and God's good world. You're as ready as you're going to be. You've been called...abide in me and all will be well.

And now what?

A few years ago, my teacher, religious historian Martin Marty, remarked that faithful people are called to pay attention to the ways in which God is depicted in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures as generous, a generosity that runs counter to careful, rational, human calculations. From acts of creation to covenants with chosen people to presence in the midst of anguish and suffering, the character of God is marked with generous self-giving. And the appropriate response to this generous God is to give thanks and get to work – with glad and generous hearts. We too are called to abide in this generosity, in this love, and to follow our calls to be God's people and do God's work in the world.

What a rare gift it is for those of us who are part of the Augsburg community to have this gospel inspiration and challenge in our lives. In this community of faith and learning, we too acknowledge the gifts we have been given – the gifts of faith and education and community and service – even as we embrace our calls to abide in God's love and do God's work.

Here are three brief scenarios of how we might pursue our lives of abundance and generosity – scenarios meant not to tell us what to do but to encourage us to live faithfully, to abide in God's love and plan for the world as we go forth from this place.

*We abide in our place*

The concept of the abundance and generosity of place is much on my mind these days in our work at Augsburg, especially as we think about our campus and its place in the neighborhood. The original motto for Augsburg Theological Seminary and College also comes from John's gospel, the first chapter: "And the Word became flesh" – and so it does, here, in our midst, God with us. We believe that Augsburg University practices generosity most authentically when it lives as the Word made flesh – abiding, present, rooted, of service, faithful, in this place.

I have long believed that colleges are place-based communities – that is, they are native to a particular place, a particular environment, a particular set of values and practices that define us – and that means something for the way we live our lives, it means something for the ways in which we understand the abundance and generosity of place and values and presence. For Augsburg, in particular, our place in this neighborhood known as Cedar-Riverside clearly shapes the values and commitments we have as an academic institution focused on education for service,

The poet and essayist, Wendell Berry, whose work I return to often for guidance, writes these wise words in his prose poem, "Damage" – "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."

Berry's good advice is extended by the work of friend and Sabo Center colleague, the late Jay Walljasper, whose *The Great Neighborhood Book: A Do-It-Yourself Guide to Placemaking* (New Society Publishers, 2007) draws us into his "neighborhood love story" with lots of practical advice to live generously in our place.

A few of his principles of placemaking are relevant to our lives in this neighborhood and to the places where you will find yourselves in the days ahead:

- (1) The community is the expert (no, consultants aren't better than your neighbors when it comes to good ideas for our neighborhood!)
- (2) You can't do it alone (look for the right partners)
- (3) They'll always say "It can't be done" (take it as a good sign when others tell you why it won't work – you're probably on the right track)
- (4) You can see a lot by just observing (look for what works)
- (5) Make the connections (working together adds up to more than the sum of the parts)
- (6) Start with petunias (sweat the small things because they set the stage for real change)

- (7) Money is not the issue (a spirited community will find ways around financial obstacles)
- (8) You are never finished (managing after a project is finished will ensure that great places abide.)

Walljasper quotes Mexican novelist, Carlos Fuentes, who says “The citizen takes his city for granted far too often. He (and she) forgets to marvel.” In other words, we forget to abide!

Augsburg’s founding scripture from the Gospel of John: “The Word became flesh and lived among us” (or, as Eugene Peterson translates that passage, “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood!”) is both a theological and practical claim. How can we be even more generous in our whereabouts and place as the body of Christ here and now, as the Word made flesh in this place, as Augsburg University here in Cedar-Riverside and everywhere we are found?

And how will you take your lessons of abiding in this place into your work in the world? God calls you to abide, to love the places where you are planted, to be the Word made flesh here and now.

*We abide in our common lives*

Let us now turn to our lives together right here on campus and in the various communities and organizations where we daily live and work and bring our faith and gifts to bear. Allow me to confess, as a lifelong organizational person, we need all of our glad and generous hearts to help our communities and organizations – including our university – live up to their better natures! We need to discern and embrace our vocations to do God’s good and generous work – to abide in God’s love and our common purpose – in the midst of settings too often shaped by the demands of the world that are grounded in scarcity, bitterness and entitlement.

These days, I’m very excited about the work of our students who are responding to the needs of their fellow students with a Campus Cupboard and a Share Shop.

As our good colleague Harry Boyte reminds us, quoting an important hymn of the civil rights movement, “We Are the Ones We’ve Been Waiting For,” we are those called to abide in love and common purpose when the world says no. We have both that power and that obligation.

I've watched with great pride as many of you – our Augsburg students and faculty and staff recognize that many in our own community lack the basics of life – food, shelter, clothing, school supplies, books, and so much more. Instead of looking to others to respond to those needs, you stepped up and said, these are our friends and fellow travelers and they deserve to have what they need to succeed in this university. Imagination, generosity, hard work, and courage combined to create the Campus Cupboard and Share Shop as a way for all of us to share in the abundance of God's good creation and to ensure that the dignity of every fellow traveler is honored in this place.

We are called to lives of faith in this community and all of the communities and organizations where we live and work day in and out. How will you follow the call to common purpose by becoming a partner with your fellow citizens – by offering your all, your mind and knowledge and experience – to say yes, to be a co-creator of God's abundant intentions for God's people and world, to abide in love and grace for the sake of communities of memory and justice and compassion?

*We abide in our lives of faith alongside those who do not share our faith*

Finally, I challenge all of us to consider what it means to abide in our faith as we live in an increasingly complex world – with and alongside our neighbors who do not share our faith. We live in diverse communities where our various faiths demand of us a generosity of spirit and means, where we are called to lives together in support of healthy and just and compassionate communities. We are called by the God we know in Jesus Christ to say yes alongside those who know God in other ways – to proclaim that we have been freed for lives of generosity that abide in service to all God's good creation and creatures. While the world divides and polarizes and demonizes the other, we are called to find common purpose, to live as God intends, to live with and for each other.

I lift up the important interfaith work our community has engaged in recent years in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood (with special thanks to Pastors Babette and John and to Professors Najeeba Syeed and Matt Maruggi for their good leadership). We are convinced that dialogue and service must be interwoven in all we do. We believe that what we learn through interfaith dialogue with each other and our neighbors is something we must do each day. We are working hard on safety, youth activities, infrastructure plans, and economic development to model interfaith living within our neighborhood.

We abide in God's love – the call of our faith – when we learn and practice this sort of hospitality, this sort of interfaith living. Eboo Patel, who founded the Interfaith Youth Corps (now, Interfaith America) in Chicago – and who has been a regular visitor to Augsburg – challenged some of our Augsburg colleagues with this question in a presentation a few years back, a question we are addressing together here at Augsburg: "What is it in your experience of the cross of Jesus Christ that calls you, that calls us, into the generous work of interfaith living?" How will you answer?

On this very special day, we give thanks for all of you who follow your calls to abide in God's love. In this university, we have sought to educate you to live as those called to abide in place, in the promise of common lives and purpose, and in the complexities of diverse faiths and cultures. We now send you forth, equipped to be God's people and do God's work. This is the Word made flesh, God at work in the world, in the cosmos, in our daily lives. This is the good news. I am loved and I am called, and so I join the great and glad work of loving the world – even as we struggle with doubt and rejection; of loving my neighbor – knowing that the hungry and poor and dispossessed are God's special ones; and of loving God – thereby to abide in the One who first loved us. Thanks be to God. And God's people say together, Amen.

#### PRACTICE THIS

>>Well done, O faithful servants<<

I delivered the following remarks at our annual faculty retirement celebration earlier this spring. It was an especially poignant moment for our community as we marked the retirements of almost 25 colleagues whose impact on our common lives was remarkable. Definitely a turning point for our university.

"This is a bittersweet moment for our community as we say farewell to a significant number of our faculty colleagues as they retire and/or depart for new opportunities.

I often return to the words of poet Marge Piercy who, in her poem "To be of use," writes:

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.

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.

“...a person for work that is real.” Such are the colleagues we celebrate this afternoon – persons who jump into the work headfirst, who believe in the thing worth doing well, who embrace the work that is real.

Each of you has made a mark in our community, a mark that has changed us, made us better, and that will continue to make a difference in our lives for years to come.

I was thinking about my annual admonition to our new students to show up, pay attention, and do the work. Professor Groven commented after last week’s Honors Convocation that those three requirements go well beyond the sort of academic community we hope to create; they are, in fact, a most urgently needed ethic for our time. And, I would argue, they are an ethic that all of you have lived in your time at Augsburg.

You have shown up, you have been present, for each other, for your students, and for this university. You have had each other’s backs, you have fought hard to have a voice, you have adapted to a student body that reflects a changing society, you have kept the faith as members of this community. You have shown up time and again.

And you have paid attention, you have attended to what is most important in the work we do, the education of our students and the mission we seek to live out with all of its underlying values. Even when we have disagreed, I have never doubted your allegiance to Augsburg’s mission to educate students to be informed citizens, thoughtful stewards, critical thinkers, and responsible leaders. In fact, several of you were involved in restating that mission in 2010. You have helped all of us pay attention.

And you have done the work, work that often you were required to do, but also work that you embraced outside of your normal responsibilities to serve our students, strengthen our university, and seek justice in the world. It has been my distinct honor to witness all that you have accomplished in the work you have pursued. You have done the work.

And now, as we wish you Godspeed for your journeys ahead, we send you with our blessings and our deep gratitude for all that you have meant to this remarkable Augsburg community. I know that wherever you go, you will carry Augsburg with you, even as Augsburg bears the marks of your time in this community.”

>>And remembering a cherished friend<<

Our community lost one of its most engaged and generous alums a few months ago. At our celebration of his life, I offered these remarks - an example of the ways in which the presidential voice matters in the life of a university.

“I had the privilege of knowing John Schwartz for most of my 18 years as Augsburg’s president – and it was a deep honor to be with John and Jim in their Chicago home just a couple days before John passed away.

I first came to know John as an engaged Augsburg alum, a distinguished health care administrator who each year hosted Augsburg business students in Chicago. As a business major at Augsburg and with his Master’s degree in healthcare administration from the University of Minnesota, John was a role model of professional success who generously shared his experience, wisdom, and networks with our students.

As the years went by, John and I had opportunities to share our personal stories with each other and we quickly realized how similar our paths were – both in our vocations and in our avocations. We were both liberal arts kinds of guys – majoring in business for John, sociology and political science for me – but finding our true passion and purpose in choral music – John in the Augsburg Choir with Leland Sateren and me with the Luther College Nordic Choir under the direction of Weston Noble. And then we each found ways along the way to balance our professional lives with opportunities to sing in choirs – for John in both Milwaukee and Chicago, where he performed for 15 years with the Apollo Chorus (which we had the gift to hear at last week’s service for John in Chicago) and for me with various professional choirs in Chicago. We rejoiced in our shared experiences and love for choral music.

In recent years, John’s commitment to Augsburg only strengthened as he served on the Board of Regents and as his generous philanthropic support began to transform our music and arts programs. His first significant gift created the John N. Schwartz Endowed Professor in Choral Leadership, now held by Dr. Kristina Boerger, whom you heard from earlier. He then supported innovation in the curriculum with additional gifts to support faculty efforts to enhance and broaden Augsburg’s music courses and

ensembles. John then endowed the Leland Sateren Endowed Professor and Chair of the Music Department, whose first incumbent is Dr. Rachel Bergman. And just a year ago, in one of the most joyful moments in my entire time at Augsburg, John, Jim, and I sat together in Chicago and John made a remarkable commitment to create the Schwartz School of the Arts at Augsburg, bringing together our music, theater, and art and design departments under Augsburg's first "school." You'll soon hear from the Schwartz School's director, Professor Christopher Houltberg, about what that gift has meant for our students and faculty.

In all of this, what I found most remarkable about John was his deep humility, his recognition of the gifts he'd been given in his life, and his commitment to being a good steward of those gifts. In many ways, our scripture readings for this afternoon depict John's way of being in the world – as the psalmist proclaims, "O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things!" while the Apostle Paul instructs the early Christians to live their faith with kindness, compassion, concern for others, and a sense of gratitude for life itself. This was our friend, John Schwartz, who now has joined the heavenly choir, having left his mark in this world, a mark that will live on in his blessed memory for years to come. I want to believe that John is up there in the tenor section, joyfully proclaiming in the words of Fred Pratt Green's glorious hymn:

*When in our music God is glorified,  
and adoration leaves no room for pride,  
it is as though the whole creation cried,  
Hallelujah!*

*How often, making music, we have found  
a new dimension in the world of sound,  
as worship moved us to a more profound  
Hallelujah!*

*Let every instrument be tuned for praise!  
Let all rejoice who have a voice to raise!  
And may God give us faith to sing always:  
Hallelujah! Amen.*

Rest in peace, my friend."

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I heard a fascinating presentation at a recent conference by Lindsey Pollak, who serves as a consultant to organizations on the issues raised by multigenerational employees. Her recent book, *The Remix: How to Lead and Succeed in the Multigenerational Workplace*,” (Harper Business, 2019) is full of insights about how this moment when at least five different generations are active in workplaces requires us to remix traditional practices with new ways of working.

>>Be empty of worrying<<

These lovely reflections from Rumi seem fitting for this time...

*Be empty of worrying  
Think of who created thought  
Why do you stay in prison  
When the door is so wide open  
Move outside the tangle of fear thinking  
Live in silence  
Flow down and down  
Into always widening  
Rings of being*

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Trusting institutions - again
- Stories we tell to ourselves and each other
- Big ideas!

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