

NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Ten, Number Six (August 2009)

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

NOTES FROM READERS

>>What you think<<

It is that wonderful time of the year once again as we welcome students back to campus – my 35th straight fall on a college campus! Hope your summer has been relaxing and refreshing, and that the next few months are full of hope and promise for your personal and organizational lives.

I am grateful for several kind notes after the last issue of my Notes. I was especially struck by the eloquent response of long-time friend and subscriber, Pam Miller, who commented on my use of the story about “telling the truth” from Norman Maclean’s *A River Runs Through It* in my May baccalaureate sermon. Here is some of what Pam writes:

“(t)he familial relationships Norman Maclean so eloquently, so poetically, so movingly described without flourish resonated with me and of course so many others... We will try to understand why, and that can generally be good and lead to our development. And sometimes it is better we just accept. After all, I cannot say I always understand myself; how can I expect another to do so?

Your comments also reminded me of Robert Anderson’s insight in *I Never Sang for My Father*: ‘Death ends a life but it does not end a relationship which struggles on in the survivor’s mind toward some resolution which it may never find.’

Death does not end one’s love for another. In the end, there is only love. As I grow older, that is the truth I care most about. ‘That I love.’ Thanks, Pam, for illustrating so well what I know our fellow reflective practitioners do when they find an especially evocative story or idea – making connections to our own experience and understanding more deeply what has happened and why.

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 (check out the fine new website!). 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

>>To excel also in this generous undertaking<<

I preached the following sermon at our June Baccalaureate service, and found it an occasion to draw together many of the themes that have become important to my Notes and our conversations over the past ten years about reflective practice.

Now as you excel in everything—in fact, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.
(2 Corinthians 8: 7)

This morning, in this Time after Pentecost, we listen in on the Apostle Paul's conversations with the early faithful in Corinth. It is a conversation about generosity. I'm not sure we can imagine the lives of these 1st century Christians, but I do think we can recognize the dynamic of a community learning to work together. Paul is writing to them 30 or 40 years after Jesus has been crucified. And his concerns are very practical. As they have formed a community of those who believe in the risen Christ, they have encountered some of the sorts of problems that any community might face. There clearly is inequity between the members in terms of their material well-being. Paul writes, as he says, not to command them to make things right, but to encourage them, to offer advice, to commend them to follow through on what he calls their earlier "eagerness" to do something that has not yet been accomplished. He is careful not to ask the members of the community to give something they do not have, but instead asks them to recognize the need for a fair balance within the community. He asks them to do the work of building a healthy community, to do the work of a generous undertaking.

Now, if we were to read only Paul's exhortation to this fair balance of meeting material needs within the Corinthian community, this text could stand as a fairly straightforward how-to guide for community-building. But, of course, it is the broad arc of Paul's theological argument that makes this practical advice so compelling. For Paul, it is the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ – the one who gave up everything so that those who believe might become rich – that inspires and challenges us to excel also in this generous undertaking. Because we have the gift of faith, Paul argues, then we have no choice but to do what it takes, to do God's work in the world. It is to this generous work that we are called as God's faithful people in the world.

What a rare gift it is for those of us who are part of the Augsburg community to have this same inspiration and challenge in our lives. In this community of faith, this college of the church, we too acknowledge the gifts we have been given – the gifts of education and ideas and relationships and opportunities – as we embrace our call to excel in our own generous undertakings. And it is this charge and call that I commend to you on this, your day of celebration and commencement.

The Apostle Paul has many spiritual ancestors who affirm this link between the gifts we have received and the generosity to which we are called. The founder of our church, Martin Luther, writes in *The Freedom of the Christian* these wise words: "From faith there flows a love and joy in the Lord. From love there proceeds a joyful, willing, and free mind that serves the neighbor and takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude, praise or blame, gain or loss." Our official college motto, "From truth to freedom," summarizes Luther's point: only the

truth we are given through faith – truth we seek and find in part through the education we receive in this college – frees us to serve our neighbor, to excel in this generous undertaking

A contemporary voice, that of my teacher Martin Marty, asks us 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, Marty argues, 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.

With glad and generous hearts then we send you forth to get to work. So what do your generous undertakings look like? I can't begin to imagine how each of you will discern and follow your call to be generous – the stories of your generous undertakings will be your gifts to this college and to the world – but allow me to point to a few aspects of the world's need that might surely demand your generous work.

I begin with the needs of creation itself. As our reading from the Wisdom of Solomon proclaims, "God did not make death, and God does not delight in the death of the living. For God created all things so that they might exist..." And yet, God's living creation is in some jeopardy and needs our attention with glad and generous hearts.

One of my most formative experiences here at Augsburg was a neighborhood tour a couple of years ago with Professor Joe Underhill from the Political Science department who guided a group of us through Cedar-Riverside down to the Mississippi River. Along the way we picked up garbage and observed, with Joe's help, all of the ways in which the waste products of those of us who live above the river, ultimately flow into the river. The lesson of the day was that the ecosphere around the river, of which we are simply a small part, was threatened by our lack of understanding of how our behavior and actions affected the well-being of the living river, God's living waters.

One of my guides to generous care for creation is the Kentucky farmer, novelist and poet, Wendell Berry, who writes these powerful words in his poem, "The Gift of Gravity."

All that passes descends,
and ascends again unseen
into the light: the river
coming down from sky
to hills, from hills to sea,
and carving as it moves,
to rise invisible,
gathered to light, to return
again. "The river's injury
is its shape." I've learned no more.
We are what we are given
and what is taken away;
blessed be the name
of the giver and taker.
For everything that comes
is a gift, the meaning always

carried out of sight
to renew our whereabouts,
always a starting place.
And every gift is perfect
in its beginning, for it
is “from above, and cometh down
from the Father of lights.”
Gravity is grace.

“For everything that comes is a gift, the meaning always carried out of sight to renew our whereabouts, always a starting place.” Our whereabouts; our relationship to the river and the earth, to God’s good creation; our history and values, our place in the community and in the culture – this is our starting place which we are called to renew again and again. Our God created all things so that they might exist – that is our gift. How will you seek to excel also in the generous undertaking to renew God’s good earth? There’s important work to be done.

Let us now turn to settings that many of you may already occupy – and if not, may soon enough – and those are the organizations in which you will live and work and bring your education to bear. Perhaps it is a corporation or a family business or a social service agency or a school or church – whatever their size or scope, organizations are the means by which we get things done in the world. And perhaps it is in an organization that you will pursue your generous undertaking – and allow me to confess, as a lifelong organizational person, we need your glad and generous hearts to help organizations live up to their better natures! Our reading from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians illustrates the fact that even the early church needed some help with its organizational practices...

But what can you do? I’ve recently been reading lots of literature on helping organizations to embrace and sustain a culture of innovation – i.e., to create organizational cultures that are constantly looking for new and different ways to do things, to make products, to deliver services; to save souls, educate students, heal the sick. You get the picture. I’m not surprised by most of what I read about this work. Make a plan, think outside of whatever box you’re in, provide incentives for innovative work, and hold people accountable for being innovative – pretty standard leadership work. But then I happened upon the writing of Mark Federman, a Canadian scholar, whose writings on innovation include this provocative suggestion: “Multiply your mind by giving it away.” And Federman means exactly what he says – be generous, be charitable, give instead of always taking. Because when you are generous with your mind, with your knowledge and education, you help to create organizations and neighborhoods and agencies and churches and schools that are marked not by the scarcity of the world, but by the abundance of what’s possible when generosity of mind and heart and spirit is our guiding principle.

How will you give away your mind in the organizations you serve? I find examples of such generosity right here in this college community – I’m sure you have your own examples of how someone at this college has multiplied his or her mind by giving it away in a classroom or in the community. These days I’m especially struck by the ways in which staff member Brian Noy and his many colleagues who run our Campus Kitchen program are illustrating this generosity of mind and spirit. Campus Kitchen’s core work is led by students who collect leftover foodstuffs from our cafeteria and area restaurants, prepare and then deliver more than 2,000 meals a month to our neighbors in Phillips and Cedar-Riverside. It is good

and important work. What I have seen in the past year, though, is that Brian and his colleagues have not been content simply to stay the course. They have focused our attention on the important role that food plays in our lives – as sustenance for our bodies, as fellowship for our community, as politics and economics in our neighborhood and world. They have multiplied their minds by giving them away to all of us. And the results are staggering – community gardens on the edge of campus that bring together neighbors and students and children; a Farmer’s Market on campus beginning next week and relationships with organic farmers from across the region; composting of leftover everything in the cafeteria; and so much more – abundance through generosity.

The gift of an education, an Augsburg education, calls you to this generous undertaking of multiplying your mind and knowledge and experience by giving it away so that it serves God’s abundant intentions for God’s people and world.

Finally, I challenge you to consider what it means to be generous with your faith itself. Not all of us in this college or in this chapel share the same faith, but we do believe – and our various faiths all demand of us a generosity of spirit and means that we have captured in Augsburg’s statement of vocation: We believe we are called to serve our neighbor. In Martin Luther’s voluminous writings, the word we find more than any other is “neighbor.” And it is for the neighbor that our faith calls us to be generous.

This morning’s gospel recounts the size and intensity of the crowds that surrounded Jesus’ earthly ministry; crowds pushing in on him, seeking a word, imploring his attention, asking to be healed. And these are people of all backgrounds – from the Jewish leader, Jairus, who asks Jesus to make his daughter well, to the unnamed and long-suffering woman who touches Jesus’ cloak in search of healing. “Who touched me?” Jesus asks, seeking out the woman in the crowd. “Do not fear, only believe,” he says to Jairus, when word comes that his daughter has already died.

I see you, Jesus tells us. Your faith has made you well, he teaches us. Now get to work. The gift that is yours through faith is meant to be shared with glad and generous hearts. The crowds are all around us as well – neighbors who need a word, who implore our attention, who seek to be healed, to find justice, to know love in their lives. And we are called to excel also in this generous undertaking – to share our faith in acts of mercy and service to the neighbors who need us so.

And so today, this very special day – surrounded by these colleagues and teachers and friends and family who have meant so much to you, as you commence from Augsburg into the world – you are called to generosity – to care for God’s creation, to give away your minds, to live your faith in service to your neighbor. Wherever you go, whatever you do, know this remarkable truth that God so loves the world, that God so loves you, that you have been equipped with the gifts of faith and education so that you might excel also in this generous undertaking. Thanks be to God – and God’s people say together, Amen.

>>Jane Addams in China<<

The following are excerpts from my paper, “Jane Addams in China [Or, What does a long-ago American woman have to do with international social welfare in the 21st century?],” which I delivered to a conference on International Social Welfare East and West in Zhuhai,

China on July 2, 2009. It was a great experience traveling with our social work students and faculty to China, engaging scholars and students from mainland China and Hong Kong on these important questions of “what we owe each other as neighbors, locally and globally.”

“The life and work of Jane Addams is inextricably bound up with the settlement house commitments to living with and meeting the needs of neighbors, and then linking those commitments to broader social policy and practice initiatives. I want to contend that both Addams’ civic biography and the principles of her work at Hull-House are more relevant than ever to the social welfare needs of the world in the 21st century. And they are relevant because they are grounded in the real, everyday lives of the neighbors whose needs are the primary object of social welfare systems, policies and practices. I’m convinced that we’ve left the work of meeting the needs of vulnerable strangers to a system that has lost its “soul.” I want to argue, along with Michael Ignatieff, that we need a new vision for imagining how we meet the needs of strangers – no matter where we find them – and that this vision must address the fundamental issue of what responsibility we have for each other in the world.

Four key questions offer a framework for exploring the relevance of Jane Addams for 21st century social welfare in both the East and the West: (a) What is the “social ethic” that grounds your work with neighbors, i.e., what is the normative statement of what we owe each other and why? (b) How do you engage your neighbors to know who they are, to listen to what they need, and to base a response to their needs on this genuine engagement? (c) What are the organizational and systemic structures that allow us to be pragmatic – nimble, innovative, concrete – in our responses, honoring the needs of our neighbors rather than our own needs to build agencies or pursue the comfortable work? And, (d) In what ways does our social welfare work recognize that local and global are inextricably bound together – that we learn in our rich and immediate context lessons that are relevant for neighbors around the world?

This commitment to genuine engagement with neighbors is the basis upon which the settlement house went about its work, and suggests a stance that is at once humble – i.e., admits our own biases and privileges – and respectful – i.e., authentically open to the perspectives and experiences of others. Humility and respect set the foundation for transforming human relations – in neighborhoods and around the globe.

In the community around our college in Minneapolis, Minnesota (USA), our neighbors are African, from Somalia and Ethiopia. As immigrants, they are just like the Greeks and Italians and Bohemians that surrounded Hull-House in Chicago in the 1890s – looking for a better life in a new land, but also wanting to maintain their cultural practices and traditions in this alien context. Our college – like our settlement brothers and sisters – is involved daily in engaging our neighbors as they worship, celebrate cultural traditions and holidays, and seek to maintain ties to their home countries. At the same time, we are engaging those same neighbors in the civic work of keeping our neighborhood safe, participating in the political process, and supporting economic development. Jane Addams and the settlement house movement offer us all a way to honor this intersection of the local and the global in the 21st century.”

PRACTICE THIS

>>Back to basics: Strategic philanthropy<<

I had the great privilege to share some thoughts recently with a group of senior fundraising practitioners here in the Twin Cities on the topic of “Navigating Uncertain Times,” certainly a theme all of us can understand these days no matter our particular professional or personal vocations. My message was straightforward. We have the resources in our philanthropic work to offer people the sense of hope and groundedness and values that set a longer horizon for our lives in the world, and we need to use those gifts in our work to help folks imagine a different future for our personal and common lives. I found the following excerpt from a piece I wrote in these Notes back in 2003, showing me the importance of this consistent message for our work in philanthropy.

“Sometimes it is important to get back to basics. Such has been the case in the past couple of months here at my new institution. We sometimes take for granted that all good and valuable institutions have been led to see philanthropy as a mission-critical aspect of organizational life. And then we are surprised to find that misguided philanthropy actually undercuts the fabric of an organization, creating competition and fragmentation rather than a genuine sense of common purpose.

And so it has been back to basics at Rockford College. Thanks to Hank Rosso and Bob Payton and many other similar-minded teachers, we know what it means to practice strategic philanthropy.

- (1) Philanthropy is a core value of organizational mission and thus linked to, and in service of, mission-based work.
- (2) Mission-based work for an institution is best guided by a strategic plan that reflects consensus about institutional priorities and values.
- (3) Institutional priorities and values must be translated in opportunities for philanthropic support that are both strategic (i.e., priorities for the institution) and donor-oriented (i.e., a way for donors to do what they want to do for the institution with their philanthropy).
- (4) Philanthropic practices must have integrity, i.e., must fit with the values and commitments of the organization and its mission.
- (5) Philanthropy (and stewardship of relationships) must “belong” to all members of an organization – in other words, philanthropy is common work and in that way it involves everyone who cares about an institution in seeking support for the institution’s strategic priorities...priorities that they had a voice in articulating as part of the planning process.

Basic stuff indeed, but when forgotten or neglected, philanthropy falters and the philanthropic relationships that confirm our organizational missions and sustain our common work go sadly untended.” Amen to that.

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I read two fine books on the plane to China. *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* by Joseph J. Ellis (Vintage Books, 2000) was another helpful guide to the sometimes messy and mixed relationships and motivations of our country's founders. And *The Christian World: A Global History* by Martin E. Marty (The Modern Library, 2007) expanded my understanding of the various ways in which Christianity has been practiced outside of the Western context. I commend both to you.

I also have subscribed to *Poetry* magazine (www.poetrymagazine.org), a fine way to stay in touch with contemporary poetry and support this revitalized art form (thanks in some part to the generosity of Ruth Lilly!)

Finally, I have found good reason these past several months to explore the so-called "Big Book," *Alcoholics Anonymous* (4th edition, 2001) – our own academic program for students recovering from addiction as well as my service as a board member for Hazelden's graduate school have been occasions to learn more about the movement and how its values resonate with other ethical traditions.

>>Unharvested<<

Here is Robert Frost's wonderful poetic call that things might go unharvested in our lives.

UNHARVESTED

A scent of ripeness from over a wall.
And come to leave the routine road
And look for what has made me stall,
There sure enough was an apple tree
That had eased itself of its summer load,
And of all but its trivial foliage free,
Now breathed as light as a lady's fan.
For there had been an apple fall
As complete as the apple had given man.
The ground was one circle of solid red.

May something go always unharvested!
May much stay out of our stated plan,
Apples or something forgotten and left,
So smelling their sweetness would be no theft.

>>Subscription information<<

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>>Topics for the next issue (October 2009)<<

- Peaceful revolutions
- On innovation

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