

## NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Fourteen, Number One (October 2012)

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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

>>What you think<<

Our 14<sup>th</sup> year of these Notes begins. Thanks to all of you for your loyalty – and most of all, for your commitment to this important work, finding the links between reflection and practice for our colleagues and ourselves. I trust you are safe and well – especially if you were in the path of Sandy. For all of us, I wish you good wishes as we await the results of US elections and their consequential implications here and afar.

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). 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.

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### REFLECT ON THIS

>>We are called<<

As I noted in the last issue of Notes, my summer sabbatical research is being presented in a series of chapel sermons here at Augsburg. Here is the first – more to follow.

Scripture assigned: Luke 5: 1-11

*[The first of five chapel homilies on the gifts of the Lutheran tradition that ground the relevance and sustainability of Lutheran higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Augsburg College Chapel, October 3, 2012]*

As many of you know, I had the rare privilege last summer to be away from campus for a sabbatical – literally, to enjoy Sabbath time away from the roles and routines of daily life for renewal and refreshment. During the six weeks we spent in Chicago, we had two objectives. The first was to spend good time as a family exploring Chicago, a city we love. Mission accomplished, I can report, as our bucket list was filled lots of time in museums and neighborhoods, on beaches, and with family and friends. My second goal was to engage in research on the relevance and sustainability of Lutheran higher education. I explored the literature written during the past fifty years about Lutheran higher education in America and set out to test a hypothesis that the charisms (or gifts) of our Lutheran theological tradition have helped to make us institutions with particular identities and character that are more needed than ever in our world.

Beginning this morning and continuing into the spring semester, I want to use the privilege of this pulpit to reflect on the five gifts of the Lutheran tradition that I named as essential to our identity as a college and say something about why I believe they make us relevant and sustainable. The five gifts are vocation, critical and humble inquiry, engagement with the other, commitment to service and justice, and *semper reformanda*, our place in the reformation tradition.

This morning, the “V” word – vocation, of course.

You already know, even if you have just joined the Augsburg community, how central the theological concept of vocation is to Augsburg’s academic mission. There are required religion courses entitled “The Search for Meaning” – 1 and 2, just in case you miss it the first time! There are capstone courses before you leave us. There are special programs in this chapel, around campus and around the world, seeking to help you discern and live your callings in the world. There are signs that proclaim, “We are called – Auggies.” – everywhere, it seems. Well, you get it. We won’t let you forget it.

And there is a simple reason for that. As Lutherans, we believe deeply that one of, if not the greatest, contribution our tradition has made to the world is this theological concept that says simply that God calls you and me and all of us to lives of meaning and purpose and significance in the world. And our vocations matter, because they implicate us in God’s work in the world. In other words, through our vocations we become co-creators of the world, working to ensure that God’s will is done, that God’s love is known to all of creation.

Luther himself put it this way, commenting on the Christmas gospel in Luke 2: “...For we are unable to give to God anything, in return for his goodness and grace, except praise and thanksgiving... Faith teaches such praise and thanksgiving; as it is written according to the shepherds that they returned to their flocks with praise and thanksgiving and were well-satisfied, even though they did not become wealthier, were not awarded higher honors, did not eat and drink better, were not obliged to carry on a better trade.” In other words, being a good shepherd was its own vocational reward!

This is all well and good, but why is the concept of vocation, developed some 500 years ago, relevant to my life today? To answer that question, we need to go back another 1500 years to our gospel lesson for this morning.

In this familiar tale from Luke’s gospel, we find Jesus in the early days of his ministry, already pressed upon by the crowds – and perhaps in need of some help, we might surmise. So he engages with Simon and the other fishers – and we all know the end of this story, so why don’t we move on? But wait a minute. Let’s look again at the story itself.

Here is Jesus engaging with men already working hard to earn a living, to make a difference. You see, Jesus doesn’t wait until they are resting on the shore or back in their homes, to call to them. He comes to them in the midst of their work, in the midst of their busy and hectic lives, in the midst of the mundane practices of throwing nets to catch fish, in the midst of messy and difficult times where the fish are not biting – and he calls them not to come out of the water to talk about the days ahead, but to return to their work, to cast their nets again, and to reap the harvest of nets overflowing.

Too often, when we talk about vocation, we seem to think that our call will come to us in some mysterious, perhaps even supernatural way. But in our tradition, what we believe is that God is

already here in our midst, in our history, and that God's call to us may very well be to continue on the journey we already have undertaken, to follow our passion and talents, to return to work, aware that God has a plan for us – and that our nets may well soon be overflowing.

There's more to the gospel story. Recall how Simon followed Jesus's instructions to pull up the nets, but he couldn't do it by himself – he needed help. And so he called for his colleagues and friends to come and help. And then there were four or five of them working together to follow the call. Only then were they able to do what Jesus asked.

So often we seem to think that this vocation stuff is all about me. I get a call and set off on my own to live it out. But both Jesus and Luther knew well that by its very definition, vocation is social. It calls us into community, into the complementarity of gifts that together, help to do God's work in the world. Every once in a while, I will hear someone say that they were called to a particular role, but that they could not live out their calling because the community or institution would not allow them to do so. The problem with that conclusion is that callings are always a dialogue between my gifts and roles and the needs of the community and the world that I am called to serve. Our callings only make sense as they serve others. God calls us into community, into the company of those who together are able to haul those heavy nets into the boat.

And then, of course, there is the conclusion to this story – the call we all remember – the call to give it all up and follow Jesus. The key here is not to forget what comes before in the story. First, Jesus comes into the midst of the disciples' lives. Then, Jesus called them into community. And now, now, Jesus calls them to sacrifice what they know to do the work that needs to be done. First, there is trust and fellowship. And then there is taking up the cross.

And that, too, is part of the story of vocation. The call we receive may very well ask us to give up our own notions of what counts as success. We may very well have to sacrifice in order to do what needs to be done. We may have to leave it all behind. We cannot sugarcoat this thing called discipleship. It demands all of us, but it does so having given us all we have. That is what we call love.

Here, then, is our Lutheran understanding of vocation. In a world where vocation has become part of common parlance, and where Christian theologian and preacher Frederick Buechner's lovely formula – “your vocation is that place where your deepest gladness intersects with the world's deepest need” – has been misappropriated to suggest that vocations are upwardly mobile journeys to always more meaning and success in the world, we now come with this perhaps never more relevant and urgent message from our faith tradition.

Your vocation – your calling – may very well be found in the messy, mundane details of daily life, where we believe God is present and active, even when we don't believe we'll catch another fish.

Your 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. A fisher one day, a healer the next. A carpenter and then a teacher. A student and then a nurse.

Your vocation is not a solitary undertaking, but is inextricably bound up with those whose own callings complement and inspire yours. God does not leave us comfortless or without the help we need to do God's work in the world.

And yes, there may come a time when the call you receive demands of you sacrifices the like of which you cannot imagine. And in that moment, you will know a love that surpasses all human understanding, the love of our God who loves the world so much, so very, very much. Will you follow? Amen.

## PRACTICE THIS

>>Fundraisers and the good life<<

[The following is the first part of an essay I have drafted to be included in an updated version of *Ethical Fundraising: A Guide for Nonprofit Boards and Fundraisers* (Wiley, 2008), edited by colleague Janice Pettey. I will include the second part in my next issues of Notes. As you will see, this essay is an opportunity to offer my thoughts on the arc of ethical work within the fundraising profession over the past three decades.]

Some twenty years ago, I sat in a Chicago hotel conference room taking the required examination in order to earn my Certified Fundraising Executive (CFRE) designation. It was a multiple-choice test, intended to measure my understanding of the core areas of fundraising knowledge and practice. I remember vividly the question near the end of the exam that posed this situation:

"You are the director of development for a small social service agency in Chicago. You receive a call from the board member who chairs your development committee offering you tickets to the Cubs game that evening. What do you do?"

There were four options from which to choose - and there was a right answer according to the code of ethics - but all I remember is thinking how much I loved baseball. I began to think back on my growing up in Wisconsin and how my dad would take my brothers and me to Milwaukee to watch Major League Baseball games. I remembered fun car rides together, baseball park concessions and the thrill of seeing big league ballplayers up close. Those memories were about family, about rich and valuable learning experiences, about joy and fun. Those memories were about my moral life.

I chose one of the multiple choice answers - hopefully the right one, which is that I could not accept the tickets for my own use (though there are ways to accept them on behalf of clients or for the good of the organization) - but what I realized in that moment was that too often we focus our moral reflection and decision-making primarily on the dilemmas we face in our life and work, rather than on all of the ways in which our values help to create what I want to call "the good life." Too often, we focus on preventing misbehavior rather than inspiring the richness and joy of the good life.

Why is this? I think it is arguable that one reason for our often-punitive focus in ethical deliberation is that the world is a complex and messy place, and the fact is that human beings don't really like the messiness. We want answers, we want conflicts resolved, we want to believe that if we simply apply the right principle to the dilemmas we face, we will have our answer and resolution. I get that. There are many days on which I would give anything for the right answer to life's big (and small) questions.

As fundraisers, we face this messiness daily. Our work involves relationships, keeping confidences, serving as links between institutions and individuals, and perhaps most vexing of all, it involves money. And for a whole lot of reasons, it is simply easier for us to believe that we need answers to the ethical challenges we face.

At the same time, I would argue that the nature of our work as fundraisers actually places us in situations and relationships where the overriding ethical consideration is not misbehavior, but the value-laden decisions that donors and volunteers make to further causes they are passionate about by giving of their time, talent and resources. What a privilege it is to be in those situations and relationships! What a noble profession we have chosen, where we are witness to remarkable acts of generosity and vision and commitment! What a privilege and obligation we have in our professional work to help our donors and volunteers give voice to their values! University of San Francisco professor Michael O'Neill has gone so far as to claim that fundraisers must be "moral trainers" because we are with people when they are making "moral decisions" (O'Neill, 1994). Now, that is the good life!

So, our dilemma in thinking about our moral lives is also messy. We are human beings and we crave order and resolution. We also often crave having someone else tell us what is right and wrong. [As an ethicist, I often find myself consulting on the moral dilemmas folks face, and I am quick to remind them that, though I might offer an opinion about how to respond, my primary duty is to help them think through on their own or with peers what is the right thing to do.]

Our humanness is extended by the fact that our primary work as fundraisers involves dealing with other humans in often intimate and personal ways, thus leading to even more complexity and vulnerability in our moral lives.

Our responses as a fundraising profession to these challenges for our ethical reflection and decision-making are instructive. More than fifty years ago, when our first professional associations were being formed, our focus was on drawing together the disparate threads of our professional community - recall that the first "professional" fundraisers often came out of advertising or journalism or community organizing. In those early days, the issues facing the profession were more about identity and public perceptions of the work of fundraisers.

As the profession evolved - and the numbers of self-described professional fundraisers increased - it became important to begin to codify the ethical values and standards that governed the behavior of fundraisers and that also depicted our commitments to being accountable to the various publics we served (organizations, communities and the wider society.) The work of some of our most wise and experienced colleagues to craft a code of ethical principles and standards for the National Society of Fundraising Executives (NSFRE) - now the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) - is a model of professional reflection and self-regulation. The AFP code has gone through many changes during the past fifty years, but it remains a comprehensive and compelling statement of our common values and aspirations as a profession (AFP, 1964)

The issue is, of course, that when you make the effort to write down such a code of ethics, it can take on a life of its own (think of Moses and the Ten Commandments!) Given our human and professional inclinations, codes of ethics can quickly become primarily the "law" that helps us respond to misbehavior rather than a statement of the sort of moral aspirations we share for our work and the world.

Over my thirty-year career as a fundraiser, I have watched my colleagues become more and more focused on applying the code to solve ethical dilemmas. I lead workshops where we review ethical cases and the climax is often giving participants the "right" answer to the multiple-choice questions. Despite my efforts - and those of many like-minded colleagues - to expand the moral conversation

to helping colleagues develop ethical reflection skills and to point to the promise of the good life, we often revert to the legalistic parsing of the dilemmas we face.

But the times are changing! Beginning a few years ago, the AFP Ethics Committee has dedicated itself to developing resources for ethical reflection and decision-making that are designed to support this more expansive vision of the moral life for fundraisers. And the timing makes sense, I think, in the context of the evolution of our profession. Our 50th anniversary as a professional association in 2010 provided an occasion to say that our important and ground-breaking work on ethics over the decades had now led us to understand the need to help our colleagues not only respond to ethical dilemmas, but to focus as well on their ethical growth and development as professionals. This represents a sea change for our association and profession. The launching of the AFP Ethics Assessment Inventory (EAI) in 2011 (described in chapter xx, pp. xx-xx) created a forum for both individual and common reflection on our moral aspirations, the sorts of people we hoped to be, and on what I might call our "public character" as professionals and a profession.

What does this mean? What difference will it make to focus on ethical growth as opposed to solving ethical dilemmas? What is the good life for fundraisers - other than following the rules and doing the right thing?

Good questions, and to answer them, I think we need to go back a few millennia to learn from the ancient philosopher Aristotle, whose entire view of ethics is linked to the concept of the good life (Aristotle, 1941).

Not to get too wonky, but just a little bit of philosophy helps. Aristotle believed that the good life is linked to how we define our telos, our ultimate end. For Aristotle, the proper end of human beings is happiness. But this is not happiness in our usual 21st century way of defining it - the stuff we possess, the relationships we enjoy, the success we achieve. Rather, happiness for Aristotle is something that comes from within, it comes from our making choices that promote our true nature. For humans, these choices are linked to our particular powers - powers of intelligence and will, the power to make choices and develop good habits. The good life, therefore, is directly linked to the development of good, moral habits - what are called virtues - and the turning away from bad habits - what are called vices.

The good life, then - at least according to Aristotle, who many of us think got it right - is about the appropriate ordering of our virtues and the resisting of vice. We achieve the good life when we find harmony and peace, controlling our human appetites and perfecting our human powers through the virtues. Perhaps you've heard of the four principle (or cardinal) virtues: Prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. The good life is defined by our capacities to make choices that order these virtues in our thinking and acting, and to develop the habits of living that lead to good character and order.

There is much more nuance and complexity in Aristotle's ethical philosophy, but I would argue that his vision of the good life is precisely what we are trying to promote for fundraisers as they navigate their ethical lives. We want fundraisers to have the support and resources they need to reflect on their experience, to make choices that bring order to their lives, to develop good and virtuous moral habits, and ultimately to be perceived by others as individuals (and a professional community) seeking to live the good life.

Our good colleague, Albert Anderson, writing in his *Ethics for Fundraisers*, challenged all of us to find in Aristotle the means to consider how "achieving moral excellence begins as a natural bent to

gain happiness mainly by discovering and developing a pattern of actions shaped by self-conscious choices that draw the line between too much and too little, the excessive and deficient..." (Anderson, 1996, 7). Hardly an easy undertaking - having someone give us the right answer seems so much more expedient in the midst of my busy life - but surely one worth aspiring to as our fundraising profession continues to evolve in its important public work to support social causes and values.

So what does the good life look like for fundraisers - other than meeting goals and closing gifts? The research undertaken in the development of the Ethics Assessment Inventory (EAI) offers us a beginning point to answer this question. As detailed elsewhere, the EAI project began by asking fundraisers this question: "Think of an AFP colleague whom you consider to be highly ethical. Describe the behaviors of that person which lead you to this conclusion" (Shoemaker, 2011). The 2,528 answers received were sorted and categorized by a group of our peers and ultimately six responses were recommended as of the highest order. We might look at these six characteristics of ethical fundraisers as our professional "virtues."

We claim that: "An ethical fundraiser aspires to: Observe and adhere to the AFP Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice (and other 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; Seek to be transparent and forthcoming in all dealings; and, Be courageous in serving the public trust.

Here then are six virtues, if you will, of the ethical fundraiser. Here are the bases for good, moral habits. Here is the "stuff" of a good life for fundraisers. We observe the rules. We are trustworthy, honest, accountable and transparent. And we are courageous. The issues are how we define these virtues, how we respond to the challenges to living this way as professionals, and how we support each other in making the choices and developing the habits that bring order and harmony to our professional lives.

[More on the six virtues of fundraisers in the December 2012 issue of Notes...]

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I'm reading on several fronts of the higher education conversations these days.

Clayton M. Christensen and Henry J. Eyring's *The Innovative University: Changing the DNA of Higher Education from the Inside Out* (2011, Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education) is the common reading for Augsburg's next Board of Regents meeting and asks provocative questions about whether and how higher education can remain relevant and sustainable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

On another path, I continue to be deeply involved in the American Commonwealth Partnership (ACP), a movement hosted by Augsburg and led by our colleague, Professor Harry Boyte. Harry and his ACP colleagues are chronicling their efforts to lift up the public roles of higher education in a series of blog posts at <http://democracyu.wordpress.com>.

>>Reformation<<

This week we celebrated Reformation Day (October 31) and were reminded again that we are called to be ever mindful and attentive of God's work in our midst and what is required of us—the

requirement to be ever reforming. Perhaps this brief prayer is worth repeating often so that we don't forget our tendencies to hold onto the past.

*Litany of Confession and Promise*

Our youth offer prophecy of challenge and judgment,

**We nod politely with clenched teeth and closed eyes.**

Invited to dream dreams,

**We prefer the familiarity of the past.**

Winds of vision swirl around us,

**We close the windows and bolt the doors.**

Even on us,

**Even here,**

The Spirit will pour forth.

**Come, Holy Spirit, Come.**

**Amen, we all whisper together.**

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Fundraisers and the good life (continued)
- Reinventing governance
- Lutheran identity and higher education (continued)

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