

NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Twenty-Four, Number Five (June, 2023)

"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 in the midst of a busy travel month – a week in Norway celebrating a new study away site; board meetings in Washington, DC and Boston; and a trip to Michigan's Mackinac Island for a talent summit with higher ed and corporation leaders. It will be good to settle a bit in July and to take the time for rest, renewal, and reflection!

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

>>Saga Reflections<<

I have shared over the past couple of years a project I am leading here at Augsburg to interrogate our institutional saga. A group of ten faculty, staff, and students have been exploring Augsburg's history with an eye to making sense of who we are today as a community. Though the project is continuing with drafting of essays that will be part of a published volume, the grant that supported the work concluded earlier this year and I submitted a final report. In addition to describing our work as a group in the report, I also sent along excerpts from essays already drafted. The three excerpts all reflect important aspects of Augsburg's saga and offer a glimpse into the power of this project for our community. You will see in each excerpt the abiding tension – sometimes divisive, sometimes creative – between our history and our present moment.

Themes from Augsburg's Saga Project

Loving Reform and the Fight to Be Seen (from Stewart Van Cleave, University Archivist)

"To fit with the subject at hand, this chapter will take a queer approach to share stories about LGBTQIA+ history at Augsburg. I will establish some historical context in the neighborhood—only indulging my chattiness one or two times—before three generations of alumni will write from their

perspectives since 1987. Punctuating four decades, our experiences should invite the Augsburg community to reflect on how much we have changed and how much further we have to go.

And now, for the Queer Historical Context! Feel free to cue up some disco and release any glitter on hand.

Like us, Augsburg's Norwegian Lutheran founders had perspectives on gender and sexuality that took shape with (and against) the interconnected forces of class, ethnicity, race, and religion. Intimate homosociality, for example, flourished between Norwegian Lutheran men at Augsburg for the first third of our history. This "friendship," "fellowship," or "brotherhood" permitted men to forge deep physical and emotional relationships and express them in public without their affections coming under immediate scrutiny or an impulse to categorize it. One photograph in the archives shows this clearly. In it, men hold hands and put their arms around each other as they attend chapel service in Old Main during the 1920s. It is certainly not how I pictured a Christian service during that time!

Homosocial intimacy was not exclusive to men. When Gerda Mortensen, Augsburg's first Dean of Women, recorded a series of oral histories for the college's 100th anniversary in 1969, she noted women leaders in higher education "never dreamed that we could be Deans of Women and be married [to men] at the same time," adding "it was sort of a call to [a] commitment of life to that kind of service." That commitment helps us understand how she described her friendship with Marian Lindemann, a French professor and Mortensen's close friend for decades. As she sat with Lindemann to record her oral histories, Mortensen recalled their first meeting and stressed the impact she felt personally:

"I shall never forget that entrance [of the] magnificent, beautiful woman made onto our campus and into our lives. And how she could like simple little me, I don't know. But she represented scholarship, refinement, culture, centuries of breeding, all this kind of thing. She brought into our society at Augsburg a quality of life that was more American than we were. We were still very much an immigrant people. And I think many of us reached out for this quality in our life."

There is much more to learn about homosociality in this early part of Augsburg's history, but I am especially curious about its relation to a later era of queer repression in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. Packed with saloons, bars, and liquor stores frequented by Norwegians and other Scandinavians who were probably not attending chapel at Augsburg, Cedar Avenue was referred to—perhaps pejoratively—as "Snoose Boulevard," the writhing spine of one of Minneapolis' notorious "vice areas" before and after Prohibition. In these areas, marginalized people aggressively contested social rules that enforced expectations of gender and sexuality."

Land Acknowledgement: A Case for More Than Mere Words (from Dr. Eric Buffalohead, Associate Professor of American Indian Studies)

"To the credit of Augsburg, the University did not wait until the Land Acknowledgement to begin to respond to the troubled history of the land currently occupied by the University. Beginning in

the late 1970s several steps were taken in order to address the needs of Native students at the (then) college.

One of the most important first steps was the founding of the now called American Indian Student Support Program (AISSP) in 1978. The first Director, Bonnie Wallace, identified several needs of the Native students including: help with financial aid and housing, help with identifying appropriate courses in which to enroll, help in making the transition from high school to college for distinctly different Native student populations (those from the reservation, those from the suburbs and those from the inner city). Wallace also identified a need for American Indian Studies courses to be taught on campus. This ended up being the beginnings of an American Indian Studies program which would eventually lead to a minor (1990) and major (2001). These courses showed a real commitment to the local and regional Native community. They also provided a much-needed safe space for Native students where they could not only learn more about their own people but about Native nations from around the US and Canada. AISSP has had the luxury of having three consecutive long-term directors in Bonnie Wallace, Cindy Peterson and Jennifer Simon. This stability has helped to grow a strong Native student presence on the campus which has led to the creation of a student organization, Augsburg Indigenous Student Association (AISA) and the establishment of a University Powwow. Other important contributions include variations of Native Student Day, which brings high school students to campus in order to familiarize them with the institution

The aforementioned American Indian Studies (AIS) program began to really come together in 1990 when it became an official minor area of study. The courses that were offered centered around American Indian History and Culture, as well as Ojibwe Language. In 2001, AIS became an official major area of study for students attending the then college. Course offerings were expanded to include: contemporary issues, representation in film, literature, community engagement and most recently in Dakota Language. The year 2003 saw the launch of the Native American Film Series which highlighted Native filmmakers and introduced them to the Augsburg community. In 2006, the AIS successfully petitioned to become the Department of American Indian Studies. This move spoke volumes to the surrounding Native community about the commitment of the University to Native people.

The most recent very important step the university has taken was the establishment of the American Indian full tuition scholarship. This scholarship will make it possible for even more Native students to attend the University and complete their education with attaining a Bachelor's Degree. This is so important in a community plagued by incredibly high drop-out rates at all levels of education.

Augsburg's commitment to Native peoples and the Dakota is clearly evidenced in these positive steps. Our common cultural commitments to stewardship and sharing and our commitment to the land acknowledgement provides ample room to continue on this path of supporting and acknowledging the peoples whose land our institution uses.”

Vocation and Location: Place and Proximity (from Paul Pribbenow, President)

“As with any vocational journey, Augsburg has not reached a destination where its work as urban settlement is done. Instead, we continue to imagine new ways in which God is calling us to the work that is known at the intersections of vocation and location, of mission and place. Of particular note in this unfolding journey is an embracing of the college’s broader role in what we call “public work,” positioning the work of the college community in the context of claims for social justice and community-building.

Martin Luther’s theological concept of the “priesthood of all believers” undergirds an institutional commitment to civic agency and democratic institutions, challenging the disempowerment that often characterizes traditional service-delivery models. Instead, we work alongside our neighbors in reciprocal and mutually-beneficial ways, doing the “public” or “political” work that contributes to the collective agency of the neighborhood and community.

This public work is probably best exemplified by Augsburg’s current leadership role in the so-called “anchor institution” movement in the Twin Cities of Minnesota. Augsburg is among almost two dozen colleges, universities and health care institutions located along a new light rail line linking Minneapolis and Saint Paul that have come together with neighborhood groups and civic leaders to understand how our self-interests as institutions can combine to create shared value for the neighborhoods along the rail line. The anchor institution movement embraces this idea of shared value as a realistic understanding of how institutions can collaborate to serve broader public needs. Among our joint work as anchors of our neighborhoods are shared purchasing programs, supporting local businesses; workforce development initiatives, aimed at meeting the employment needs of institutions and residents along the rail line; placemaking efforts, focused on ensuring safer and more livable neighborhoods; and community-based research projects, involving students and faculty in applied research that addresses social justice concerns and strengthens neighborhood services.

The anchor institution movement may be a helpful framework for all communities to understand and practice the links between vocation and location in a variety of settings.

As a college of the church in the city, Augsburg stays, we accompany and settle alongside our neighbors. God has called us to be here in Cedar-Riverside, the urban neighborhood where we have been with our immigrant neighbors for more than 150 years. God has called us to educate students here who are skilled and reflective and committed to service. God has called us to be neighbor here, to do acts of mercy and to make this a place of hospitality and mutual respect. God has called us to be faithful here, to learn from those who are different from us even as we are firm and confident in our belief that God is good.

I wonder where God calls you to be and what God calls you to do? What is the saga of your community? Place matters. So does linking place with mission and work. And so does the abiding call to vigilance and intentionality about what God is doing in our midst and what God intends for God’s good and faithful people, wherever we are located.”

PRACTICE THIS

>>Awe<<

I had the wonderful privilege recently of visiting my mentor, Martin Marty, and his spouse, Harriet. Marty and Harriet have moved to Minneapolis to be closer to family. We spent a delightful hour catching up on family and reminiscing about our many ties. I was reminded in the midst of our conversation about a series of books that Marty and his son, Micah – a photographer – published in the 1990's, including *Places Along the Way: Meditations on the Journey of Faith* (Augsburg Press, 1994), *Our Hope for Years to Come: The Search for Spiritual Sanctuary* (Augsburg Press, 1995), and *When True Simplicity is Gained: Finding Spiritual Clarity in a Complex World* (Wm. Eerdmans, 1998). Alongside the dozens of scholarly books Marty penned, these devotional volumes stand out for the pastoral heart they share. I reprint one of the brief devotionals from *Our Hope for Years to Come*, which seems most fitting for this time of the year when rest and renewal seem so needed.

“Awe

For the joy of ear and eye,
For the heart and mind's delight,
For the mystic harmony
Linking sense to sound and sight:
Christ, our Lord, to you we raise
This our sacrifice of praise.

A long pilgrimage of hope requires some early stopping places for rest. Along the route of the ordinary experiences that make up so much of our daily lives, we seek rooms for refuge. We need places for retreat since hard climbs and blue Mondays lie ahead.

Sanctuary for the soul take surprising forms in our postures. A person may be next to a campfire after sundown or smokefall. Sit near a brook where someone plays praise on a flute. Kneel in a hospital chapel, needing momentary respite from concerns over care. March into a church school classroom where a child parts with a quarter in a collection plate. Rest in a cathedral where...

Where tourists may gape and gawk, where sellers may hawk and artists sketch and choirs sing. At such places, after the body has fasted, the eye feasts and for those who have ears to hear, organs roar to drown out the sounds of our stirrings and shufflings.

And after the awe-full roar, the soul welcomes soft sounds of prayer – and silence during divine response to prayer and praise.”

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PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

Quite a few new books came into my orbit these past couple of months, including:

A Way Out Of No Way: A Memoir of Truth, Transformation, and the New American Story, by Raphael G. Warnock (Penguin Press, 2022), a book made more poignant because of a visit in April to Atlanta, where I took a “Civil Rights Tour” with Martin Luther King Jr.’s long-time aide and driver.

Two Cheers for Politics: Why Democracy is Flawed, Frightening – and Our Best Hope, by Jedediah Purdy (Basic Books, 2022).

Mutual Accompaniment and the Creation of the Commons, by Mary Watkins (Yale University Press, 2019).

The Risk of Being Woke: Sermonic Reflections for Activists, by Curtiss Paul DeYoung (Judson Press, 2023), a good colleague who leads the Minnesota Council of Churches.

HERS, by Chung Lip (Fulton Books, 2022). Chung is an Augsburg grad, who came to the US as a refugee from Cambodia. He did a Master’s in Public Health at Columbia University, and then a nursing degree at Mount Aloysius College. He now works as a critical care nurse at the University of Pennsylvania Medical Center. His is quite the story!

>>The peace of wild things<<

Here is one of Wendell Berry’s best-known poems, fitting for what Christians call Ordinary Time, the liturgical season between Pentecost and Advent.

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children’s lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

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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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