

NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Seven, Number Three (February 2006)

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

NOTES FROM READERS

>>What you think<<

Late winter greetings – hope all is well for you.

I have news that may have reached some of you already. On February 10, 2006, I was elected as the 11th president of Augsburg College in Minneapolis, and will begin my work there in July. The difficult decision to leave Rockford College was not taken lightly. But in the end, the fit between my experiences and commitments and those of the Augsburg community was too compelling to deny. Augsburg is a small, private liberal arts college, linked to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), my faith tradition. The campus is located near downtown Minneapolis, in the shadow of the University of Minnesota. Its focus on being a college of the church in the city plays itself out in remarkable programs and projects that I find inspiring and engaging. Check out the college at www.augsburg.edu. Pay attention for more information as this next step in my vocational journey unfolds!

The Reverend Dr. William Enright, former senior pastor at Second Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis (a really big church!) and now Director of the Lake Family Institute on Faith and Giving at the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, wrote with this wonderful extension on my comments on fundraising as a calling, "Your recent *Notes* with its reference to fundraising as a vocation or calling struck a chord with me. I may be presumptuous but attached is an address I gave in Maine last October to a group of fundraisers in which I used two metaphors to help them see their work as a calling: "Innkeepers" and "Curators of the Soul." I will be presumptuous to suggest that if you want to read Bill's fine address and his evocative metaphors to describe the work of fundraisers, please email him at wenright@iupui.edu.

Jamie Dent, who leads the Pickens County Meals on Wheels program in South Carolina, wrote with this kind word and interesting observation about faith and politics: "May I get a head start on a new year's resolution by saying thank you for this most encouraging issue of *Notes*?...I've been in non-profit management and fund raising for thirty years come next March, and it has always seemed to me to be a calling. Not a job, but a profession....I am constantly challenged by people who come to drastically different political conclusions and definitions of civic good while claiming to follow the same Lord. The mystery goes on, but you always shed some light and encourage me to keep trying." Thank you and keep the faith.

I had a revelation recently when listening to a presentation by a religion professor here at Rockford College. He described his work over the past couple of years with a small group of Muslim students to develop a new introductory religion course on Islam. As I listened to his engaging story, I was reminded of my comments in the last issue of Notes about diversity and democracy. We often throw around the notion of diversity in higher education, but the truth is that we don't always fully understand what it means to genuinely embrace "otherness" in our lives. What this faculty member taught me about diversity is that to genuinely embrace difference, we need extreme patience, deep humility and a suspension of disbelief – all attitudes and characteristics that are rare in our culture (and in our colleges). He admitted the mistakes he made in describing Islam to students. He described his childlike efforts to learn a bit of Arabic. He talked about misconceptions of the Islamic faith and tradition that he (and we) needed to debunk. What I learned from him was a wonderful reminder that genuine diversity is at the heart of a liberal arts education and community – and we have such a long way to go to honor and practice that commitment in our daily lives

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. 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

>>Benjamin Franklin on leadership and philanthropy<<

Last month (January 2006) was the 300th anniversary of the birth of Benjamin Franklin and the recent renaissance of interest and research on his life and work has generated some very helpful glimpses into the nature of civic life in our democracy. Recent biographies by Edmund S. Morgan (*Benjamin Franklin*, Yale University Press, 2002) and Walter Isaacson (*Benjamin Franklin: An American Life*, Simon & Schuster, 2003) offer a sense of the rich and evocative character of the man and his long life of public service, scientific achievement, business acumen and civic life.

We also have the opportunity to return to Franklin's own prolific writings – from his *Poor Richard's Almanac* and his *Autobiography*, in which he offers practical counsel and moral instruction, to the codicil to his last will and testament, wherein he offers some insight into his own philanthropic imagination. Amy Kass' *The Perfect Gift: The Philanthropic Imagination in Poetry and Prose* (Indiana University Press, 2002) offers insightful selections from Franklin's *Autobiography*. Friend and long-time subscriber, Eugene Scanlan – apparently a real Franklin groupie! – sent along a copy of the codicil to Franklin's will, in which Franklin describes plans for scholarship support for apprentice

tradesmen in New York and Philadelphia. You can find the text of the will and codicil at <http://sln.fi.edu/franklin/family/lastwill.html>.

An article by Jack Uldrich in the Fall 2005 issue of *Leader to Leader* provides a good summary of the principles that defined Franklin's civic leadership:

- (1) *The importance of continuous education* – Franklin had no formal education, but he was the consummate lifelong learner – both through books and experience. Spirited debate was one of his preferred pedagogical tools. He believed in a genuine liberal education.
- (2) *Entrepreneurial risk-taking* – Franklin started his career as a printer when he was 16 – ten years later he had a franchise system of print shops. He took risks as he built his business, forging partnerships with competitors and constantly building networks of relationships that served the growth and success of his business.
- (3) *Focusing on goals beyond the self* – Franklin believed that his efforts could change the course of history – ala Plutarch – but he also believed that his efforts must be “useful” for others. Franklin's life is full of examples of his organizing cooperative projects to serve the common good. He embodied the genius of our democracy – individual efforts in tandem with common needs and aspirations.
- (4) *Accommodating divergent needs – quietly* – Franklin saw the critical role of reasonable compromise at the heart of the new democracy. His behind-the-scenes diplomacy and negotiations are recognized now for the impact they had on a new nation and its relations with the rest of the world.
- (5) *Building strategic partnerships* – Franklin's successful foreign diplomacy was characterized by its focus, not simply on self-interested compromise, but on strategic and principled ends. He knew what was essential and what was merely advisable in negotiations – he always ensured that the former was accomplished, which often meant that the latter also was achieved.
- (6) *Embracing change* – Franklin lived a long and rich life, but always kept an open mind to changing political and social climates. His decision to become a revolutionary was the result of his ability to seize new opportunities when they were the right thing to do.
- (7) *Think for the long term* – Franklin was someone who imagined a future and then made decisions to ensure that the future might become reality. His philanthropy is a strong example of this thinking. His giving always was designed to ensure that endowment funds would grow and provide future support – even while others might worry more about short-term impact. We owe a great deal to this perspective in some of the core ideals of American philanthropy.
- (8) *Shaping our character* – Franklin's belief in the genius of American democracy – the intersection of individual interests with the good of the community – set an example for the formation of the American character and the role of the American citizen. Franklin saw the messiness of life in a democracy – and then found ways to navigate the messiness for good ends. America, Franklin once said, is a place where “people do not enquire of a stranger, What is he? But, What can he do?”

And those are leadership lessons worth recalling and seeking to emulate in the 21st century, when our democracy so needs the Franklin example!

>>The domestic arts<<

The following entry first appeared in Notes 2:2 (December 2000), but has been on my mind pretty much all the time I have been here at Rockford College because the theme is at the core of my personal vision of higher education. I reprint it here as I venture off to a new leadership opportunity with the firm belief that it is more relevant then ever to our work of crafting an understanding of higher education that never allows learning to be separated from our obligations to serve.

“As you may have noticed, I am a devotee of Wendell Berry, whose work consistently challenges and inspires me (and there is nothing I value more than being inspired!). In a recent issue of “The Sun” (September 2000, pp. 20-23), Berry offers an intriguing essay titled, “In distrust of movements.” Now, the activists in our midst, who look to social movements as among the most pure forms of common purpose and action, may protest, but allow Berry to make his point.

Talking specifically about movements concerning environmental issues (land use, clean water, etc.), Berry says that such efforts are “too specialized, they are not comprehensive enough, they are not radical enough...leaving causes in place...they propose that the trouble is caused by other people.” Berry believes that movements get confused or preempted because they do not deal with the root causes of the problems they address, and therefore they lose the language that inspires all of us to join in, understand the issues and causes addressed by the movement, and get something done that has lasting impact. If we lose the language, we lose the imagination, the means to inspire each other to genuine and lasting action.

Berry suggests that we all give up hope and belief in piecemeal, one-shot solutions to big problems. Such problems are messy and complex, and must be addressed as such. He also recommends that all of us who join movements must take full responsibility for ourselves as part of the problem. For example, if we are going to teach the economy what it is doing (i.e., criticize the economy through the lens of our movement), then we need to learn (and criticize) what we personally are doing. In other words, these must be private as well as public movements.

Berry’s call for all of us to learn the disciplines of the domestic arts (alongside the fine arts and the liberal arts!) is his specific response to the needs of the environmental movements, but also offers all of us a helpful corrective to our tendencies to forget how much we must be willing to do, to give up, to change, if the world will ever change. Berry says, “The callings and disciplines that I have spoken of as the domestic arts are stationed all along the way from the farm to the prepared dinner, from the forest to the dinner table, from stewardship of the land to hospitality to friends and strangers. These arts are as demanding and gratifying, as instructive and as pleasing, as the so-called fine arts. To learn them is, I believe, our profoundest calling.””

PRACTICE THIS

>>Colleges and cities<<

During the search process at Augsburg, I was challenged to think again about the role of colleges and universities in an urban setting. The Minneapolis-St. Paul community has many small, private colleges, along with the University of Minnesota. And though each institution brings distinctive resources to bear on the city – based on academic programs, outreach efforts, traditional attitudes to partnerships and so forth – I think there are some general categories of college-city relationships that are valuable guides to enhancing interaction and mutual responsibility. Richard Freeland, president of Northeastern University in Boston, has suggested the following framework for understanding the links between higher education and urban life:

- (1) Colleges and cities have incidental impact on each other – for example, colleges employ citizens, citizens live in the city, colleges construct buildings and offer cultural programming that strengthen economic and civic life.
- (2) Colleges and cities make intentional contributions to each other – for example, colleges have faculty members who do research on urban issues, colleges support public schools, students participate in community service, cities may use colleges as economic development engines and attractors.
- (3) Colleges and cities also extract benefits from each other in various quid pro quo relationships – for example, colleges need zoning changes for campus expansion and the city needs a park or a scholarship for city employees – interests intersect!

Freeland's larger point is that this framework for understanding the relationships between cities and higher education institutions is best grounded in mutual dependency. Colleges and universities need to be good neighbors (and often constitute an actual city neighborhood), involved in neighborhood planning that addresses both campus and city needs. There also are strong academic reasons for community involvement, especially for those institutions that have mission-based programs that extend teaching, learning and research into the wider community (such as service-learning and cooperative education programs). At the same time, cities depend on colleges and universities for economic stability and for contributions to a rich and vital public life. Cities can ask academic institutions to lend credibility to urban development projects and to drive social and economic progress.

The new paradigm for the relationships between cities and higher education is less about extracting benefits from each other, less dependent on incidental impact and more focused on the various resources that can be shared in the pursuit of a more robust, healthy and meaningful urban life. I look forward to our efforts at Augsburg to give substance to this new (but not really so new!) paradigm of urban citizenship.

>>A Homestead Act for the 21st Century<<

The February 2006 issue of *Harvard Business Review* has its annual list of “breakthrough ideas.” As with all such lists, there is room for agreement and disagreement, but there is almost always something that brings you up short. In this year’s list, the idea that most intrigued me was offered by Ted Halstead, president and CEO of the New America Foundation, a non-partisan think tank.

Halstead’s argument is that the best of American society is its broad middle class, and that the genesis of that middle class can be linked to the Homestead Act of 1862, which awarded land to American families who ventured westward, and to the GI Bill and Federal Housing Administration, which helped to extend home ownership. Halstead notes that it is time for another Homestead Act, one that responds to the declining income of middle class individuals and families in America.

He recommends that, in the spirit of broadening land and home ownership in the past, the United States needs to extend the ownership of financial assets in the 21st century. Americans need access to financial capital so that they can make better lives for themselves.

His proposal: Every newborn in America receives \$6,000 at birth as a down payment on a productive life. With compound interest, this investment would grow to \$20,000 by the time the child turns 18. This investment could then be used for education, as a down payment for a first home, or as seed money to start a business. The annual costs of the program would be about \$24 billion nationwide – about what we currently pay for farm subsidies!

Halstead’s proposal endows the next generation with the resources to invest in its own capital and financial future. In addition to wages, this “nest egg” gives young people a real stake in our economy. This is part of a new social contract with our children, demanding that they stay in school and play by the rules, and that we, in turn, will invest in their futures.

Great Britain has created a similar program recently and there is bipartisan support for the idea in the US Congress right now. Social policy cannot be left to chance. Do we have the imagination and resolve to create a new “ownership society?” Visit www.newamerica.net for more information.

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

In the last issue of Notes, I described the asset-mapping project we have begun here at Rockford College. The consultant for the project recommended a workbook that I have

found most helpful in understanding and guiding the project. It is entitled *Discovering Community Power: A Guide to Mobilizing Local Assets and our Organization's Capacity*, written by John Kretzmann and John McKnight (and colleagues) from the Asset-Based Community Development Institute at Northwestern University. You can download the workbook at no cost on W.K. Kellogg Foundation's website: www.wkkf.org.

I am a long-time reader of *Fast Company*, a magazine that has evolved with the times during its tumultuous ten year history (and what a decade it has been!). The recent tenth anniversary issue (March 2006) is worth picking up for its lists of people and ideas that are shaping our economic, scientific and public lives.

I read a fairly eccentric group of publications and sometimes find an article in an out-of-the-way magazine or journal that ties together various intriguing themes. One such article, entitled "Food Democracy: Nourishing a Fundamental Freedom," appeared in the January/February 2006 issue of *World Ark*, a publication of the Heifer Project. World hunger, local and neighborhood economies, organic farming, economic sustainability, and democracy – it's all there and right on target!

>>A vocational poem<<

I subscribe to Garrison Keillor's daily email "A Writer's Almanac" and enjoy the wide range of poetry and bibliographic information he sends along. He recently introduced me to this wonderful poem by Ingrid Wendt that strikes me as vocational in the most generous sense.

["Starting from Scratch" by Ingrid Wendt from *Moving the House*. © BOA Editions. Also included in the anthology *Sweeping Beauty: Contemporary Women Poets Do Housework*. © University of Iowa Press.]

Starting from Scratch

To begin with, none of your neighbors began here.
Everyone moved in years before you moved into
a pattern you found yourself part of
before you intended: flowers, fences,
attention to the details your mother always took care of,
duller than film on dishes it was always your job to wipe.
Nobody spoke about courage.

Nobody said you could choose this life.
It happened, it didn't, the fact
you could choose to remain would become
what's yours to control: hours
of sleeping and waking, meals, the home
you need to go out in the world from.
Neighborhood customs you know you can count on.

Recipes, grapes exchanged for zucchini, the garden
someone will know when to plant.
The book you suggest. The pattern of limits
no one has asked for, told over coffee, lives
like yours you could have become
starting from scratch. Each day
the way you will live before what comes next.
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>>Topics for the next issue (April 2006)<<

- Ethics and responsibility
- A commonplace on children
- Higher education and paying attention

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