

NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Nine, Number Six (August 2008)

"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 high political season here in Minnesota as the Republican Party gathers for its national convention in our fair Twin Cities this next week. We've been hosting lots of student activities here on campus and the area is abuzz with media and security and all those here to celebrate or protest! An exciting moment for St. Paul and Minneapolis, and also a reminder for all of us what a gift we've been given to live in a country where political expression is encouraged and (for the most part!) guaranteed.

A few comments from subscribers about my June Notes. Reader Ben Mohler wrote to comment on my thoughts in the last issue of Notes about "going green:"

"I'm working on involving the energy production and infrastructure industry in a meaningful way in these regards by engaging them in supporting key research initiatives in sustainable and renewable energy production and delivery.

Your insight on the "narrative" of this issue was both inspiring and timely for the work I have ahead of me. Thanks for the encouragement to remain dedicated to the issue of stewardship."

And long-time subscriber and friend, Joan Flanagan, wrote to share this quote: "As always, I read the Reflective Practitioner cover to cover and have used many of your insights. I saw a quote on a building going up (in downtown Chicago) that you would like: "The difference between genius and stupidity is that genius has limits." Albert Einstein." I think Einstein's words are especially timely for this political season!

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

>>Radical hospitality<<

I preached this homily at the annual Baccalaureate Service for our adult undergraduates and graduate students in June. Witness my continuing efforts to send our graduates forth with a relevant message for lives of faith and purpose in the world.

“A cup of cold water”

Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me...and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple – truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.

(Matthew 10: 40, 42)

It is a wonderful privilege to be with all of you this morning – our graduates, your families and friends; our faculty, staff and Regents; and other members of the Augsburg community. This is a splendid day for all of us as we mark your great achievements and celebrate the mission-based work of Augsburg College. 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 we join Jesus and his disciples early on the path of their ministry. In our liturgical calendar, we are in the season after Pentecost, these long days between the celebration of the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and the beginning of the new church year in Advent – what also has been called ordinary time – a time when we follow the unfolding teaching and healing journeys of Jesus and his disciples. It also is our time – time when we are called to consider how we might live faithful lives in the world and many days, just as it was for the original disciples, we’re just not sure what that looks like. And in our gospel reading from Matthew, we sit here alongside the disciples receiving our orientation, if you will, directly from our leader (in my red letter version of the New Testament – with red indicating the words of Jesus – pretty much the entire 10th chapter of Matthew is red, a sure sign that this is important stuff!) Now you may think it a bit odd to talk about orientation when you are about to graduate – that’s something we do when you are about to begin your educational journeys – but allow me to suggest that we don’t call it commencement for nothing. Today you begin, you commence, to live as someone educated – in a particular degree program, a particular discipline of study, a particular professional field – but also as someone formed by the faith, values and vision of this particular college. And it seems perfectly fitting that we begin your commencement day at Augsburg with this orientation to faithful lives in the world!

My sense is that what we hear in this morning’s orientation lesson is one of the central – and most radical – of all of Jesus’ teachings. And it focuses on this simple practice of giving “even a cup of cold water.” Let’s think about what that might mean for us. I don’t know about you, but I don’t carry cold water with me everywhere I go. Even if I happen to have a biker’s water bottle with me, it likely has been sitting in the sun and is not going to offer chilled refreshment. And if someone needs a cup of cold water, it’s not going to be easy for me; I’m going to have to go out of my way to get it for her. And here lies the gospel claim that Jesus makes on all of his disciples – whether 2000 years ago or today. A cup of cold

water. Canadian theological educator, Laurel Dyskstra, suggests that this passage challenges us with the claim of radical hospitality. She writes, “Prophets have no subtlety, no appreciation for the daily compromises required for getting along. And while truly good people don’t trash the place, they can make you really look at your own life and upset your routine. Disciples and little ones are perhaps the worst of all. You know who they are: no money, no bag, no coat, bad-smelling, and talking about mercy. To get a cup of cold water, they have to come right into the kitchen.” Right into the kitchen. Now that is radical.

I often wonder about this claim of radical hospitality upon our college, which aspires in its mission to be a welcoming community. A quick story reminds us of how difficult it can be – even when we want to welcome the stranger – to overcome the institutional and personal obstacles that keep us from being genuinely hospitable. My friend and predecessor, Bill Frame, the 9th president of Augsburg, had a deal with the local Somali community that I inherited when I took office two years ago. If they needed space for a meeting or some other sort of gathering, they should come to the President’s office and we would work it out for them. Simple, right? Well, I still recall the day early in my tenure when Omar came into the office and asked my assistant for help in scheduling a room for a meeting. She said sure – how many people do you expect, when do you need it, how long, and so forth? All the right questions. To which Omar replied, 15 people, for an hour or so, right now – and my assistant looked out the window to see the 15 Somalis standing on the sidewalk waiting to get a room to meet. A cup of cold water. Right into the kitchen. Counter to all our rules, our schedules, our expectations – now that is radical.

So here we are, ready for the orientation to the rest of our lives, claimed by the gospel call to radical hospitality, shaped by our education in this college with its distinctive vision focused on the belief that we are called to serve our neighbor...now what? Here are my humble reflections on what this means for you and me as we seek to live faithful lives in the world.

It begins with our openness to the stranger in our midst. The world is filled with such fear and most of that fear is grounded in our anxiety about what we don’t know or understand. Jesus knew that. Those who taught you in this place know that. You know that. And I believe that it is because we know how fear paralyzes and distracts and fragments that we come together in this community to seek education, to learn about new and strange things, to broaden our perspectives on the issues and people and systems that define our world, to seek even to figure out what it all means. Genuine education, as Parker Palmer reminds us, is about overcoming the fear that so pervades our personal and social lives. Radical hospitality begins with the openness that authentic education provides to take pleasure, to find joy, to be intrigued by what we don’t know, what we might be able to learn, who we might come to respect and love. Certainly our Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, the most diverse zip code between Chicago and Los Angeles, offers all of us daily opportunities to welcome the stranger, to learn from those who do not share our life experience, our culture, our faith tradition. But that can be scary, too. I think about the student who was with me as part of a service project in the neighborhood, who noticed a Somali woman in traditional garb, with a suitcase, attempting to hail a cab on Cedar Avenue. After several cabs passed her by, the student crossed the street, asked the woman where she was headed, hailed a cab for her and made sure the driver knew where to take his passenger. That morning, our student learned a life lesson about otherness and privilege – about not having to worry whether or not a cab would stop – but that student could just as easily not chosen to cross the street to be of

assistance. A cup of cold water. Right into the kitchen. Are we open to the strangers in our midst, who might teach us important lessons?

Hospitality is more than random acts of kindness; it is a way of life. I think that one of the great temptations of the way in which we read scripture – passage by passage, often out of context – is that we lose sight of the radical claim it puts on us to live as people of the book, of the gospel. This really isn't just about inviting someone into our kitchen for a cup of cold water, an act that might push our comfort zone for a while but that will not fundamentally alter our way of seeing and being in the world. This is about a life of hospitality, a life reshaped by the claim of the gospel to live as the people of God, a life in community that is often messy, even sacrificial, but that ultimately is about faithful and grace-filled lives that proclaim God's reign. You don't meet many people who have fully grasped the radical claim of hospitality that Jesus calls us to live out – and there's probably a good reason why. This hospitable way of living is tough – just ask the disciples, who floundered and denied and betrayed their teacher! In their book, *Radical Hospitality*, Father Daniel Homans (a Benedictine monk) and Lonni Collins Pratt, describe what it was like for the monks of St. Benedict Monastery to open their worship lives to the public, when they had long saw themselves only as “professional pray-ers,” watching the world from afar.. “It is easy to pray for ‘the world’ and ‘God’s people’ when you don’t have to look into their tear-reddened eyes, or fetch more toilet paper after mass on Sunday. Something sacred and unexpected has happened since we opened our doors and our hearts...we have become a part of each other’s lives.” And there you have it. It is easy for hospitality to position us as the “professional do-gooders,” patting ourselves on the back for our good works. But the call of radical hospitality is to the messiness of daily, mundane life together, sharing the good, the bad and the ugly, the pain and the joy, the boredom and the richness, because that is what it is like to be human, and that is what Jesus calls us to understand. A cup of cold water. Right into the kitchen. Not just once, but every day, all the time. Are we ready for lives of radical hospitality, really radical...? I hope so, because...

The world so needs our lives of radical hospitality. This is serious business, my friends. The founders of this college understood that when they chose the motto for Augsburg. It's on the original seal of Augsburg Seminary, written in Norwegian, from the gospel of John: “And the Word became flesh.” Our college was founded upon the greatest act of hospitality we could ever imagine, the act of a gracious and loving God who entered into our world so that we might know God's radical welcome. And what did we do – what did the world do – but reject God's hospitality? There you have it. Out of fear, ignorance, injustice and hate, we turn our backs on God's hospitality, God's abundant and eternal welcome. “He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him,” the gospel proclaims. But God knows how much the world needs radical hospitality, and so God abides (perhaps the most lovely word in all the scriptures), God persists, God fulfills God's plan for God's people. For God loved the world so much, God sent his only Son...And here in this college community, the community that has educated and shaped you to commence this next part of your lives, we stand firmly on the shoulders of our founders who believed – as we believe – that we are called to serve our neighbors, that we too are called to abide in the face of a world that needs our lives of radical hospitality. We are called to be prophets of peace, to work for justice and fairness, to feed the hungry and heal the sick, to be the word made flesh in the world. A cup of cold water, Jesus teaches us – strangers right into our kitchens – lives of radical hospitality, no matter the cost, no account for the joy. The Word made flesh, full

of truth and grace. Here ends our orientation. Here begins the work we are called to do and the people we are called to be. Thanks be to God. Amen.

>>Get political<<

I offered these remarks at the opening session of a seminar series that brought more than 100 students to our campus from around the country to learn about and participate in the Republican National Convention. The series is organized by the Washington Center, a DC-based organization that offers college and graduate students remarkable opportunities to “learn by doing” in a variety of internship programs in the DC area. Since 1984, they have organized non-partisan educational and internship opportunities at both national political conventions. We were privileged to be chosen to host this program and to find ourselves right in the center of convention activities.

“The theme we have chosen for the 2008 Washington Center RNC Program is “Get political – listen, learn, engage.” This theme is central to Augsburg’s mission and vision to educate students for lives of faithful service, meaningful work and responsible citizenship in the world.

As we live out our mission and vision here at Augsburg, we, of course, are deeply engaged in the electoral political process – as our role in helping to sponsor this seminar and your experience at the convention will help illustrate. In addition, our students are closely involved in local political and advocacy efforts, in public service internships, in get-out-the-vote campaigns, and in helping our many new American neighbors to participate in American electoral politics.

But even as this fall offers all of us amazing opportunities to practice politics in an intense electoral season, we are especially committed to the ideas and practices of a broader public claim – a claim that calls on all citizens to “get political” – to follow the call of our University of Minnesota friend and colleague, Harry Boyte, who suggests that “Despite its bad reputation, politics is the way people in any setting deal with differences to get something done. Politics means creating alliances, negotiating, engaging people around self-interests, using levers of change in a strategic way. Politics is how diverse groups of people build a future together. In higher education, disavowal of politics is a sure way to consign civic engagement to marginal status, lodged in centers or courses, or added as a hortatory moment at commencement. Politics is from the Greek root, *politikos*, “of the citizen.”” As Boyte reminds us, “For over two thousand years politics meant not parties or vertical relations with the state but rather horizontal engagement among citizens. In other words, politics and getting political is the authentic and important work of citizenship, not to be left to “professional politicians” but claimed by all of us as our birthright and moral obligation.

One of my heroines in American history is the great social reformer, Jane Addams, who lived and worked at Hull-House in Chicago for almost 50 years, helping her immigrant neighbors to practice citizenship not because of a political system but because democracy is a social ethic, a way of living together in community, neighborhood, country, some of us think even, the world. She described democracy as a “mixed and thronged road,” on which we all are travelers together, navigating our lives together. Surely, Miss Addams illustrated in her own life and work the ways in which mature citizenship, genuine politics, is meeting the

needs of our neighbors, building stronger and healthier neighborhoods, finding common purpose and then the will to make it real, learning to be what political philosopher and ethicist Jean Bethke Elshtain has called “chastened patriots,” those who love a cause or community or country, but love it in ways that make it stronger, more responsible, more faithful to common purpose. Politics as common, public work.

In that vein, then, we genuinely hope that your experience these next few days will help you to be more thoughtful and engaged citizens of our country and world – help you to enhance your civic literacy, strengthen your civic engagement skills, and imagine what real civic prosperity might look like. May your experience of the RNC and your work here at Augsburg with your fellow students and faculty help you to understand and become advocates for a more expansive understanding of politics for our democracy.

The great Illinois senator, Adlai Stevenson, who ran for president against Dwight Eisenhower in 1952, was once said to have responded at a whistle stop to a supporter who shouted out, “All thoughtful Americans are with you, Adlai,” with this great line, “That won’t be enough.” For those of us committed to the public and civic roles of higher education, we know that one of our great challenges is to educate more thoughtful citizens and to challenge our students to help others become the same – as they reclaim a sense that politics is not simply about who is in power and who is not, not simply about ideology and partisanship, not simply about winners and losers, but instead that politics is the work we all are called to do to ensure that our common purpose will be realized. I’m proud to have so many thoughtful Americans – so many authentic “politicians” with us for this special program.

Let me close by commending to you the Irish poet Seamus Heaney’s provocative poem, “From the Republic of Conscience,” in which he calls on all of us to consider ourselves “dual citizens.” Heaney writes (in this excerpt):

The old man rose and gazed into my face
and said that was official recognition
that I was now a dual citizen.
He therefore desired me when I got home
to consider myself a representative
and to speak on their behalf in my own tongue.
Their embassies, he said, were everywhere
but operated independently
and no ambassador would ever be relieved.

May we all learn to be dual citizens, navigating the intersections of loyalties, values and goods that are the “stuff” our lives in our democracy – intersections of individual rights and common good, of parochial and universal, of local and global, of political parties and national interest. Your time here is important to all of us as we count on you and your vision of public service as the future of genuine political work in our democracy.

PRACTICE THIS

>>Five myths about poverty<<

Frances Moore Lappé, writing in the September/October 2008 issue of *Sojourners*, offers these five myths about poverty, which, she believes, stand in the way of our efforts to overcome the scourge of poverty in our country. Her point is that these “ideas” – “beliefs about poverty that rob citizens of power to follow our common sense, our own interests, and our innate need for fairness” – are the real obstacles to ending poverty. Here is reflective practice at work in response to an abiding challenge in our common lives.

Myth (1) *We don't know how to end poverty.* We have several examples in the past century of programs that had a significant impact on reducing poverty – economic laws are not sacred, they are made by humans and can be revised by human imagination and will.

Myth (2) *Ending poverty would cost too much.* The real cost is poverty itself – the real cost comes from our not acting.

Myth (3) *Ending poverty would require big, intrusive government.* Ending poverty depends on citizens shaping a government they can trust as their tool: as a fair-rules setter and enforcer.

Myth (4) *Society has to choose between equity and economic success; we can't have both.* The evidence shows that “more equal” societies, in general, perform better economically.

Myth (5) *Ending poverty would require equality, which is unnatural.* Americans across the political landscape view poverty as a failing we should act on – it is the lack of equality that violates our deeply-ingrained need for mutuality and cooperation.

>>Philanthropy in restless times<<

Bruce Flessner, founding principal the consulting firm, Bentz, Whaley, Flessner (BWF) writes in the Summer 2008 issue of BWF's *Occasional Papers* about the topics that make this year a restless time for philanthropy. He outlines three “E”s that we must pay attention to and take seriously as potential challenges to fundraising this year.

- The Economy – we all know the facts: unemployment, higher gas prices, consumer debt and sub-prime mortgage crises, and a volatile market. We can expect that our donors may be leery to part with assets – an important part of any major gift campaign. We also may need to focus on prospects whose investments are in sectors that are growing (like oil).
- The Elections – both the long duration of the election season and the issues being debated mean that we must be even more focused with our case for support of our organizations and the important work we do.
- The Energy Prices – this challenge means that “going green” is important and organizations that support environmental causes may benefit. It also means that both our donors and our institutions face rising costs, which challenge all of us to use our resources wisely.

Flessner's recommendations to institutions and their fundraising teams in light of these challenges are good to focus on: listen and work with key donors to adapt to the impact of these challenges on their lives; work smarter so that you can model wise use of institutional resources; keep in contact with your supporters and keep your case for support focused and clear; stay tuned to foundation and corporate giving sources that may be more willing to invest even as individual donors are more reluctant.

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I was with an Augsburg alumna a couple of weeks ago and she remarked how she had been struck by my first President's column in our college magazine in fall 2006 because I had shared the books that were especially important to my vocational journey. It's nice to know our alumni read my column, but it's also a good reminder that what we read is an emblem to others of what is important in our lives. Here is my list, reprinted for you as resources for your reflective practice and/or as the occasion for you to make your own list.

"The Bible is the source of my worldview. It teaches me of faithful and abundant lives, of generous love surpassing all understanding, and of a gracious story that still unfolds around all of us in our lives in this world and beyond.

The Constitution of the United States sits on my desk as a reminder of the truths and aspirations of our democracy. In those truths is the stuff of patriotism, properly understood.

Michael Ignatieff's *The Needs of Strangers* is an elegant essay that draws together some of the best of human thought to help all of us better understand what it means to care for each other.

Jane Addams' *Twenty Years at Hull-House* is the story of a life led in a neighborhood, serving others and strengthening democracy.

Parker Palmer's *Let Your Life Speak* is my roadmap to vocational journeys.

And Wendell Berry's *What Are People For?* challenges us to remember the proper scale of human work and life – and to fight for sustainability in the world bent on destroying itself."

>>I don't want to end up simply having visited this world<<

Long-time reader and friend, Don Johnson, who lives in both Maine and France, wrote to recommend this Mary Oliver poem, which offers us a keen reminder of the amazement all around us that is ours to grasp – a particularly fitting theme as we begin another academic year.

When Death Comes

Mary Oliver

From *New and Selected Poems* (Beacon Press)

When death comes
like the hungry bear in autumn;
when death comes and takes all the bright coins from his purse

to buy me, and snaps the purse shut;
when death comes
like the measles-pox;

when death comes
like an iceberg between the shoulder blades,

I want to step through the door full of curiosity, wondering:
what is it going to be like, that cottage of darkness?

And therefore I look upon everything
as a brotherhood and a sisterhood,
and I look upon time as no more than an idea,
and I consider eternity as another possibility,

and I think of each life as a flower, as common
as a field daisy, and as singular,

and each name a comfortable music in the mouth
tending as all music does, toward silence,

and each body a lion of courage, and something
precious to the earth.

When it's over, I want to say: all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.

When it is over, I don't want to wonder
if I have made of my life something particular, and real.
I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened,
or full of argument.

I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.

>>Subscription information<<

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>>Topics for the next issue (October 2008)<<

- Friendly disentangling
- Dual citizenship

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