

NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Nine, Number Two (December 2007)

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

NOTES FROM READERS

>>What you think<<

Greetings in this season of light. I trust that you and yours have enjoyed a healthy and happy holiday season. We have experienced our first "genuine" Minnesota December with loads of snow and cold – you have to love it!

Not much chatter out there since my last Notes so I'll take this opportunity to share the news that I am now back at work (with the help of a talented research assistant) on a collection of my essays and musings that I hope to publish. It has been both gratifying and humbling to return to essays written over an almost twenty year period and to selections from these Notes over nine years, and to find the abiding themes related to our common work as reflective practitioners. I give thanks for your support and interest – and for the examples you offer of responsible and effective professional work. You inspire me.

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

>>Faith and life<<

Every year in the week of Thanksgiving, the local Sons of Norway group here in the Twin Cities sponsors an event called the Nordic-American Thanksgiving Breakfast. You probably need to see it to believe it, but imagine almost 1,000 folks gathered in a hotel ballroom at 7:00 am for fellowship, with a program that includes three relatively "brief" talks on faith, freedom, and family and friends. I was privileged this year to offer the following remarks on "faith."

"This thing called faith is so central to our lives, our tradition, and our role in the world, and yet too often we find it extremely difficult to engage each other in conversations about what we believe and why. I believe deeply that our need to talk about faith and its role in our

private and public lives is perhaps more relevant than ever before because the world needs people of faith. The evidence is so clear that we are a fallen people – in pain, separated from our better natures, fragmented from each other, at war within and without – surely we all know the reality of what the Apostle Paul called “creation’s groaning.” And we could leave it just there – as many do – with no evidence for optimism, no sense of what it all means, no horizon that inspires us to go on. Yet we are called to faith and hope. Acknowledging creation’s groaning while also believing that the Divine is active in our midst, we find hope in the *glimpses* of God’s reign in our history, in our daily lives. Faith is what helps us live in the paradox that Martin Luther called *simul justus et peccator* – people living in the tension of being saved yet still sinful, in the tension of creation’s groaning and the mysterious and redemptive work of God in our lives.

Perhaps the greatest prophet of 20th century Christian realism, Reinhold Niebuhr, wrote in his *The Irony of American History* (1952) these words that summarize how we might live in these tensions – how hope can be found and pursued, how faith creates trust and leads us to grasp the love of the Creator: “Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime; therefore we are saved by hope. Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we are saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as from our own; therefore we are saved by the final form of love, which is forgiveness.”

In the context of this elegant tension, I’ve been thinking about faith a good bit over the past few months as we try to imagine the role that faith plays in the Augsburg College community – I’d like to offer a brief glimpse of some of my thinking and see if it makes sense to you as we all seek to grasp what it means to be faithful people in the world.

Story of Thomas’ adoption: Imagine this situation – five families gathered in an orphanage conference room in Soc Trang, Vietnam, brief speeches, food is served, and all of a sudden five children are carried out from the back room. There ensues this remarkable cacophony of screaming and crying and picture-taking – and then we are off, loaded into vans and on our way back to our lives, changed forever by what happened in that orphanage.

This scene, it seems to me, is a glimpse of what happens to all of us when faith breaks into our lives: a ceremony, cacophony, and our lives are changed forever – it is this wondrous moment of transformation, of being claimed and named, of becoming part of a new family, of receiving the greatest gift we could ever imagine to receive.

It is this story that helps me to understand that faith truly is a gift – not to be coveted or expected, but to be received – we are chosen by God to be God’s child, to become a part of God’s family. Faith disrupts our lives, surprises us, transforms what we expect to happen, changes us forever – and there is nothing we can do but receive the gift and then live as gifted people.

Story of Betsy, an Augsburg student: Betsy is like many of our students who come to the college not sure exactly what she believes – and yet she jumps into the life of the college, a good student, a good citizen, and more and more an active participant in our Campus Kitchens program. Betsy begins to understand through her work with our neighbors how

much she values the opportunity to be of service, perhaps initially because it feels good, but more and more because she begins to understand what she learns in relationship with neighbor. She is disappointed when she is asked simply to deliver meals – she wants fellowship and community.

Surely Betsy shows us what it means to think about faith as a call, not a finished product, but a story unfolding where faith is not a certain fact, but an evolving narrative of a life that comes to understand what it means to live as a gifted person of faith.

My teacher, Martin Marty, says that the distinctive mark of faithful people is “acts of mercy” – Luther uses the word “neighbor” more often than any other word in his voluminous works.

Faith as call teaches us that there is not necessarily one destination point – one place where we can call it a day. Faith as call reminds us of the seeking and searching that accompanies a life of faith – faith is loving the neighbor, doing acts of mercy – faith is an unfolding story to our lives that may not be what we expected.

Story of my mother, Elsie My mom died five years ago this past summer and during her final couple of weeks, she was surrounded by the vigil of friends and family in the hospice care center where she was lodged. My mother, who was a most remarkable woman, had been battling cancer for several years, and, now having made some difficult decisions about her treatment alternatives, was in a time of peaceful and faithful waiting for the disease to run its course. Her large family—I am the oldest of six children, all married with children of their own—made frequent visits to see mom/grandma, valuing the time together and with her.

Our visits struck me as instructive for all of us as we “keep vigil” with and for mom. I wonder what we might all learn from those times when we band together with family, friends, co-workers, fellow citizens to pay attention, to wait for, to mark out the time in preparation for some impending moment.

Here, then, is faith as promise, the ways in which we suspend our own notions of time and progress and success to wait patiently and prayerfully for God’s will to be done. This is faith reaching to a deeper place in our lives, asking us to remember all the ways in which our lives are shaped by the people we care about; to console each other, to be faithful partners in the work of grieving loss and celebrating lives well lived; to learn how healing is more often about broken hearts and spirits than about broken bodies; to be patient, to wait for things beyond our control to show us the way to a new place; to wonder at the awesome power of life and death, and of our grand and mysterious God; and to hope for the things to come.

And when my mom passed into our God’s embrace, we experienced what the hymn writer John Ylvisaker has called “just one last surprise,” God’s promise of abundant and eternal life.

Faith as gift, call and promise – faith as a life unfolding. We join together to proclaim “Lord, I believe” – I believe in your gift, your call, your promise – even as we admit, “help my

unbelief? – my struggles to receive the gift, to discern and live the call, to wait for the promise. This is faith living in the world, full of tensions and full of grace!

One last story, once again a baptism story. Our youngest, Maya, was surrounded by family and friends at her baptism, including her older brother, Thomas. As my dad baptized her in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, spilling the ceremonial water over her head, Maya let out a great cry, and her brother, always quick to get a word in, shouted out for the entire congregation to hear, “Maya, shake it off like a dog.” As much as we might like to shake off the role of faith in our lives, it is, of course, impossible to do – thanks be to God!”

>>Reflective professionals<<

In recent months, Parker Palmer has offered some wise counsel for those of us who care about reflective professionals. Originally written as a new afterword for the 10th anniversary edition of Palmer’s *The Courage to Teach*, versions of “The New Professional: Education for Transformation” (Jossey-Bass, 2007) also have appeared as “Heart at Work” (in *The Christian Century*, October 2, 2007) and as “A New Professional: The Aims of Education Revisited” (in *Change*, November/December 2007).

Palmer’s challenge is familiar: “If higher education is to serve humane purposes, we who educate must insist that knowing is not enough, that we are not fully human until we recognize what we know and take responsibility for it.”

Palmer specifically calls for the education of “new professionals,” those whose education prepares them not only as competent in their specific disciplines but also as skillful and courageous in confronting, challenging and changing the institutions in which they work – institutions that too often get in the way of and threaten the highest standards of professional work.

Palmer offers five proposals for educating these new professionals:

- (1) **We must help our students uncover, examine and debunk the myth that institutions are external to and constrain us, as if they possessed powers that render us helpless – an assumption that is largely unconscious and wholly untrue.** The victim mentality we sometimes have concerning institutional dynamics must be overcome. (Parenthetically, I think this is why I chose to teach organizational behavior to nonprofit managers and other professionals) We must get beyond the notion that we can have no impact on institutional life and take back the power of the human heart to remake our organizations and the world.
- (2) **We must take our students’ emotions as seriously as we take their intellects.** We must reverse the traditional academic notion that emotions must be suppressed in order to become technicians – instead, we must learn to stay close to emotions that can generate energy for institutional change.
- (3) **We must start taking seriously the “intelligence” in emotional intelligence.** We must learn to extract from our emotions the knowledge they contain, knowledge which may well help us understand how to translate private feelings into public action. Emotional intelligence is at the heart of some of the most remarkable social

movements in our time – civil rights, women’s rights, the environment, and so forth – helping to move us beyond the status quo to strategies for social change.

- (4) **We must offer our students the knowledge, skills, and sensibilities required to cultivate communities of discernment and support.** Emotions are important sources of knowledge but as with all knowledge, emotional knowledge must be verified by viewpoints other than my own, in communal settings. Disciplined group inquiry – the creation of circles of trust for professionals – provides both support for deep and difficult learning and organized groups of people who can support each other when the demands of being a change agent are overwhelming.
- (5) **We must help our students understand what it means to live and work with the question of an undivided life always before them.** This final proposal is grounded in the entire corpus of Palmer’s work. As teachers we must be role models for a life that integrates knowledge and passion, reflection and action. We must help students to live in the tensions between our highest values and the reality of daily life as a professional.

Palmer’s quest is to revive the root meaning of the word “professional,” someone who professes faith in the midst of a disheartening world. As he challenges all of us – teachers and students alike – “in the midst of the powerful forcefield of institutional life, where so much conspires to compromise the core values of my work, I have found the firm ground on which to stand – the ground of personal and professional identity and integrity – and from which I can call myself, my colleagues, and my profession back to our true mission.”

>>The company of witnesses<<

I came upon this favorite item first included in Notes, 2-2 (December 2000). I think it is most fitting as we enter the new year!

“Reinforcements are at hand.

I think that one of the difficult things for those of us who work in the philanthropic community is that it sometimes seems like we’re all alone. This is tough work—stressful, goal-driven, not always clear lines of accountability, a sense that we are out here trying to do good work for our organizations and for the public, but finding that people don’t always understand, that motivations are often mixed, that rejection of our genuine efforts to enlist support is draining and hurtful. Even if we are fortunate to have volunteer and staff colleagues in our efforts, it still is the case that, in the end, we personally must face the end of the day and its confusing mix of sadness and elation. That can be very lonely indeed.

I think our loneliness is tied to some very concrete dynamics of life in contemporary society. We are not a very historical people. We forget that many have gone before us, preparing a path, giving us the gift of shoulders upon which to stand as we do our work today. We are not a people comfortable with talk of money—and like it or not, our work as fundraisers is often about money. So, we hide the nature of our work with various euphemisms: advancement, development, philanthropic professionals...and, in the mean time, we forget to talk about why our work makes such a difference for so many people. We are a people without the imagination to see that our work is always common. We spend so much time worrying about how we will succeed personally that we lose sight of the social character of

life in the world. We forget that it is we who succeed or fail, we who go on or not, we who create a more humane world, a richer and more adventurous society, a good life worth living well.

But reinforcements are at hand—and the hope and help they offer us are just what we need when the loneliness threatens to break our good spirits. Some of us know them as the company of witnesses, those individuals and communities, both historical and contemporaneous, whose good works and patterns for living in the world offer each of us the examples, vocabularies, ideas, and faith we need to make our way.

Perhaps you will learn from Jane Addams, the great social reformer who lived with those she served on Chicago's west side. Or perhaps it will be St. Francis of Assisi, who instructs us to "Preach the Gospel always; and when necessary, use words." Or Robert K. Greenleaf, who both lived and communicated his vision of leaders as servants. Or your next-door neighbor who delivers Meals-on-Wheels everyday. Or the founder of your organization, whose vision for the world translated into concrete philanthropic action. Or your parents, who taught you well. Or the homeless man, selling newspapers on the street corner, whose sincere "thank you" captures the essence of gratitude.

You are not alone. The work you do makes you part of a great company of witnesses to the good that is possible when we share a common purpose, share abundant gifts, and share the confusing mix of sadness and elation that is the stuff of our daily lives. Reinforcements are at hand and with their help, we go on with renewed energy and patience and wisdom to do our work in the world.

[Questions for reflection: Who are the members of your company of witnesses and what do they teach you about your work in philanthropy? How do you recall the lessons of the company of witnesses in your daily work—do you have a list, a picture, a favorite passage or text? How do you deal with the confusing mix of sadness and elation that is the stuff of our daily lives in the world? How do you share the lessons from your company of witnesses with others?]

PRACTICE THIS

>>Evolving giving<<

Perhaps you're one of the many (like me) who have purchased your own copy of Bill Clinton's *Giving: How Each of Us Can Change the World* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2007). It is an intriguing perspective on the creation of markets for nonprofits – mixing the traditionally corporate perspective with the pursuit of public goods. There is a helpful gloss by Jonathan Rauch on Clinton's philanthropic vision and work in the October 2007 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, which I commend to you as background to reading the book.

What I found especially interesting in the same issue of *Atlantic* is an archival feature, excerpting from historical issues of the magazine on the general topic of "Philanthropy."

Each of the four excerpts speaks to the historically evolving understanding of this balancing (some might say, tension between) the private and the public in philanthropy.

First up is Jane Addams (from 1899), remarking that there is no struggle that has made more of an impression on her (after ten years at Hull-House) “than the incredibly painful difficulties which involve both giver and recipient when one person asks charitable aid of another...” She is especially struck by the difference between “the emotional kindness with which relief is given by one poor neighbor to another poor neighbor, and the guarded care with which relief is given by a charity visitor to a charity recipient.”

Next is Dr. Alice Hamilton, who lived at Hull-House for a time and then became the first women faculty member at Harvard Medical School (from 1930): “I must...join with those who stand for state pensions for the aged poor rather than support given through private charity...Personally, I am very loath to accept the verdict that a dependence on the benevolence of the uppermost class toward the lowest class is the only possible American way of solving the problem of the poor, or even that it makes for a healthy state and contentment at the bottom of society.”

And then Dr. Abraham Flexner, founder of Princeton’s Institute for Advanced Study, writing in 1935: “It might even be maintained that the level of a given civilization can perhaps be measured by the extent of private initiative, private responsibility, private organization in all the fields open to human culture...The accumulation of fortunes through foresight, unusual capacity, energy, thrift, and native honorable shrewdness is in itself no crime. On the contrary...fortunes so accumulated may be made the sources from which great philanthropic, cultural and beneficent enterprises ultimately flow.”

Finally, international philanthropist George Soros, writing in 1997, says “Although I have made a fortune in the financial markets, I now fear that the untrammelled intensification of laissez-faire capitalism and the spread of market values into all areas of life is endangering our open and democratic society.” And quoting Francis Bacon, Soros concludes, “Money is like muck, not good except it be spread.”

That’s all for our history lesson – good reminders for our imagining of philanthropic work in our time.

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I commend to you the annual special “Giving” section, which appeared in the November 12, 2007 edition of *The New York Times* (nytimes.com/giving) – it keeps getting better as a digest of current issues and trends in philanthropy.

A friend gave me *The Triple Bottom Line*, by Andrew Savitz (with Karl Weber) for Christmas, which I look forward to reading in the new year. Savitz argues for a management concept

that promotes the intersection of financial interests with social and environmental sustainability.

The National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) and the Forum for the Future of Higher Education jointly publish *Futures Forum* each year as a roadmap to the sorts of issues and challenges faced by the higher education community. The 2007 edition is chock-full of insightful essays, including Martha Nussbaum on “Cultivating Humanity and World Citizenship” and Benjamin Friedman on “The Moral Consequences of Economic Growth.” Copies are available through NACUBO’s website, www.nacubo.org.

>>Light<<

Our annual Advent Vespers services here at Augsburg this year were organized around the theme, “That all may have light,” which sent me on a wonderful journey through the scriptures to find light (references!)

I found these inspiring words from Zechariah, who with his wife, Elizabeth, was surprised late in life with the birth of a child, John (the Baptist). In the first chapter of Luke’s gospel, we read:

“By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

May your new year be full of light and peace!

>>Subscription information<<

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

- Liberal arts in China – a personal journey
- Presidential creeds and character
- A bias for the margins

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