NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Twelve, Number Five (June 2011)

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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<<

Happy July 4th to my US friends! Summer finally has arrived in Minnesota. I have spent much of the month of June is Oslo working on behalf of the Nobel Forum. Good work in a beautiful place, but I’m happy to be home for the rest of the summer.

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.

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REFLECT ON THIS

>>Stay with us<<

Here is the latest installment in my Baccalaureate sermon series! I delivered this sermon to our May graduates, just a couple of weeks after Easter.

But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them.
(Luke 24: 29)

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.

Let me digress for a moment with some behind-the-scenes insight from the world of those who have the privilege to preach on occasions such as these. The print deadlines for fine programs like you have before you this morning are often 4-6 weeks before the actual event, meaning that the choice of sermon titles can be speculative at times. My own pattern when given a far-away deadline
for a title is to take a quick look at the assigned scripture for the day to see if I can find some catchy phrase that will help me organize my thoughts when I actually get around to preparing my sermon. Today’s readings, the assigned lectionary for tomorrow, the third Sunday in Easter, gave me pause. Let me point out that you could have heard a sermon this morning on such provocative lines as this from the Acts of the Apostles, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation!” – which may be how you’re really feeling today – or even this from Peter’s first letter, “Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth” – which may be how you perceive the academic demands of your final semester. But instead I invite you to join me in exploring what it means to ask someone to “stay with us,” this act of hospitality that has much to do with the sort of education you have received in this college, as it has for generations of those who have gone before us as God’s faithful people in this place we call Augsburg.

In these hours and days after Easter, we join Jesus in Luke’s story as he appears alongside the two disciples – one of whom we learn is named Cleopas, the other remains anonymous – on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. It is a familiar and well-loved gospel story. The disciples do not recognize Jesus, we’re told, and there ensues this remarkable conversation in which the two disciples share with this stranger their account of what has happened in Jerusalem in the previous few days. “The things about Jesus of Nazareth,” they exclaim, this mighty prophet handed over to authorities, condemned, crucified like a common criminal, and then reported by the faithful women to have disappeared from the tomb, alive even according to the report of angels.

And then there is the rebuke from Jesus, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!” Was it not prophesied that the Messiah would suffer so that he might enter into glory? “Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures,” Luke recounts. And then, as with any good and engaging conversation, the time passes quickly and the three near the village. Jesus walks ahead, only to be invited – urged strongly we learn – to “stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” Stay with us, stay with us – and Jesus does, later blessing and breaking the bread at table, the moment when the eyes of the disciples are opened to his true identity. The Lord has risen indeed.

This is a delightful Word for a baccalaureate service – especially as we gather here together as God’s faithful people before you are sent into the world as graduates of this college.

Three simple messages emerge for us from this story.

Vocare

The first is about Augsburg and your call – OK, OK, you knew I would get this in one last time before you depart!

Joining a college is a wondrous thing. The great American poet, Robert Frost, captured my sentiment in his 1936 poem, “Build Soil,” where he wrote:

Steal away and stay away.
Don’t join too many gangs. Join few if any.
Join the United States and join the family.
But not much in between unless a college.
No matter how you may be feeling today – sad to leave friends, excited about what’s ahead, anxious for that job or grad school application, glad it’s over, or probably some combination of these and other emotions – I can assure you that joining this college and the community it represents will have a lifelong impact on you in so many ways. And there is something tremendously meaningful about how you will invite the values and character and people of this college to stay with you as you move forward in your lives.

Not a day passes for me that I don’t remember the ways in which my college experience has shaped my life. It was the reason for my first ever airplane ride and my first ever international experience. It was the place where I grew up and realized that I could not live my dad’s life and become a pastor (though here I am!). It was the community in which challenging and loving teachers made me think, made me stronger, taught me how much more I had to learn. It was the sanctuary where I learned to sing from my heart and soul, and not simply from my diaphragm. It was the college that helped me discern a life’s journey, a calling to faithful leadership and service in education.

How about you? What will you remember about how your Augsburg experience shaped your journey, your call to the life you will lead, your sense of what is important and what is not?

Stay with us, we plead, for we feel and know how much this college and its community have meant to who we are and aspire to be. Stay with us, so that our eyes might be opened and our hearts set to burning. Stay with us.

_Educare_

There is in this story on the road to Emmaus also a compelling metaphor for the ways in which education is at the heart of a good and significant life together. I love the image of these strangers deep in conversation along this road. And there is Jesus walking alongside, responding to their confusion over what had happened just now in Jerusalem with his wise interpretation of the scriptures. Here is Jesus, our teacher, helping us to make sense of our lives in the world. Isn’t that what good teachers always do for us? Isn’t that what we are called to do for each other as we commence our lives as college graduates?

Some of you likely studied Martin Luther’s _Small Catechism_ in your confirmation classes or perhaps in a religion course here. I am convinced that if we are to be truly faithful to our Lutheran roots, we would put the simple question “What does this mean?” above the door to every classroom on this campus. Here at Augsburg, we embrace the faith and values of the Lutheran church that allow us to affirm that we are indeed called to ask questions of the world and our experiences in it – scientific questions, artistic questions, political questions, historical questions, questions of all sorts. “What does this mean?” becomes the abiding question of a liberal arts education and a liberal arts life.

The Roman Catholic priest and political philosopher, John Courtney Murray, has taught me a great deal about how genuine education is at the heart of a healthy and good society. Murray writes that “Barbarism…is the lack of reasonable conversation according to reasonable laws. Here the word ‘conversation’ has its twofold Latin sense. It means living together and talking together. Barbarism threatens when men cease to live together according to reason, embodied in law and custom, and incorporated in a web of institutions that sufficiently reveal rational influences…. Barbarism likewise strikes when men cease to talk.
together... when dialogue gives way to a series of monologues; when parties to the conversation cease to listen to one another...” Murray’s challenge is clear: How shall we recover our capacity for conversation – both genuine living and talking together?

Murray’s words, written more than fifty years ago, strike me as most relevant for our own 21st century lives. Scan the newspapers and find example after example of where barbarism is at our doorstep – in nationalistic fervor, political diatribe, and social rancor – and this is the world into which we send you now, our educated friends. I’m sorry, but this is why we have taught you to be informed citizens, thoughtful stewards, critical thinkers and responsible leaders – this is why Augsburg College exists. The world needs you, we need you and your many gifts of intellect and creativity and passion.

Stay with us, we urge all of those who have been our teachers and mentors and colleagues here, those who have taught us that education is our most compelling asset in creating genuine conversation, in learning to talk and live together, in doing God’s faithful work in the world. Stay with us so that we might never cease in asking “What does this mean?” Stay with us, for the darkness around us is near and deep, and you are our light. Stay with us.

Servare

And finally, there is in this gospel story a moving reminder that when we invite the stranger to stay with us, that when we sit together at table and break bread, that when we overcome our fear and confusion, then our eyes will be opened and we will know that we have been redeemed. We will know that our loving God will not leave us without comfort and hope.

I wonder if you might think about Riverside or Cedar or Franklin avenues as your roads to Emmaus here in the Seward and Cedar-Riverside neighborhoods. What strangers did you meet there or nearby, what did you learn from them, and in what ways has your mutual hospitality become a source of love and grace and comfort and hope in your lives here at Augsburg?

Teacher and spiritual guide for many of us, Parker Palmer (who has an honorary degree from Augsburg), commenting on the road to Emmaus story, says that “the stranger is a bearer of truth which might not otherwise have been received. (The story tells) us that our everyday perceptions and assumptions must be shaken by the intrusion of strangeness if we are to hear God’s word.”

I remember an Augsburg graduate of a few years ago sharing with me her experience of working with the Campus Kitchen program, first preparing and delivering meals, and then developing relationships with the families who received the meals. She spoke of how her world was changed by a stranger – a Somali mother whose children played at the Brian Coyle Center – who invited her to visit her apartment in the Riverside Plaza, to help tutor her children in English, to enjoy time with the family over meals, and then to learn in return about the Somali language and culture. Her life was changed, she learned more than she could have imagined, and her call was made clear in the truth of the stranger breaking into her world.
Where have you met the stranger here and invited her to stay? Where has your world been turned upside down by a stranger, by an alternative truth, by an experience of otherness? Where have your eyes been opened by the truth of new life, breaking in all around? When has your heart burned with the wisdom of the stranger, whose love for us is boundless?

Stay with us, dear stranger, so that we might learn from you. Stay with us so that our eyes might be opened, our hearts set to burning – so that we might break bread together and know in you the Risen Christ. Stay with us.

And so today, this very special day – surrounded by these colleagues and teachers and friends and family who have meant so much to you, as you commence from Augsburg into the world – you are called by this community, by your education, by the stranger – to care for God’s creation, to give away your minds and hearts, to live your faith in service to your neighbor. Stay with us, we pray, for wherever you go, whatever you do, we know this remarkable truth that God so loves the world, that God so loves you, that we have been equipped with the gifts of faith and education so that we might do God’s good and faithful work in all the world. Thanks be to God – and God’s people say together, Amen.

>>Education for service<<

We had the extraordinary good news in mid-May that Augsburg College had been selected to receive the highest federal honor for colleges and universities committed to civic engagement – the President’s Award for Community Service. We were one of six chosen from across the nation. I wrote the following editorial reflection to celebrate this important news for our college.

“We just one day after a tornado ripped through the homes of our neighbors in North Minneapolis, the Augsburg College community organized clean-up trips and issued a call to make 1,000 sandwiches to help feed displaced neighbors and volunteers who were digging out from the storm. It’s who we are and what we do as a college.

It’s this kind of community engagement that helped Augsburg College earn the Presidential Award for Community Service last month.

We are honored and proud to be one of only six higher education institutions in the nation – and the first in Minnesota – to earn this top federal recognition in a field of more than 850 schools, but we don’t think of what we do purely as “community service.”

It is about learning. Research shows that knowledge retention soars to 75 percent when learning is practiced by doing, compared to retention of 20 percent when we learn by listening. That’s why community engagement is among the most powerful learning experiences our students can encounter. Each year, we have dozens of courses that embed service learning at an average of 25 hours of hands-on engagement per student per course. This hands-on learning is one of the most significant values Augsburg College delivers as an urban institution set in the vibrant and diverse Cedar-Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis.

Experience-based learning is part of our mission, too. As a college community, we believe we are called to serve our neighbor. We educate students for service.
Our work is shaped by being rooted for more than 140 years in a neighborhood that long has been a point of entry for immigrants. By engaging with our diverse neighbors, we have the marvelous opportunity to see our shared community, and world, through the eyes of those who have made great and often perilous journeys to join their families, to work, to build better lives.

Through their stories, we experience the gift of not taking for granted the freedoms won for us in great battles at great cost. Our worldview is expanded through the gift of learning new languages, customs and traditions. We are blessed with neighbors whose hard work and enthusiasm for life and community challenges our complacency and cynicism; and whose pursuit of justice and fairness and engagement in a new world is nothing short of inspiring.

And so, from our experience engaging with our community, we know in our hearts that the nearly 200,000 volunteer hours our students invested this past academic year will benefit us—our College, our future alumni and the communities they will serve—more than they benefit those we were called to serve.

The Presidential Award is a gratifying testament to the exceptional work done by our staff, students and faculty. But it is we who are richer for the experience of educating students not only for professions and careers, but also—and perhaps more so—for lives of meaning and purpose in a city and a world marked by a more urgent need for informed citizens, thoughtful stewards, critical thinkers and responsible leaders.

That is our mission as a college of the Lutheran church located in this remarkable city.”

PRACTICE THIS

>>>Ethics discourse <<

A version of this brief essay will be published in upcoming issue of Philanthropy Journal, as part of a series on ethics in fundraising.

“I have the privilege in teaching ethics and in my role as chair of the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) Ethics Committee to confer with many fellow fundraising professionals about the ethical dilemmas they face in their work. Often, however, my conclusion is that when we get to an ethical dilemma - whether it concerns donor intent, so-called “tainted money,” or conflicts of interest - it is often too late for the sorts of conversations we should be having all the time about the values we espouse as professionals and organizations, the ways those values might support or come into conflict with our behavior, and how we might work together to live up to our highest values and commitments.

AFP has recently launched its new Ethics Assessment Inventory (EAI) ©, an on-line tool that enables professional fundraisers to review their ethical values and to compare them to the organizations they serve. It is a helpful step in giving fundraisers a resource for professional and personal reflection on ethical values. But it also begs the question of where and how fundraising professionals and their organizational colleagues might find the help they need to continue to grow in ethical understanding and maturity.
How do we learn to talk together about ethics in our profession and organizations? Here are a few concrete strategies we might pursue:

**Craft an organizational (or departmental) ethics statement**

Crafting an organizational ethics statement can be valuable, both as a finished document and for the process of reflection and collaboration that its creation occasions.

How do we view the links between our organization’s mission and the values of potential donors? How do we balance the dynamics of loyalty and honesty? What values do we espouse in situations where there might be the appearance of impropriety? How well do our gift acceptance policies and practices reflect our community values?

We might begin by bringing together staff and board members to ask what we value as an organization, i.e., to reflect on our common values and relationships; to explore how and whether (or not) our moral activity is grounded in our common values; and then to consider the means by which we are accountable to various publics for our common values and moral activity. Are we an organization with integrity?

Our conversations would provide important material for an organizational ethics statement and also would help create an organizational culture in which talking about ethics is encouraged and expected. An ethics statement—aimed at describing and sustaining an organization with integrity provides a forum for considering the cases where our missions and core values don't always get practiced in our day-to-day lives. *Independent Sector* offers a template for such an organizational code of ethics (www.independentsector.org/resources).

**Administrative case rounds**

I have long been intrigued by Stanley Reiser’s concept of administrative case rounds as a strategy for using the discussion of specific situations in our organizations as opportunities to examine the links between organizational values and practices. Adapted from the concept of medical case rounds, where a case is presented to a group of doctors and nurses from various specialties for discussion, administrative case rounds bring together diverse administrative, program, and board constituencies for discussions of cases that are of some common concern.

For example, I once used our development office stewardship plans and practices as a common theme for cross-departmental conversations. Instead of bringing together just the usual suspects (from the development staff), we also invited representatives from the President's office, the Dean of Students office, and the admissions office, to join in a conversation about what stewardship means for our college. They were fascinating conversations that resulted in both a better stewardship plan and a better sense across our campus of how stewardship is part of our common work. Perhaps the best outcome was the off-hand comment from one member of the discussion group that she now understood how much of her job involved stewardship. We had a convert.


**Create clearness committees**
I first learned about the concept of "the clearness committee" when I was involved in a discernment process to consider whether I had a calling for the ministry. Since then, I have thought many times how valuable that process was for me and what a challenge it provides to our normal ways of thinking through personal and common issues in our organizations.

Recently, Parker Palmer has suggested that "the clearness committee" concept, adapted from the Quaker tradition, might have merit for our busy lives in organizations. In *The Courage to Teach: A Guide for Reflection and Renewal* (Jossey-Bass, 1999), Palmer and co-author, Rachel C. Livsey, propose the clearness committee as a communal approach to discernment.

The basic premise is this: A small of people come together to help an individual discover (discern) the answer to a dilemma through questions that help the individual find the inner voice of truth that often offers the best guidance and power for dealing with our problems. The process is full of silence and honest, open questions. It is not an advice or brainstorming session. It is not a cure-all. But it can be a powerful way to rally the strength of community in the pursuit of wisdom—an important outcome in itself!

The Livsey/Palmer guide is important reading—in addition to the clearness committee "rules" and description, it also offers various other ideas and disciplines for helping us and our colleagues prepare for reflection.

With these simple strategies, we begin to create communities of moral discourse in our professional associations and nonprofit organizations. In other words, we learn to talk together about ethics. Such conversations may not prevent ethical dilemmas, but they surely will prepare us to place them in context and face them with resolve and maturity.”

>>Institutional codes<<

This piece originally appeared in Notes back in 2003, but seems relevant in relation to the above essay which references this Independent Sector resource for organizational ethics.

“I have written often here of the good work that Independent Sector (IS) does to help all of us in the philanthropic sector in our reflection and practice related to social values and public accountability. Independent Sector’s *Obedience to the Unenforceable* was first issued in 1991 (as I was writing my dissertation on related issues!) and re-released in 2002. It is a thorough and insightful guide to the issues raised by the work we do—work that is grounded in public trust—and the need to be good and vigilant stewards of that trust.

Recently, IS has released its *Statement of Values and Code of Ethics for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Organizations* (see www.IndependentSector.org to download a PDF version), which offers both a guide on these important issues to the entire philanthropic sector, and also a template for individual nonprofit organizations to create their own such statements and guides. In the introduction to the statement, the authors “encourage all organizations to set aside time in your board meeting or at a retreat to discuss in detail all aspects of an ethical code—and be sure that new board members have the appropriate orientation to understand and embrace your code of ethics and practices.” No one else will create such codes for us—but someone (or some agency) may well enforce the tenets of the
code if we do not ensure that our boards and staffs understand and practice the highest of ethical standards in their work.

IS suggests the following foundation of widely shared values for the philanthropic sector:

- Commitment to the public good
- Accountability to the public
- Commitment beyond the law
- Respect for the worth and dignity of individuals
- Inclusiveness and social justice
- Respect for pluralism and diversity
- Transparency, integrity and honesty
- Responsible stewardship of resources, and
- Commitment to excellence and to maintaining the public trust.

Based on these values, a code of ethics for nonprofit organizations includes statements on:

- Personal and professional integrity
- Organizational mission and governance
- Legal compliance
- Responsible stewardship of resources
- Openness and disclosure
- Program evaluation
- Inclusiveness and diversity
- Fundraising policies and practices
- (and as relevant) Grant making guidelines.

Make it a priority to urge your board and organizational leadership to use this resource to review your organization’s work on behalf of the public trust. We owe a deep debt of gratitude once again to Independent Sector for its leadership in encouraging ethical and accountable voluntary action for the public good.”

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I’m reading Wendell Berry’s new collection of essays, *What Matters? Economics for a Renewed Commonwealth* (Counterpoint, 2010), which seem especially relevant given the urgent attention across the globe to the tattered state of our economic lives. Perhaps we need a paradigm shift!

I also am enjoying Mike Rose’s *The Mind at Work: Valuing the Intelligence of the American Worker* (Penguin Books, 2004), recommended by my colleague Harry Boyte and reflective of a broader understanding of the nature and purpose of education.
Here is a lovely antidote to a world of ‘no’s’. Enjoy.

**God Says Yes To Me**

by Kaylin Haught

I asked God if it was okay to be melodramatic
and she said yes
I asked her if it was okay to be short
and she said it sure is
I asked her if I could wear nail polish
or not wear nail polish
and she said honey
she calls me that sometimes
she said you can do just exactly
what you want to
Thanks God I said
And is it even okay if I don't paragraph
my letters
Sweetcakes God said
who knows where she picked that up
what I'm telling you is
Yes Yes Yes


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>>Topics for the next issue (August 2011)<<

- Abundance in practice
- The opportunity for co-creation
- Evolving social arrangements

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