

Intersections

Volume 2018 | Number 48

Article 1

Full Issue, Number 48, Fall 2018

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FALL 2018

Intersections

Faith, Learning, and the Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education



IN THIS ISSUE

Civil Discourse in a Fragmented World

Intersections is a publication by and largely for the academic communities of the twenty-seven institutions that comprise the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU). Each issue reflects on the **intersection** of faith, learning, and teaching within Lutheran higher education. It is published by the NECU, and has its home in the Presidential Center for Faith and Learning at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois, the institutional sponsor of the publication. **Intersections** extends and enhances discussions fostered by the annual Vocation of the Lutheran College Conference, together lifting up the vocation of Lutheran colleges and universities. It aims to raise the level of awareness among faculty, staff, and administration about the Lutheran heritage and church-relatedness of their institutions, especially as these **intersect** with contemporary challenges, opportunities, and initiatives.

About the Cover

Sheila Agee

Hiawatha, 2018

Oil on wood door

80" x 144" (four 80" x 36" panels)

Sheila Agee lives and works out of her studio near Brandon, South Dakota. Her work most often reflects whatever nature has to offer—hoping to capture the light of the sky or reflect on the essence of a more intimate detail. *Hiawatha* depicts the essence of the vivid details left behind by loving, thoughtful persons—evoking a lasting impression.

The piece is part of a “Seeing Dakota” installation (seeingdakota.com), in which Sheila Agee and Ann Pederson, Professor of Religion at Augustana University, Sioux Fall, South Dakota, bring together the artistic process and works of a visual artist with the reflections of a theologian to cultivate imaginative and possibly transformative ways of seeing and interpreting the world. They intertwine not only two different professional practices of art and theology, but also their two different ways of seeing Dakota. Their hope is that those who see the installation will see Dakota in a new manner. They invite people to look with intention, to ponder the images and words, and to gather insight from the art and words.

The following is part of Ann Pederson’s reflections on the broader landscape surrounding *Hiawatha*:

The location of the cemetery within a nearby golf course gives me the creeps.

Massive bur oaks shelter the graves of 121 Native Americans who were once inmates of the Hiawatha Asylum for Insane Indians. They were buried *en masse* on the 5th hole. Brilliant green grasses cover the bodies of men and women who were once warehoused within the massive walls of brick. Family members still come to honor their ancestors.

Faint outlines appear where individuals were buried. Simple crosses mark two of the graves. Red, yellow, white, and black ribbons on the fence posts flap in the wind. The deaths of these people are not shadows of a distant past. They reveal the present horror of what happens when evil is covered up.

Intersections

Number 48 Fall 2018

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PUBLISHED BY

The Network of ELCA Colleges
and Universities

INTERSECTIONS ONLINE

[http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/
intersections/](http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections/)

PUBLISHED AT

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639 38th Street
Rock Island, Illinois USA 61201

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From the Publisher



I write this column with the famous (in Christian circles) words about the human tongue from the Letter of James in the New Testament freshly on my mind. The text was one of readings yesterday at my church. The passage from James reads, “How great a forest is set ablaze by a small

fire. And the tongue is a fire! No one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison” (James 3:5b-6a; 8). As James writes more succinctly earlier in his letter, “If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues... their religion is worthless” (1:26).

Social ethics is not my academic discipline. Nonetheless, I can safely say that much Christian discourse about ethical conduct turns around the interplay of “bridling the tongue” and at the same time endorsing frank, honest conversation. The latter concern finds expression in a passage in the Letter to the Colossians, which urges Christians to always let their speech “be seasoned with salt” (4:6). Christians are to embrace a love ethic, but they are not to be door mats for Jesus, nor are they to ignore the evils they see. As the Lutheran tradition puts it, a theologian of the cross (that is, a follower of Jesus), calls a thing what it is.

Balancing the need for frank honesty in our speech, while at the same time not permitting frank speech to degenerate into hateful speech, is a daunting challenge. It is no virtue to avoid challenging difficult issues or wrongful acts under the banner of maintaining civility. At the same time, it is no virtue to speak with an arrogant, haranguing, unbridled tongue. We struggle to find the sweet spot. In response to the evil of segregation in the United States, Martin Luther King was convinced that nonviolent action was the way to “speak” frankly and honestly, controlling and avoiding

“speaking” hate through a violent response. Malcolm X thought otherwise. The debates continue.

The challenge is further complicated because evil in our speech is easily disguised. This can be true in personal speech, for example, when overtly mild speech is used to demean someone, as in the damning of African Americans with faint praise in the comment “he speaks so well,” while omitting the implied “for a (n-word).” Evil social or organizational speech may also be disguised, often perniciously. For example, overtly “good” public speech by organizations is increasingly used for evil through the mechanism known as astroturfing. Astroturfing is the practice of hiding the true sponsors of a message to make a message appear to be from some other (typically, grassroots) group. See John Oliver’s September 16 episode of *Last Week Tonight* on HBO if you are unfamiliar with the dastardly practice of astroturfing.

In higher education, the received practices of the academy give us an advantage over many groups in the United States for facing the challenge to sustain frank and honest but not hateful discourse about complex and divisive public issues. We should insist that the standards of academic discourse prevail when such issues are taken up on our campuses. These standards do not allow any and all speech, as guidelines adopted by many NECU institutions demonstrate. The standards of the North Atlantic academy, in which NECU institutions share, are deeply rooted in the Lutheran tradition and its insistence on frankness, honesty, and calling a thing what it is, while maintaining a concern for others and the common good and avoiding acrimony amid divisive disputes. The standards of academic discourse do not eliminate the challenge of speaking appropriately, but they give all of us in ELCA-related higher education a solid platform on which to stand. And they do this within a larger, fragmented culture struggling for pathways into civil discourse.

Mark Wilhelm is the Executive Director of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities.

From the Editor

For me, the most compelling and constructive moment at this past summer's Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference was also the most challenging.

Lynn Hunnicut was two-thirds the way through her opening introduction to the organizing theme of vocation within Lutheran higher education and its connections with this year's focus on "civil discourse in a fragmented world." During a pause for comments and questions, one participant pressed her on what she meant by civil discourse. Was it, the participant wanted to know, merely talk that was deemed to be respectful and polite by those whose power is protected by "respectful" and "polite" (read: carefully controlled and conforming) conversations? When do appeals for civility and civil discourse silence voices that are already repeatedly silenced because they are deemed too angry or unreasonable? Was the "fragmented world" in the conference title meant to implicate minority groups who find solidarity in self-segmentation? Did fragmentation's alternate naively imply a kind of white, majoritarian space that many mistake for neutral or unified?

These were tough questions. We returned to them throughout the conference and it made for richer, more difficult, more productive exchanges. Looking back now, I admit that I had not realized that "civil discourse," which had seemed to me a rather innocuous theme, could be spotted by others as un-interrogated and so not-so-innocent after all. I'm learning that one of the most determinative characteristics of the privilege possessed by white, straight, Christian males like me is the inability to see our own privilege, when left to ourselves. I am grateful to the other participants of the conference for enabling me to see how what counts as "civil discourse" can and should be contested—especially by asking who benefits from appeals to it. The no-less contestable title of next summer's conference—"Beyond Privilege:

Engaging Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity" (July 15-17, 2019, see announcement on page 13) promises to pick up where last summer's conference left off.

Most of the essays that follow were first presented at the 2018 Vocation of a Lutheran College conference. Some of them emphasize the need to emphatically listen and find common ground in a polarized culture, complete with partisan politics, social media echo-chambers, and the propaganda of "alternative facts." Others remind us that calls for civility can also become "the sleep-aid of a majority inclined to ignore the violence done in its name" (Newkirk, as cited by Leiseth, below); these authors urge educators to speak truthfully, even when those words sound angry. Together, the essays help us tune up for frank and honest conversations while resisting hateful discourse about divisive issues, as Mark Wilhelm puts it. Even the final essay by Pacific Lutheran University music director Jeffrey Bell-Hanson—which is ostensibly "outside the theme"—might help us get the "pitch" of our discourse right. Hanson, too, connects feelings with facts, passionate performance with responsible truth-telling.

The spring 2019 issue of *Intersections* will be devoted to the foundational document of NECU: "Rooted and Open: The Common Calling of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities." The editorial board invites reflections on the document; essays about its use among educators, administrators, and board members on our campuses; as well as reviews of other recent publications that help us consider our overlapping institutional vocations. Please contact me if you are willing and able to contribute.



Jason Mahn is an Associate Professor of Religion and Director of the Presidential Center for Faith and Learning at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois.

LYNN HUNNICUTT

Vocation and Civil Discourse: Discerning and Defining



I've been a Lutheran all my life. Except for brief stints worshipping with the Catholics in college (because they held services on Sunday evenings), and the United Church of Christ during grad school (because the building was closer to my apartment), my home congregation has

always been Lutheran. Among other things, this means that even if it was rarely mentioned, the concept of vocation has been part of what I was taught to believe. For as long as I can remember, I have believed that God calls people to various jobs, and that all jobs are somehow equally valid in God's eyes.

Given this understanding, if you'd asked me what my vocation was while I was in college, or even in graduate school, I would have said that I was waiting for God to call me in some distinctive and obvious way to my role in life, which would (of course) include significant service to the common good. In the meantime, I was just doing what made sense to me. It wasn't until I had finished my PhD, married, started work as an assistant professor of economics, and had my first child that it dawned on me that maybe God wasn't going to "call" me in the

distinctive and obvious way that I'd been expecting. This led me to wonder: How is it that a person is called to their particular role in the world? Absent some clear and distinct calling, how do we figure out if the thing we're doing is what we are actually called to do? How can one know the ways that one's work and various roles in the world actually serve the common good? Interestingly, it wasn't long after I started asking these questions that I saw an opening in my field at Pacific Lutheran University and felt, somehow, that this position was meant for me and that I couldn't *not* apply.

"Absent some clear and distinct calling, how do we figure out if the thing we're doing is what we are actually called to do?"

There are many ways to approach vocation, and one can consider the concept from a variety of faith traditions (including "none"). Rabbi Amy Eilberg uses the story of Moses' calling to illustrate four key factors which help us understand what it means to discern one's vocation. It turns out that discerning vocation is both easier and more difficult than my grad school self expected. While Moses was obviously and distinctively called by God, the factors

Lynn Hunnicutt is a professor of economics at Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, Washington. She has been a part of PLU's vocation initiative since 2003, and served as the founding director of PLU's Wild Hope Center for Vocation. Lynn is also the Assistant Director of the Council of Independent College's Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education, and serves as the co-chair of the Vocation of a Lutheran College conference. She lives in a house full of boys in Fircrest, Washington, and is most likely out for a bike ride when she's not at home.

Eilberg discusses suggest that it's possible for those of us who are not so directly called to discern who we are meant to be and what we are meant to do.

Clear and Extraordinary Callings

The story of Moses' calling is found in the third chapter of Exodus. I'm quoting it at length here and ask that you read it carefully and with fresh eyes, even if it's a familiar story:

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."

When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

And Moses said, "Here I am."

"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. [Exodus 3:1-6]

Clearly, this is a story of calling. Moses doesn't have to work very hard to hear the call, nor does he have to wonder just who he's hearing it from. Even so, it contains several lessons for those of us who do not receive such clear messages. Before I get to these, let me name two components of this story that are *not* necessarily in all callings.

First, the obvious: vocational discernment doesn't require an audible call from God through a burning bush. While some people speak of literally *hearing* the voice of God while dreaming or awake, vocation can and often does come

to us in much more ordinary ways. Your friend points out something you're really good at. You suggest to a student that they should consider your discipline as a major. You find yourself taking on a challenge that somehow, you can't *not* do. All of these can lead a person to her or his vocation. And so, the burning bush is but one of many ways to become aware of—to discern—one's vocation.

"The temptation is to think that vocation must be some grand action or position—one that will be prestigious, challenging, exhilarating, and powerful."

Second, and more subtly, following this passage we learn that God is calling Moses to lead God's people out of slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land. The temptation is to think that vocation must be some grand action or position—one that will be prestigious, challenging, exhilarating, and powerful. What is more, we think that only those who are so called have a *true* vocation. To be sure, sometimes, and for some people, vocation turns out to be a call to leadership or to recognition or to distinction. Yet there are times when vocation includes neither power nor recognition, when people are called to things that no one will see, or to things that are viewed as mundane or ordinary. Small, even. Vocation, properly understood, is something everyone may claim, regardless of gender, race, or economic position. We all have a discernible vocation.

Attention, Wonder, Community, Humility

Given these caveats, let's return to the story of Moses' calling. Eilberg claims that it illustrates four requirements for vocational discernment. The first is *attentiveness*. In order to sense a calling (regardless of the source), one must pay attention. One has to notice the source of the calling before it can be understood. It would have been easy for Moses to pass by the burning bush (he was, after all, in the desert and had doubtless seen burning things before). But he didn't. Something about the bush

"Vocational discernment doesn't require an audible call from God through a burning bush."

caught his attention and held it long enough for him to really notice. Generally speaking, vocational discernment requires this sort of attention. And so I ask: Where and how do we pay attention? On what do we focus long enough to notice? What gets in the way of our noticing? Perhaps most importantly: What are we ignoring that is asking for our attention?

Wonder is the second quality of vocational discernment. One must wonder about what one notices. Once he had noticed the burning bush, Moses became curious and moved closer to investigate. He became actively engaged in trying to understand what he saw. While not everything we notice leads to our vocation, noticing without wondering only leads to an interesting collection of unusual things. Vocational discernment requires the sort of active engagement that Moses undertook—a pointed curiosity and willingness to find out more. And so I ask: What do you wonder about? How are you actively engaged in the process of wondering? How do you foster a sense of wonder in others? Where and how do our colleges and universities foster this sense of wonder? How do we accompany students as they explore the questions that cause them to wonder? It has been said that vocation is often discerned internally and confirmed externally. How do our colleges and universities serve as external confirmation for what our students wonder about themselves and the world around them? Perhaps most importantly: Where and how do we fall short?

“Where and how do our colleges and universities foster this sense of wonder? How do we accompany students as they explore the questions that cause them to wonder?”

Eilberg’s third feature of vocational discernment is a sense of *communal consciousness*. To understand this, you need to know that Moses was tending flocks in the wilderness because he was on the run. He had been chased out of Egypt for killing an Egyptian he saw beating one of his fellow Israelites. Moses’ sense of belonging to the Israelite community served as an important part of his discernment process. It provided him a clear sense of who he was

meant to serve. Martin Luther would extend this further, claiming that a correct understanding of vocation requires that it be of service to the community, or as Luther would put it, to the neighbor. According to Luther, the Christian “should be guided in all his works by this thought and contemplate this one thing alone, that he may serve and benefit others in all that he does, considering nothing except the need and advantage of his neighbor” (Luther 365, as quoted by Kleinmans 396-97).

Vocation, properly understood, must benefit the other.

It is this sort of openness to and care for the other that Mark Schwehn refers to in examining the relationship between friendship and truth. Schwehn’s descriptions of missionary Frank Laubach’s work with the Moro population of the Philippines, and of biologist Barbara McClintock’s research on the corn plant, illustrate his claim that in order to understand something, one must approach it first in friendship.¹ Schwehn claims that in order to truly understand, one must first love—or “neighbor”—the other. Inasmuch as discerning vocation depends on and informs understanding, it must also involve a sense of belonging, or a communal consciousness with the thing one serves.

Finally, Eilberg notes that following this episode, Moses spent a long time arguing with God about whether he was the right person to lead the Israelites. Eilberg attributes this argument to Moses’ humility, and claims that *humility* is a fourth feature of vocational discernment. Purposeful action born of ambition, or a need for self-aggrandizement, Eilberg seems to be saying, is likely *not* vocation. Such action crowds out other features of vocational discernment such as attention and wonder, not to mention service to the other. While it is important that we accurately assess our capacities (false humility is no humility at all), it is also important that we recognize how much we can learn from the other.

The Correspondence of Calling and Civil Discourse

Isn’t it interesting that these four features—attention, wonder, communal consciousness and humility—are key aspects of civil discourse?² Given this correspondence, we should ask: When we foster vocational discernment on our campuses, are we also promoting civil discourse? Are we

forming our students to pay attention to the other until they understand? Are we forming students to wonder—about themselves, about the world around them, and (particularly) about things that are different from what they're used to? Are we forming students to have a sense of community, and is the community that our students sense as diverse and inclusive as we hope it will be? Are we building a sense of humility within our students—a sense that they might learn from everyone they encounter on our campuses? It seems to me that this is what our colleges and universities are called to do. And it seems to me that a focus on providing students opportunities to be attentive, to wonder, to build communities with those who are different from them, and to exhibit both intellectual and ethical humility might move our campuses and our world to a much more civil state.

To conclude, I want to quote an anonymous comment submitted at the end of last summer's Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference. I close with it because it highlights a question that is closely related to civil discourse:

I have left with questions of privilege and vocation, especially how we might engage students in conversations of vocational discernment when many may still be attempting to discern their own identities.... When students come to our institutions and are able to explore themselves [asking questions] such as, "Am I gay?" or, "What does it mean to be a man?" or "I'm a black person in a sea of white people, how do I act?" perhaps for the first time, I wonder how that engagement is different than the "traditional" white, middle-class student we gear many things toward.

Perhaps the qualities that Moses exhibited, particularly attentiveness and wonder, broaden the scope of vocation and also allow us to address questions of privilege in *its* discernment. That is, when we begin to discern vocation through processes of attentiveness and wonder, perhaps vocation is made available to all people, not only those to whom God speaks directly, or those who are called to religious service, or those who embody what my colleagues in sociology call the hegemonic narrative. The poet Mary Oliver says this well: "Instructions for living a life. *Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it.*"

Encouraging students to notice and wonder not only fosters civil discourse but also introduces them to vocation and its discernment. Perhaps this might provide a way for all of our students to begin considering who they are and who they might become. In that case, we do well when we find ways to promote attentiveness and wonder—ways that are welcoming to those who come to use from "traditional" backgrounds, as well as those who are encountering our traditions for the first time. Maybe this could be the beginning of introducing our students to vocation and its discernment.

Endnotes

1. In relating these stories, Schwehn cites books by David Hollinger and Evelyn Fox Keller, both listed below.
2. A brief introduction to the topic of civil discourse can be found in Andrea Leskes's "A Plea for Civil Discourse" (see below).

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Polarization, Incivility, and a Need for “Change”



We live in a time where the demands for change and the promises of change dominate much of American discourse. While many Americans are clamoring for change and many politicians are promising change, it's not always clear what this so-called change is supposed to look like. What

exactly is it that people are wanting and what exactly is it that politicians are promising?

While there is no universal consensus regarding a definition of “change,” there do seem to be some common assumptions shared by many people when talking about change. The most prevalent assumption is that change involves the replacement of a present undesired way of being with a proposed desired alternative way of being. Often implicit in this assumption is a belief held by those demanding change that their views represent the desired alternative way of being, while the present undesired way of being is represented by the views of those needing to change. In other words, usually when people are demanding change, what they are really demanding is that “others” see things the way they already see them.

“Usually when people are demanding change, what they are really demanding is that ‘others’ see things the way they already see them.”

How Rhetoric of Change Contributes to Polarization

Far too often when we refer to “change,” we’re referring to something we believe “others” need to do rather than something we ourselves also need to do. During a period that many people have identified as the most deeply divided period in American politics and culture—a period where political gridlock is the norm rather than the exception—there has been an exponential increase in the rhetoric of “change” (Noah 2008). I find that extremely ironic. Everyone is dug in, entrenched, and unwilling to move from their ideological position; at the same time everyone is talking about, demanding, and even promising change. What kind of change is possible when no one thinks they need to change and everyone thinks “others” need to change?

The belief that others are “the problem” hinders change and contributes to much of the incivility and polarization

Guy Nave is a professor of religion at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. His research focuses on Christianity, religion and social justice, the social construction of religious meaning, and race-religion-and-politics. He is currently researching the power, politics, and meaning behind the rhetoric of “change,” in part through the creation of the Clamoring for Change social media platform described in this essay.

within society today. Polarization within both the United States Senate and the House of Representatives is the highest it has been since the Civil War post-Reconstruction period (“Polarization”).

A study of 10,000 Americans (“Political Polarization”) finds that polarization among Americans is more extreme than it has been any time in the last 20 years (Wade). The nature of this divide reflects a depth of cultural conflict that results in the demonization of people who hold opposing views (Bridges). People on opposite sides are not now simply “wrong”; they are immoral and must be opposed. Over a quarter of democrats and a third of republicans see “the other” as a “threat to the nation’s well-being” (Wade). In order to experience meaningful transformative change, this demonization of others—which only contributes to incivility and polarization—has to stop.

The Limitations of our Perspectives

Only when we allow ourselves to truly hear the perspectives of others can genuine dialogue take place. Engaging in concurrent monologues devoted to persuading others is not the same thing as engaging in dialogue. Monologues are simply about expressing one perspective. Dialogue, however, is about sharing insights and learning from one another in order to arrive at positions reflective of multiple perspectives.

“Our worldviews and ideologies make it difficult for us to acknowledge the provisional nature of our perspectives. Instead, we operate from positions of certainty, which hinder civility between people possessing differing views.”

Every belief we possess is based on limited amounts of information and personal experiences. When confronted with the reality of a multiverse that is infinite, we have to acknowledge that there is far more we do not know than we do know. If there is an infinite amount to learn and experience, and if our perspectives are based upon limited amounts of information and experiences, then

our perspectives can only be provisional and contingent at best. We have to be willing, therefore, to consider the possibility that our perspectives do not represent the right, the best, or the only perspectives.

This way of thinking is rarely easy because one’s perspective is often a reflection of one’s worldview, which is difficult to alter because there is much at stake if the worldview is “wrong.” Worldviews are so deeply embedded in our consciousness and in the habits of our lives that to question our worldview is in many ways to question reality itself. Our worldviews are shaped by our ideologies, which represent complex belief systems that attempt to make sense of and explain social and political arrangements and relationships.

Our worldviews and ideologies make it difficult for us to acknowledge the provisional nature of our perspectives. Instead, we operate from positions of certainty, which hinder civility between people possessing differing views.

Using Social Media to Promote Civility

Social media often reinforces our notions of certainty. Since most people gravitate toward media sources that affirm preexisting views, social media frequently affirms our belief that “others” are the ones who need to change. Social media regularly functions as an “echo chamber” that filters the information we receive, thereby affirming our opinions about “others” (“Reason Your Feed”). Echo chambers present single ideological perspectives that resonate with the perspectives people already have, creating dangerous ideological bubbles (Grimes).

Given this challenge, I am attempting to develop a social media platform called “Clamoring for Change”¹ that seeks to burst such ideological bubbles. Clamoring for Change endeavors to create a space that welcomes multiple ideological perspectives and encourages interaction and conversation across multiple perspectives.

While America is becoming increasingly divided along ideological fault lines, the majority of Americans are not ideological extremists (“Political Polarization”). This American majority, however, is often less politically engaged and frequently less willing to participate in discourse about important social issues—possibly because of frustration, disillusionment, and a distaste for the

rancor and incivility associated with such discourse. Their lack of engagement allows extremist on both the right and the left to dominate much of the discourse, which results in increased polarization and incivility.

Changing the Way We Think about Change

While much of the rhetoric of change in America today is targeted at changing “others,” meaningful transformative change is not primarily about persuading and convincing one side to see things the way the other side sees them. Instead, change is about each and every side embracing perspectives informed by engagement with and understanding of others.

Understanding is a necessary ingredient for meaningful transformative change. We must all seek to understand as much as we seek to be understood. Unfortunately, too often we focus more on being understood than on trying to understand.

What is more, in our quest to be understood, we must at all times ask ourselves whether what we’re saying and the way we are saying it encourages others to seek to understand us. If we genuinely seek to be understood, we must give others a reason to want to understand us. Being disrespectful to others does not give others a reason to want to understand us.

This is not an issue of “political correctness.” It is an issue of respect—which goes a long way in reducing incivility and polarization. Promoting civility is not about promoting agreement. We are not suggesting people will (or even should) agree on everything. Differing perspectives are an essential component of a thriving and vibrant society. Disagreement is not the cause of incivility and polarization. Disrespect is a primary source of incivility and polarization, and disrespect is almost always rooted in a lack of understanding.

Request for Participation

In order for a project like Clamoring for Change to succeed, we need numerous contributors representing multiple ideological perspectives to produce “user

content” (e.g. blogs, videos, podcasts, etc.) and we need participants with diverse perspectives to join the conversations regarding important social issues. While the creation of this platform is an ambitious project, we believe it has the potential of making a major contribution to the promotion of civil dialogue in a society that is growing increasingly polarized.

Please visit the Clamoring for Change website (listed below) and consider joining us in our effort to reduce polarization by promoting understanding of and engagement with multiple ideological perspectives.

Endnotes

1. Clamoring for Change is “a space that seeks to bring together people who are interested in effecting meaningful societal change regarding important social issues. We hope to help reduce societal polarization and promote civil dialogue by building a community of people with diverse views, opinions, and ideas, who are willing to share, listen, and learn—people who not only want to bring about change but who are also open to experiencing change themselves.” See clamoringforchange.com/about/.

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SAVE THE DATE FOR NEXT SUMMER'S

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Vice President of Diversity,
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Dr. Guy Nave

Professor of Religion
Luther College
Decorah, Iowa

Putting the Kind Back in Human



How do we put the kind back in human? How do we move forward into living with generosity as a spiritual practice, with open hearts and open hands when—in our country—fear, polarization, and cynicism tell us to close ourselves off except to those who believe, think,

behave, vote, and perhaps worship like us? How do we break habitual one-liners on social media and judgments (whether spoken or unspoken) such as: “If you are a Christian you couldn’t possibly have voted for such-and-such a candidate”?

We need to prioritize our ability actually to listen with intent to understand, with intent to honor the other as being created in the image of God, with intent to construct something that is mutually beneficial based on core values. Yelling louder and coming up with pithy memes is simply more of the same. Right now the last thing we need is more of the same.

To put the kind back in human is how we will find our common humanity. Let me differentiate: I’m not using *kind* and *nice* interchangeably. Some of us were raised with the advice that Thumper (in *Bambi*) received from his mother, “If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.” And I happen to live in Minnesota, with its reputation for “Minnesota nice.” Don’t get me wrong—I’m all for politeness, respect, and civility, but “nice” has been used

as a way to avoid challenging conversations, as a way to support the status quo; nice can even become passive-aggressive. Sometimes the truth that needs to be spoken isn’t nice to hear. Recently I’ve been working on becoming “Minnesota *kind*.”

Brené Brown, a grounded theory researcher, has some helpful insights for us. For the last 14 years, she has listened to people’s stories of struggle, courage, shame, and vulnerability. She studies the human condition by starting with lived experiences. I love that she starts with story because those of us in Christian churches also teach through story; we even know ourselves as co-creators in God’s story. At this point, Dr. Brown has over 200,000 pieces of data. I have facilitated her research for the past six years. Over and over again I see how this research makes people feel known and seen because Brené is naming their reality in ways that they recognize.

And so, what, according to this research, stops us from putting the kind back in human?

Vulnerability

Brown defines vulnerability as “risk, emotional exposure, and uncertainty.” Anything we do that is courageous involves risk, emotional exposure, and uncertainty. When we are vulnerable and own a truth that may not conform to majority culture, we know we will be judged. When we risk saying, “I need help; I don’t understand,” we are open to being wounded.

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Many of us tell ourselves that we will have hard conversations about race, religion, immigration, debt reduction, or our own family histories only when we're better prepared, when we've got all our facts straight, or after we've studied the topic more. In part, we believe that if we had all this organized, then having hard conversations would not be hard or uncomfortable or jarring. We believe that we could achieve a noble outcome without ever really changing:

without having to say, "I have white privilege and that shapes my biases,"

without having to say, "what you just said is giving me pause to re-think my view,"

without having to say, "this conversation is really hard for me and in the past when I've tried to talk about these things, I haven't felt safe to express my perspective so just showing up here is a huge ask of me."

And yet, the truth remains that vulnerability is the path back to each other. And God created us for each other. When I risk a bit with you, and you risk a bit with me, we now trust each other a bit more and are more deeply connected. We've seen God in each other.

Brown teaches this: "When we stop caring about what people think, we lose our capacity for connection. When we become defined by what people think, we lose our willingness to be vulnerable."

Courageous and Playful Truth-telling

I have volunteered with an organization called Better Angels, whose mission it is to de-polarize the United States through highly facilitated conversations between republicans and democrats. Last fall, on a rainy evening, a group gathered to engage in these conversations; the event was open to the public to watch, and the Minneapolis/St. Paul *Star Tribune* newspaper sent a reporter and photographer. Through a series of questions and exercises, participants were asked to reflect on and critique their own political party. Everyone was asked the question, "What don't you like about your party?" The initial answers were about smaller policy issues, but eventually a woman said, "I don't hold the same view on abortion as my party and I feel like I can't say that—that there is no place within the party for me to say that."

What do I most profoundly remember from that night? Of course, it is this woman speaking her courageous truth.

But there is another side to courageous truth telling, and it gets us back to the issue of kindness. I believe that God created us to play, to laugh, to create, to have moments of collective joy together. Jesus even prayed at the Last Supper that his followers would have joy!

"When any system—whether it be a family, a business, a faith community, a country, or a college—is anxious, playfulness is a way to stay connected through the conflict."

Many of us often think we will do those things only after we've done the big things, when we have time. That isn't getting us where we want to go. Instead, Dr. Stuart Brown, who studies play, writes, "The opposite of play is not work—the opposite of play is depression." If you've worked in higher education for a number of years, have you seen the rate of depression among students increase? The opposite of play is depression.

According to family systems theorist Edwin Friedman, when any system—whether it be a family, a business, a faith community, a country, or a college—is anxious, playfulness is a way to stay connected through the conflict. When there is anxiety, we become serious to protect ourselves because it feels less exposed. But vulnerability is how we share our common humanity.

How would *your* world change if you played, connected, dwelt in joy and kindness more? And how would that change *our* world?

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It's Time to Rewrite the Rules of Civility



I have a big problem with civil discourse and civility itself. I wonder if they are broken beyond repair. If not irreparably broken, then I think it is time for a major overhaul.

On June 29, 2018, *The New York Times* published a piece with the title, "White America's Age-Old, Misguided

Obsession with Civility." In it, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" is quoted: "I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council-er or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice" (Sugrue).

The day before, on June 28, Vann Newkirk II wrote for *The Atlantic*, "As has so often been the case, the demands for civility function primarily to stifle the frustrations of those currently facing real harm.... Poor people, immigrants, black activists, and perhaps LGBT employees at a restaurant in Virginia¹ are bludgeoned into silence by the constant cry for civility, made to hold still as injustices are visited upon them." Newkirk concludes, "Civility is the sleep-aid of a majority inclined to ignore the violence done in its name—because in the end, they will be alright" (Newkirk).

From Policing Civility to Neighboring and Accompaniment

The rules of civility regularly translate into the majority's rules—play "nice" and behave (because I say so!)—so count me in among those who say it is time to set them aside and look elsewhere. The two pieces I mentioned resonate deeply with some of the most unsettling challenges from my own Christian faith journey. How often are the words *civility* and *Christianity*, and their related networks of ideas, used to shut up, to shut down, and to shut out? How frequently do people, in the names of both civility and Christianity, sustain the status quo of systems that scold and dismiss, that harm

"How frequently do people, in the names of both civility and Christianity, sustain the status quo of systems that scold and dismiss, that harm people and perpetuate injustice?"

people and perpetuate injustice? Thankfully, the parallel I see between civility and Christianity does not end here. I yearn for a Christianity that is durable and resilient enough to carry our greatest suffering and biggest problems as well as our deepest compassion. I have the same longings for civility and civil discourse.

Over the past few years, my longings for Christianity have brought me to focus less on beliefs and more on practice. It is not that I don't find discussions of Christian

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theology important. I do. And it is not that I see myself and my actions as of ultimate concern. I don't. What I find important and urgent is my need for finding my way in this world day in and day out. So I am *practicing* Christianity. These days I am listening deeply and listening daily to the words of Jesus as he tells me to love God and love my neighbor as myself. I am practicing loving: loving God, neighbor, and self. I am practicing Christianity as neighboring and it seems to me that neighboring ought to be the beating heart of civility and civil discourse. Not the majority's rules. Not play nice. Not behave (because I say so!). Neighboring.

"Neighboring ought to be the beating heart of civility and civil discourse."

When I consider Christianity as neighboring, the most helpful guidance I know comes from the model of accompaniment used by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Originating in the ELCA's Global Mission Unit, accompaniment is journeying together in solidarity, living with the understanding that our lives are interwoven and interdependent.² Accompaniment is first, foremost, and always relational. Accompaniment puts flesh on the bones of neighboring. While nearly all of its ideas are appealing to me, it is the five values of accompaniment that I find concrete and specific enough to be practical, to be practice-able. This is why I aspire to practice them on a daily basis; this is why we've adopted the five values of accompaniment as the values of service for Campus Ministry at Concordia College; and this is why I propose we all carry these five values with us whenever we set out to practice civility and civil discourse. The five values of accompaniment are as follows:

- Mutuality
- Inclusivity
- Empowerment
- Sustainability
- Vulnerability

I propose that at each of our ELCA colleges and universities we rewrite civility as neighboring and use the five values of accompaniment as our guide.

Unpacking the Values of Accompaniment

I would now like to share some of the richness of how the ELCA specifically unpacks these universal values. At the same time, I will share some examples of the five values in action from within the Concordia community. These are my examples. They are from my perspective and they are not necessarily drawn from civil discourse, but I hope they can still serve to get our creative juices flowing as we consider rewriting civility as neighboring by using the five values of the model of accompaniment.

Mutuality is grounded in the belief that we all have strengths, resources, challenges, fears, hopes, dreams, and shortcomings to share in every circumstance (Global Mission). When I design reflection on service, mutuality is almost always the starting point. Was this experience mutual? How do you know this? These short questions can go a long way while reflecting after a service engagement. They can reveal and contribute to rewiring the "white savior complex" and to disrupting feelings of, "Hey, good job! That's all done. Back to (my) life!" They focus attention on people and relationships as opposed to tasks and self-congratulation.

The value of *inclusivity* as upheld within the accompaniment model recognizes that someone is always excluded; accepting this as given, we "seek to build relationships across boundaries that exclude and divide" (Global Mission). Thanks to a Circle Keepers training organized by my colleague, Amena Chaudhry, I'm committed to "keeping circle" as a vital, equitable, and relational practice. An example from circle keeping is to pass a talking piece around a circle of conversation (Pranis 35). Everyone gets a turn to speak without interruption and a person's turn only ends when she/he chooses to end it by passing on that talking piece.

The ELCA translates the value of *empowerment* into the following intention: "We seek to identify and correct imbalances of power, which may mean recognizing and letting go of our own" (Global Mission). I find the explicit naming of this need to let go important, especially because I hold a lot of power and privilege and I am accustomed to this status. This past academic year I collaborated with four black male Concordia students, inviting them to explore the topic of black male anger as a Chapel during the week of MLK. I am grateful that they

answered with an enthusiastic and inspiring yes. My job was not to shape the message; my job was to create an environment, tend to relationships, and design a process whereby these four students could discover, draft, and refine what they wanted to say, including questions that they wanted to pose.

In the context of accompaniment, *sustainability* recognizes that tending to relationships and community leads to more durable shared efforts (Global Mission). Last spring, after listening to the insistence of compassionate students and in partnership with the disaster relief team of the Gulf Coast Synod of the ELCA, a group of 40 members of the college community travelled down to Pasadena, Texas to spend time with neighbors impacted by Hurricane Harvey. This fall, another group of students will head down to a nearby community, this time to learn about immigration, citizenship, and the mapping of community resources. Across campus, from week-long Justice Journeys to global learning partnerships, we're increasingly putting our energies into sustaining ongoing relationships rather than initiating one-off transactions.

The article by Sarah Ciavarrri in this issue of *Intersections* discusses *vulnerability*, the last value associated with accompaniment, and I am very thankful for her work. One of the ways I practice vulnerability is quite basic, but holds the potential to transform conversations, relationships, and me: when listening to another person, I practice presence instead of figuring out what I'm going to say next.

Clearly, I practice these five values a lot. Every day I practice not because I think practice makes perfect but because I think it's important to exercise these muscles.

Concluding Thoughts

If civility is the sleep-aid of the majority (Newkirk), it is time for those of us who are the majority to wake up. Together, all of us must redefine the rules of civility so that "the frustrations of those currently facing real harm" are not "regularly stifled" (Newkirk). Let us commit to a civility that has neighboring as its beating heart and not the majority's rules of playing "nice" and upholding the status quo. We need a civil discourse which can hold the biggest problems of our whole "glocal" neighborhood and the

"Let us commit to a civility that has neighboring as its beating heart and not the majority's rules of playing 'nice' and upholding the status quo."

deepest compassion we have for each other as neighbors. Let us rewrite civility as neighboring using the five values of the ELCA's model of accompaniment: mutuality, inclusivity, empowerment, sustainability, and vulnerability. Let us get started and start practicing today. And today will be a beautiful day in the neighborhood.

Endnotes

1. Both of these pieces were published in the days after Sarah Huckabee Sanders was asked to leave The Red Hen by Virginia restaurant owner, Stephanie Wilkinson.
2. While I'd previously heard of the model of accompaniment, my more thorough introduction to the model was in the context of an ecumenical training prior to serving as Associate Country Coordinator for the ELCA's Young Adults in Global Mission Program in Southern Africa. Held in Toronto, this training also introduced me to the forced residential schooling of aboriginal peoples in Canada, a history we share in the United States. When I speak of the painful past of Christian (mission) history, such stories shape my perceptions and practices.

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MIKE BLAIR

Original Song Lyrics

"Just a Little"

(August 2018)

Weary from the rising tides of malice,
families separated in the land of liberty.
How have we become a nation callous
to *huddled masses yearning to breathe free*?
Prophets' wisdom, like a bell resounding,
justice bearing mercy and a generous feast for all,
parables of need and grace abounding,
last handful of flour becomes a widow's generous call.

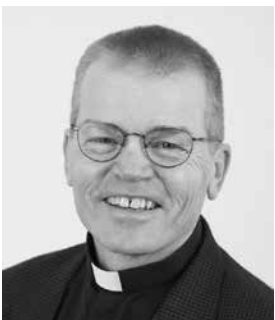
I just need a little light from Bethlehem,
it would be enough just to reach and touch the
garment's hem.
join the great refrain, "We shall overcome,"
even dogs will get the master's table crumbs.
All I need is a little, all I need, just a little.

Immigrant Naomi suffered losses,
like so many refugees, a tale of deep lament,
the faithfulness of Ruth, a new colossus,
"I will go where you go," a sacred testament.
Mother of all citizens and exiles,
bless us by your welcome with so many things amiss,
courage grant amidst the chaos hostile,
what if we are born for a time such as this?

I just need a little light from Bethlehem,
it would be enough just to reach and touch the
garment's hem.
Take and bless the gifts counted last and least,
hearts are hungry for a loaves and fishes feast.
All I need is a little, all I need, just a little.

Torch of liberty and faithful beacon,
burn with pilgrim hunger for a world more just and whole,
luminous and wise with fire of freedom,
summon forth the kindred spark in every blessed soul.

I just need a little light...



Mike Blair serves as a college pastor at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. He is a 1979 alumnus of Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois, with majors in music and psychology, and a 1985 graduate of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Mike and his wife, Sue Blair, sing together at coffeehouses, congregations, retreats, and community venues. Their first CD, *Ever Singing*, is a collection of original works expressing gratitude for Sue's recovery from Hodgkin's Lymphoma and the shared journey of song. You can learn more about their music at eversinging.com. Mike led a version of "Just a Little" as one of the devotions during the 2018 Vocation of a Lutheran College conference. The lyrics are inspired by a host of biblical images and stories, by Emma Lazarus' poem "The New Colossus" that graces the Statue of Liberty, and by the faith, hope, love, and courage of immigrant friends and neighbors.

The Musician's Vocation



On March 31, 2003, soon after the invasion of Iraq, the *News Hour* on PBS began running a segment listing the American military (and some civilian) personnel killed there each week. The brief profiles appeared on the screen one by one in silence. The decision not to include music was made

by anchor and managing editor, Jim Lehrer. He wanted to keep these segments purely about remembering those who had lost their lives, and to avoid any political statement (Getler).

In a society so accustomed to cinematic production values, and in which other high-profile news organizations had produced similar segments with an underlay of soaring, inspirational music, the choice made by Lehrer at the *News Hour* stands out. To have chosen a musical soundtrack for that moment of reflection on those lost in war would have been to suggest to the viewers how they should think and feel about them. Especially during a war surrounded by public controversy, the reactions of people to such losses are complicated and unpredictable. In making this choice, Lehrer not only showed respect for his viewers, but also at least an intuitive understanding of the power of music to shape emotional perceptions, and of the importance of those perceptions in shaping a sense of the truth.

Jeffrey Bell-Hanson began his seventeenth season as Music Director of the Pacific Lutheran University Symphony Orchestra and Professor of Music at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington. He has conducted orchestras and wind ensembles throughout the United States and in Bulgaria and the Czech Republic, including the West Bohemian Symphony Orchestra, the Olympia Symphony, the Marquette Symphony Orchestra, the Vratza Philharmonic and the Philharmonia Bulgarica.

That music provides emotional cues that help shape how we see events and objects is not a revelation. We have a lucrative entertainment industry that demonstrates the principle with every new film or computer game. The concept of song itself is premised on the idea of enhancing the power of text with music. Yet the *News Hour* anecdote, by its negative example, strikingly illustrates the power of music to provide such cues about real world events.

Articulating Art

Ironically, discussions among musicians indicating a similar depth of thought about how their art is used seem relatively rare. This observation is not meant to suggest that musicians don't deeply feel that what they do is important. However, some musicians, along with artists of all kinds, have expressed doubt about the need for, and even the wisdom of, such discussions. For them, talking or writing about their art often seems, at best, beside the point. To offer comment beyond the expression embodied in the work itself would be to make it less effective (Farago). For some, there may simply be a sense that to become mired in examination and discussion of the product of their self-expression would blunt the passion that drives it. Their objections are not without merit. Words can circumscribe a musical experience in the same way that music can circumscribe what should be a solemn and personal reflection, like an accounting of the casualties of war.

This reluctance is, to some extent, baked into the history of the discipline. The earliest institutions created to educate musicians treated it as a craft for which artisans were to be trained. These training programs did not arise within the great universities that were the traditional homes to intellectual pursuits. Accordingly, the teaching mostly took the form of skill-based training.

“For some, there may simply be a sense that to become mired in examination and discussion of the product of their self-expression would blunt the passion that drives it.”

In the nineteenth century, even as a new level of intellectual discourse flowered among musicians, other factors began to discourage such reflection. The status of composers and performers was being elevated from artisan to artist. The musical profession increasingly gave rise to a cult of personality, and a corresponding mystique began to develop around the art itself. This, in turn, led to the belief that music was an entirely unique form of human expression that would not easily yield to examination or description by linguistic means.

This history leaves the academic musical establishment today in a somewhat awkward position. Musicians were invited into the university in the last century—particularly in the United States. However, they have yet to find a comfortable role in the intellectual life of the academy. This discomfort often manifests as difficulty in engaging in the sort of introspection necessary in the search for a sense of vocation. Such introspection would not be aimed at producing the sort of superficial commentary shared with audiences at a performance, often focused on details of context and biography. Rather it would encourage dialog across disciplines that could advance the creation of a musical hermeneutic.

What (and Whom) is Music For?

While it is certainly the case that committed, experienced musicians understand at least intuitively that their art offers a unique way of knowing and sharing important

truths, a sense of vocation calls them to something more. It requires that they strive to understand ever more clearly how the art they practice meets the needs they are called to address. For this, they need a more robust vocabulary and more encouragement.

Musicians are most often driven by passion for the performance at hand. That passion is surely a good thing. We are often told that to be successful in life we must pursue that about which we are passionate, or, as the late Joseph Campbell was fond of saying, “follow your bliss” (Campbell 120).¹ Yet pursuing passion is not necessarily synonymous with vocation. One is called to a sense of vocation. Being called implies the involvement of another who is doing the calling. Whatever one names the caller—a deity, the quiet, inner voice of conscience, a sense of empathy and compassion, or perhaps a desire simply to be useful to one’s peers—is less important than that it is other-focused. It is born of a sense of relationship to one’s fellow travelers (Christensen 49).

“Pursuing passion is not necessarily synonymous with vocation.”

There should be little doubt that the musician’s passionate impulse for self-expression is, at its core, a desire to share some essential significance. But just as passion alone does not define vocation, that sharing cannot be the only concern of a musician following a sense of vocation. She must also be concerned about the effect of that sharing on the listener, or community of listeners.

The issue posed here is not unlike those faced in other disciplines. In an interview in 1945, Robert Oppenheimer reflected on the intellectual curiosity that drove him and others in their pursuit of a workable atomic weapon:

If you are a scientist, you believe that it is good to find out how the world works. When you see something that is technically sweet you go ahead and do it and you argue about what to do with it only after you have had your technical success. That’s the way it was with the atomic bomb. (Hijiya 128-29)

Oppenheimer maintained to the end of his life that he had no regrets about the use of atomic weapons at the end of the Second World War. However, his growing ambivalence about the role he played in creating them eventually led to his humiliating forced removal from government service (Hijiya 135-36).

It is hard to imagine the work of a musician having consequences of similar magnitude. Indeed, many people likely think of the art mostly as a pleasant distraction or accompaniment. Even so, history is replete with cases of the work of musicians being co-opted for nefarious ends, be they political, religious, or utilitarian. The Nazis' preference for Wagner's music as an emblem of their brand, the common use of religious music by colonial powers as an aid in imposing alien cultures on native populations, and the blasting of loud music into prison cells to soften up subjects for interrogation are all dramatic examples of consequences likely unintended by the original artists. We live in an age of easy digital storage and reproduction of sound. Short of copyright protections, there is little that composers or recording artists can do about how subsequent generations use the "products" of their labors. They can, however, practice their art in ways that are consistent with their own understanding of its significance for others. When their efforts are preserved beyond a single, ephemeral performance, they can document their intentions well enough to inoculate at least their reputations against the damage that might be done by misappropriation. But first, they must clearly understand its potential for misuse, and must learn to be articulate about their intentions in ways that will not compromise the work's inherent eloquence.

Meaning and the Musician's Mandate

As observed above, music doesn't need words to be meaningful, and words can unnecessarily circumscribe a listener's experience of music. Even teaching music or training musicians can be done to a certain degree without language. That said, the more complex or multi-layered music is, the more likely words are to be of help in plumbing those depths. Like any studied discipline, those who seek to fully understand the art form need to occasionally stand outside of it as observers and contemplate the nature of its significance. To do that in community with

others requires the ability to describe it. Traditionally this sort of description has been a challenge for, and has often been resisted by, musicians.

"The more complex or multi-layered music is, the more likely words are to be of help in plumbing those depths."

Igor Stravinsky was famously reluctant to say anything about the meaning or significance of his music, preferring instead to focus his attention on the demands it made on performers. In 1957, when asked for his response to W. H. Auden's characterization of music as "a virtual image of our experience as temporal, with its double aspect of recurrence and becoming," Stravinsky replied:

If music is to me an "image of our experience of living as temporal" (and however unverifiable, I suppose it is), my saying so is the result of a reflection, and as such is independent of music itself. But this kind of thinking about music is a different vocation altogether for me: I cannot *do* anything with it as a truth, and my mind is a *doing* one... (Stravinsky 18-19)

Aaron Copland, unlike Stravinsky, was willing to try to help listeners become more informed, better dialog partners. In *What to Listen for in Music*, the composer wrote about three planes in which we listen: the sensuous plane, the expressive plane, and the purely musical plane (Copland 10-16). In his relatively brief discussion of the expressive plane, he encapsulates his notion of the nature of musical expression by saying that his answer to the question of whether or not music means anything would be, "yes," but his answer to the question, "Can you state in so many words what the meaning is," would be, "No" (Copland 12). Yet he does acknowledge the ability of music to impart "general concepts," saying, "Music expresses, at different moments, serenity or exuberance, regret or triumph, fury or delight. It expresses each of these moods, and many others, in a numberless variety of subtle shadings and differences" (Copland 13).

For the most part, the rest of Copland's book deals with the third, or purely musical plane, including concepts and

mechanics of musical form, timbre, etc. He exhorts the listener to learn about and attend more to these technical aspects of the art. Ironically, when he turns briefly to the role and responsibility of musicians, he urges them *not* to be preoccupied with technical matters to the exclusion of the expressive content:

Professional musicians...are, if anything, too conscious of the mere notes themselves. They often fall into the error of becoming so engrossed with their arpeggios and staccatos that they forget the deeper aspects of the music they are performing. (Copland 16)

One implication of Copland's exhortation, viewed through the prism of a Lutheran sense of vocation, might be that the musician owes the listener more than just a technically proficient, stylistically correct, or virtuosic performance. The musician's mandate is to embrace some meaningful interpretation of the music and imbue her performance with as much of it as her facility allows. Despite the composer's admonition, his own lack of clarity about the significance of musical expression demonstrates the likely root of the musician's difficulty in fulfilling that mandate.

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Writing in 1944, only a few years after Copland, Eliot Carter commented on what he viewed as the deplorable state of scholarship among musicians in the academy when he charged that "music departments are too often staffed by professionals with little capacity to see their subject in a broader light than the teaching of special technic [sic] demand, who tend to be less articulate than their academic colleagues." He characterized the typical *modus operandi* in music schools as the teaching of "skill without appeal

to reason," and as style without historical or philosophical context (Carter 12).

As every musician knows, no skill can be developed without significant practice, including intellectual skills. If musicians hope to engage in a dialog with those in other disciplines about the human significance of what they do or the truth they pursue (as Carter seemed to advocate), they must know how to articulate something important about it in ways that others will understand. This sort of translation can be a burdensome problem in any discipline, but it may be particularly difficult for musicians because of their habits of mind.

Careers and Callings

As Copland suggested, musicians tend to focus on the technical and musical challenges immediately before them, and, by economic necessity, on the longer-range challenges of building a career. Measures of success and professionalism seem most often defined by technical ability, dependability within an ensemble, expressive imagination, showmanship, and collegiality.² While not exhaustive, this list helps explain the pragmatic frame of mind with which many musical performers approach their craft. While musicologists have turned their focus in recent decades more to the cultural significance of music, in-depth conversations among performing musicians about the implications of their individual work for a listener or a community are rare.³ Moreover, the basic professional training that most musicians receive up through the undergraduate level (and often beyond) is shaped mostly by this pragmatic performance orientation.

It has not been my intention to suggest in the foregoing that musicians are soulless, unfeeling, technical automatons. On the contrary, the motivation for most musicians is the satisfaction they find in musical self-expression. This rich and valuable sense of play resonates with Stravinsky's characterization of his mind as a "doing mind" (Stravinsky 19). Naturally many musicians share his preference for doing over reflection. However, this preference is likely learned, not inherent, and is a by-product of the way musicians are trained. Often, the more accomplished and serious a young musician becomes, the easier it is to deal with the "how" of music making rather than the "what," its substance.

My own musical journey may be typical. What began as a titillation of the ear when I was a young child led to a playful fascination with the sounds that I could make at my family's old upright Chickering. As I developed an ease and comfort with musical materials I also developed a restless desire to be able to express more with this language. I had not yet received, nor had been jaded by, the intensive, methodical training characteristic of the conservatory. My innocence left me free to think more about the substance of self-expression, but less well-equipped to execute it.

"As musicians move into the professional world, they often face an increasing commoditization of their work that discourages such exploration."

Once I began my university training I discovered the seductive comfort of the daily practice routine. The repetitive exercises designed to perfect my technique became my *raison d'être*. They presented challenges, but success was easy to measure. Moreover, they generally prepared me for playing in the ensembles to which I had been assigned. If I was improving my performance on those exercises, I could feel that I was doing my part as a musician.

When I faced graduation, I also faced a crisis. I realized that I had, those four years, been largely relying on teachers and conductors to shape the content of my music making. At that moment, I found myself metaphorically at the center of the stage, alone, able to speak, but with little to say.

James Jordan, in *The Musician's Soul*, the first of three books exploring what he would call the spiritual side of music making, returns throughout to the theme of authenticity and honesty; of learning to know oneself and expressing musically only what comes from that deep well of self-awareness. His work has received mixed reactions. One reviewer, James Moyer, while favorably disposed to the book, also acknowledges that "these are rather deep thoughts, which many musicians do not care to confront" (Moyer 82). In fact, music students are seldom asked to confront those issues. Further, as musicians move into the professional world, they often face an increasing commoditization of their work that discourages such exploration.

Thinking, Feeling, and the Musical Intellect

Two years ago, the opportunity to explore the nature of the musician's vocation came to me in the context of a year-long dialog with colleagues in other disciplines. I was prompted to consider the big question that my discipline addresses. Perhaps a clearer way of stating this challenge would be to ask how music contributes to the aggregate human knowledge, or to understanding its acquisition. An answer will hopefully show ways in which my discipline intersects with or complements others in this pursuit.

At the core of this challenge is music's unique mode of expression. Any discussion of it must, in part, be undertaken with borrowed, and predictably imprecise, terminology. So, musicians have tended to throw up their hands in frustration and go back to the practice room. Add to this the tendency in our profession—and our culture—to celebrate feats of great technical achievement, and a need to explain the content of the art can seem unimportant enough to justify the time and effort.

In pursuing a clearer understanding of the nature and significance of music, musicians would be helped by the long history of such discussion among philosophers and aestheticians. This history shows an evolution of ideas from those of the ancient Greeks, who understood music as resonant with certain qualities of human beings as well as the universe of which they were a part. For Martin Luther and Philippe Melancthon, that resonance became a more dynamic and useful resource—a pathway for moral persuasion akin to oratory. As such, it was given a place in their new school curriculum. For the first time musical education went beyond the narrow model of training practiced in the conservatories and choir schools. With the Enlightenment came a clearer sense that music, as a dynamic and ephemeral process, went hand in hand with the increasingly dynamic view of human psychology and emotions. In the mid-twentieth century, Suzanne K. Langer wrote that "works of art are projections of 'felt life,' as Henry James called it, into spatial, temporal, and poetic structures. They are images of feeling, that formulate it for our cognition" (Langer 25). She goes further by defining relationships between specific artistic forms and the various dimensions of human experience, noting that the medium of music is virtual time, but that music can,

and often does, through its play in virtual time, create a secondary sense of motion through space (Langer 37-38).

Recent advances in neuroscience have opened exciting new opportunities to test this philosophical speculation with empirical research into the human response to music. In her book *Deeper Than Reason: Emotion and its Role in Literature, Music, and Art*, Jenefer Robinson discusses various theories about the nature of emotions in light of evolving research. She concludes that, “Emotion is a *process* that unfolds, as the situation is appraised and reappraised, and as continuous feedback occurs” (Robinson 76). With regard specifically to music, she says, “Music, like emotion, is a process, and so it is peculiarly well suited to express not only particular emotional states but also blends of emotion, conflicts between emotions, ambiguous emotions, and the way one emotion transforms into another” (Robinson 293). The landscape of the musical intellect is therefore one that stretches across an intersection between the realms of thought and feeling.

“Musicians potentially exercise a profound influence over the emotional flavor of a moment, which can then become deeply meaningful for a listener.”

It is becoming clearer that human perception and thought is profoundly shaped by our emotional states. It would seem to follow that musicians potentially exercise a profound influence over the emotional flavor of a moment, which can then become deeply meaningful for a listener. Therefore, any response to that moment can be shaped in part by the musician’s efforts. It’s not necessary to attribute some Jedi-like mind control to the musician to accept this point. One need only search one’s own experience with music to find examples.

Truthful Music Making

Discernment of vocation for an individual can simply mean embracing the valuable work to which one is called. However, the meaning of vocation in a disciplinary context

means defining how this work is valuable to humankind. In making that determination for music, the answer would appear to have two layers. First, the musician seeks to help reveal the truth of a thing by facilitating the contemplation of how that thing feels, either on her own or within a community of listeners. Second, those who study music, its mechanisms, its rhetoric, its history, and its varied forms, seek validation for the connection between the musician’s efforts and the pursuit of truth.

The second part of this statement acknowledges the possibility that a musician’s efforts can be more or less effective. It also poses the possibility that musicians, rather than finding truth, can obscure or distort it either by what they do or by what they choose not to do. Herein lies the nub of the musician’s sense of vocation. It is not enough to have effective control of musical materials and technique. It is also incumbent on the musician to understand the emotional cues she produces and to intend truthfulness, not simply manipulation.

No musician, the present author included, would deny the importance of a sense of play, and of making intuitive musical choices in the moment. It does not seem too extreme to suggest, however, that musicians should recognize the potential for their choices, intuitive or conscious, to influence the emotional lenses through which they and their listeners perceive associated ideas or events. Further, that recognition should carry with it some obligation to exercise judgment about the possible effects of those choices. What is suggested here is not a change in how musicians make music, only that they approach it more mindfully.

During the discussions that preceded the writing of this essay, a colleague described the questions she was facing in preparing for a public talk at an occasion commemorating a particular set of events in American frontier history. The evening would include not only her perspectives as an historian, but also remarks by a celebrity involved in the making of a film on the subject. While the film told the story from one perspective, there was much that my colleague could share—and felt obliged to share—that would not necessarily harmonize with that perspective. She was faced with choices about what she should share through the lens of her discipline, and about what she should remain unspoken, given the occasion.

My colleague's duty as an historian is not the issue I am concerned with. The obligation of the artists who made the film is. Whenever artists become involved in relating historic episodes they can create narratives that would not, in many respects, be supported by a more sober examination of documentable facts. In the same way, a composer who creates a score for such a film has a significant responsibility for shaping the emotional flavor of that retelling of history. Arguably, even the musicians who record the score share some degree of responsibility.

Perhaps an interesting question to ask about this scenario is this: Whose resources bring us closer to understanding the maximal truth about this historic event? Is it the historian, carefully sifting through her stack of documents to find the most likely path to the truth? Or is it the filmmaker, with her carefully constructed narrative flow, and the soundtrack that swells and recedes at strategic points? It seems clear that both can help lead us to the clearest sense of the truth, but only if each is informed by the other.

What should future generations understand about the events that shape our social and political lives today? When the histories of the Black Lives Matter movement or the March for Our Lives are recounted, it's possible—even likely—that a movie soundtrack or an opera or a song will be just as influential as police reports, jury findings, and first-hand accounts. Whatever emotional landscape these artistic expressions attribute to these events may be even more impactful than the facts themselves.

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The question for the musician who is asked to contribute to such work would be whether she understands the potential power of her art well enough to use it in a measured and responsible way, as the historian uses her

factual resources in telling the truth about these stories. Will she grasp the necessity of being thoroughly informed by the historian's work in creating her interpretation of the emotional landscape? Or will she simply craft a score that will push certain emotional buttons according to her own intuition? Once the score is written, will the musicians who record it share some sense of the importance of the nuanced choices made by the composer so that their performance doesn't suggest something unintended? Even though too many musicians seem reluctant or ill-equipped to undertake a serious discussion about this sort of potential significance, there are many musicians who seem to grasp that potential. They demonstrate that understanding best when they confront controversy with their music.

Art and Advocacy

We needn't look far for examples of high profile musicians who have used their art, or the credibility they have earned through it, to advance a cause that they believe to serve the common good. Some court considerable controversy or display remarkable courage in doing so. Yo-Yo Ma's *Silk Road Project*, an effort build unity through our diversity, Paul Winter's environmental advocacy, and Daniel Barenboim's collaboration with Edward Said to create the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra all come to mind. Sister Souljah's combination of provocation onstage and community action offstage would seem to be a vivid demonstration of someone dedicated to comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable.

These and many other admirable examples aside, there are daily choices within the career of any musician—including amateurs—that may or may not harmonize with their own beliefs. These choices may not be recognized as significant, either because they fail to think through the consequences of lending their voices or industry to an event, product, or cause, or because they underestimate their potential influence.

Musicians, along with everyone in our society, are today facing injustices that have long gone unseen by too many. We bear a lack of diversity and sustainability in our profession, in some cases to an even greater degree than is true of society. Too often our sense of professionalism, so tightly

focused on quality of performance, has ill-equipped us with the habits of mind to confront these issues and to understand how our art can support what we know as human beings to be right.

“We musicians must eventually stop to think about the content of that poetry and the context in which it will be heard, and ask, to what end?”

Given the demanding nature of public performance and the professional consequences of doing it badly, the near-obsession on the part of musicians with virtuosity and technical detail is perhaps understandable. One who has not mastered a language cannot use it to spin poetry. Nevertheless, though it takes time away from our arpeggios and staccatos, we musicians must eventually stop to think about the content of that poetry and the context in which it will be heard, and ask, to what end? Our ability to think about vocation deeply and meaningfully will depend on this question becoming one of our habits of mind.

For those of us who teach, it is time to recognize that we have created excellent curricula for helping our students develop professional careers, but not necessarily vocational commitments. This moment, for our society, seems like a time for all hands on deck. A profession that potentially wields so much power over how things are perceived should not be less than fully intentional about how it uses that power.

Endnotes

1. To be clear, Campbell does not invoke a sense of calling in describing this way of finding one's path in life, but he does say that following your bliss may “put you on a kind of track that has been there all the while.” This suggests that following one's own bliss might also entail following the call of another.

2. “Expressive imagination,” in the context of this list, is a quality of performance that displays a musician's sense of play in shaping musical lines and phrases. It can reflect a mindful engagement with a deeper significance, or it can be largely intuitive, rooted in stylistic models with which the performer is familiar.

3. Of course, musicologists can also be performers and vice-versa. Nevertheless, the rampant specialization within academia in general applies to the musical discipline, and these specializations have a different focus in their training.

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