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Vocation of the Institute for Global Citizenship: An Undivided Life

The Rev. Dr. Lucy Forster-Smith

*I*n my thirteen years as Chaplain of Macalester College I have been privileged to serve this community of scholars, students, staff, and alumni as we seek to educate the bright lights on the horizon of the future of our planet. Much of our work in this place has to do with bridging. We are in the business of bridge building—between academics and the co-curricular, between men and women, gay and straight and transgendered, between faculty and staff, between physical and emotional health, between our local context and the global arena, and between personal and public, to name a few. The act of building bridges and then the consequent act of walking across those bridges and engaging the world on the other side is in large measure what a liberal arts education is about. But in some ways the metaphor strains at this time on planet earth because it assumes that there is one side and the other side, and we often pay little attention to the chasm, the barrier, the river, the adversary, over which the bridge is built. It also strains because residing on one side of the bridge or the other keeps us separated from the side we have left, and places limits on our perspective with the deterministic positioning.

I thought of this bridging metaphor when I participated a few weeks ago with a group of Macalester seniors in a ropes course during our Lilly Senior Leadership Conference out on Whidbey Island in the Puget Sound. For those of you that don't know ropes courses, they are set up as a series of challenges for a group to overcome in order to accomplish a set goal. In the particular challenge given to our group that day, we

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were to navigate a series of steel cables that were about three feet off the ground, ranging in length from eight to twenty-five feet. These cables were strung between trees. The challenge was to get the group to the end of the course and if anyone fell off they had to start over again. Accomplishing this task took strategy, some coordination, and a lot of communication. But what was absolutely true about the experience was not the thought-out strategy at the beginning or the sense of accomplishment at the end, but the clear sense of commitment that we were all in it together and every person involved brought a particular gift or skill to the course that no one else in that circle of seniors and two staff people could replicate. It wasn't the physics of the course or the foreknowledge that one or another of us had about the mechanics of a ropes course that was most important, but paying attention and discovering what each person brought to the task at hand. There was a hidden wholeness in the group that was brought to light as we made our way across the wobbly cables, linking hands, sturdying the timid, experimenting, and trying out new ways of thinking and processing.

One of the contributions the Institute for Global Citizenship must make at Macalester College is bridging and exposing the hidden wholeness in our institution. We live fragmented lives. Not only in our personal lives but also in our nation's common life, we are increasingly polarized and our world increasingly perilous. There is much pressure on the planet to divide things up between good and evil, between the haves and have-nots, between religious and secular, powerful and powerless—one side of the bridge or the other. The critical function of our Institute for Global Citizenship is to focus not only on the problems of our time but to summon our students and every member of this community to realize the hidden connection among all of our worlds, and in that realization recognize that seeing the world in an undivided way may lead to discomfort and a lack of certainty about any of our individual contributions. Dianna Chapman Walsh, President of Wellesley College, in a lecture given at the Institute for College Student Values, says, "It is summoning the discipline to focus attention in all directions that causes discomfort, facing moral dilemmas in all their complexity. It is seeing past the self-interest...and cultivating the imagination and the generosity of spirit—in ourselves and those we touch—to focus on wrenching problems and yet not to lose heart, to open our hearts to sorrow without being paralyzed, to find in the world's suffering our bonds of humanity."¹

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The question that arises in the midst of this is how can we best prepare and support our students in becoming passionate and courageous participants in the world, and who also live undivided lives? My answer to that question is that we live an undivided life in this place, Macalester College, March 29, 2007, and beyond. This is not a new thought. As a matter of fact, it is at the core of our college's founding. Have you ever really looked at the college seal? There it is, the undivided life: Two women, scantily clad, holding the symbols of late 19th-century enlightenment educational context. In the hand of one, the telescope, in the hand of the other, the open Bible, and a compass at their feet—Nature and Revelation, the heavenly twins. Edward Duffield Neill comments on this seal:

The trustees of Macalester College, believing in the harmony of nature and revelation, have engraved on their corporate seal two figures; one in loose, classic drapery, standing with telescope in hand, and compass at the feet, representing science investigating the laws of nature; the other, in sitting posture, clad in modest robes, holding open the Word of God, representing revelation. Both are in friendly converse, twin sisters of heaven, as the motto suggests. 'Natura et revelato coeli Gemini.' The object of the American College is not to promote an aesthetic or a medieval culture. It recognizes that the life of a young man from sixteen to twenty-one years of age is most critical and susceptible. Its aim is to develop harmoniously the body, the intellect and the affections."²

I think it is our students who are asking for an integrated life. The pressure on students today to prepare for and at the same time live their life on this globe is unbelievable. If our goal is to send from our midst citizen leaders who are going to have cultural fluency, intellectual curiosity for life-long learning, great relationships with partners, friends, and their own children, and a willingness to take risks in the pursuit of harmony, then we must open the way for this college and community to be a laboratory for effective action and deep, honest reflection, not only of the impact of our actions but of the motivations and informants of that engagement. We must take seriously our lives as moral agents, bringing into close contact the knower and the known, our inner life and what we are discovering in the outside world. What we are engaging is how the story of our lives informs the way we approach academic study. But this also includes how we play rugby on the lawn, how we party with one another, and how we engage in the conversations we have in advising appointments or with a colleague at

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Old Main. In other words, the deepest engagement of the Institute for Global Citizenship is to bridge the world “in here” with the world “out there.” I not only mean a bridge from the Macalester “bubble” to the “world,” but the inner sanctum of our full life as citizens of this community, Macalester College, and the frontier of the human soul and imagination.

I don't think it is any coincidence that many of the endeavors that are associated with the Institute for Global Citizenship are at their core reaching for an integrated life.

- The Civic Engagement Center's legacy at Macalester is one of engagement with our neighborhood and community that takes the inner life of commitment to the world and seals that with a mutual vulnerability with the populations or causes one serves. The ethic of service is one of care for the *other* and opening the way to learn more in the engagement than one would ever hope to impart.
- The Lilly Project has at its core the big questions of the meaning and purpose of one's life and how a person can live out dreams, hopes, and longings that drive us to contribute to the world. The thing that receives the most accolades from our students in this project is not the specific programs, such as Lives of Commitment or the Summer Fellows program, but the opportunity to stop and reflect on what one is doing, why one is doing it, and how it is drawing together the dizzying academic insights with the shaping of the soul. The Lilly Project is the speed bump in the Macalester autobahn.

But other developments in our life here at Macalester are indicators of the need for an integrated life and world.

- The development of the Multifaith Council at Macalester came out of the deep hunger in our students to be honest about their own religious and spiritual lives, lives that caused anxiety for some in this very secular and sometimes religiously intolerant campus. Having a place where students can explore their own religious/spiritual tradition in depth, and also to engage those whose assumptions may deeply conflict or run counter to their own in honest conversation, is excellent preparation for a world in which people are killing each other over conflicting gods. Even in its first year, the amazing opportunities to live in a religiously flourishing environment and to dare to craft a religiously pluralistic Macalester culture has awakened the imagination of each person on the Council.

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- The Pluralism and Unity Project that takes first-year students from diverse backgrounds and calls them to get to know each other and the wider Twin Cities community through the lens of race, ethnicity, and culture. Even the name calls out the type of educational life I am suggesting.

One of the suspicions I have about an undivided life at Macalester is that what we discover when we go deeply into the soul of this institution and into shaping a community of knowing in the fullest sense is that we will discover in our differences the yearning for a deeper knowing and connection.

With all this said, you might respond, how is this *global* citizenship? I think we have too narrowly defined what we mean by global, somehow equating it only with things that are international, multinational, beyond our borders. I want to propose that global certainly comprises that definition, but also global is the large view, the vistas of our human inner landscape and the universe's story. Such citizenship is not only political, social, and economic, but also aesthetic, ethical, and religious.

Martha Nussbaum, in her book *Cultivating Humanity*, describes a liberal education as, "the preparation of a whole human being for the functions of citizenship and life." This entails the "cultivation of three capacities:"

1. A capacity for critical examination of oneself and one's traditions,
2. An ability to see oneself not simply as a citizen of a local region or group but also as a human being bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern, and
3. The narrative imagination which "is the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have. This means "learning how to be a human being capable of love and imagination."³

I am awed by the remarkable capacity of our students to engage the ambiguity of our world and mostly come out on the side of love and imagination. I am inspired by the urgency of not only our current students but students throughout our history that have held the vision

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confidently that we must contribute to our world, we must defy the cultural trends toward consumer capacity-building. They have kept their sights set on their place in the muck of it all, in the miracle of it all.

I think that an occasion like this one that asks us to think big and learn large is a time to ask the profound questions. One of those questions is, "What is the soul of Macalester College?" What is at the very center of our life together, not as a static reality but the living, breathing, alive, stumbling, and standing Macalester College? Robert McAfee Brown, a theologian who taught here in the 1970s, once said, "The larger the horizon becomes, the smaller the world turns out to be."⁴ This paradox of the world writ large on our consciousness, and the issues of our day arriving at our own doorstep and asking us to deal with them, is what global citizenship requires of a Macalester student.

Each and every one of us in this institution, from the full professor to the greenest first-year student, must engage in the perilous task of taking up our particular role as a global citizen. That raises the stakes pretty high and it also means that we must be willing to sacrifice and deeply care about the commons in our activity on campus. This means we are not only smart but we strive for wisdom, wisdom that is marked by paradoxes such as: Dying is what gives deep life, sacrifice brings abundance, confusion gives way to insight. Our days bring us the opportunity to turn up every stone and see what is crawling around under there. Our days demand that we take audacious risks, only to crack open the soul's light to the enormous power of perilous hope. This time in history requires that every brilliant thought be harnessed by our academic institutions in collaborative efforts to address the most pressing problems of our globe. One writer by the name of Reverend Virginia Safford advises us to, "plant ourselves at the gates of hope," even in situations of pessimism, because "with our lives we make our answers all the time, to this ravenous, beautiful, mutilated, gorgeous world."⁵

The complexity of the world demands that the divide between the mind and the heart be bridged. When we overemphasize the critical capacity, then the affective capacity atrophies—the spiritual as well. When we venture into the heart of mystery, we must never allow the critical edge to cut out the heart...taking with it hope and leaving us in a cynical stew.

The contribution of the Institute for Global Citizenship must be more than just flexing our critical muscles in order to see the world's

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issues clearly, but shaping an imagination from a deeply knowing heart that engages the world in all its complexity and takes the time to do the very hard work of creating an imagination of what can be, what must be. To quote Dianna Chapman Walsh again, “as sure as I am that we are providing our students with a great education, I’m equally sure that we are letting them down in important ways—not feeding their yearning to be living the deepest ontological questions they see unfolding around them and within them, which they don’t know quite how to embrace, but attending chiefly to their minds when their hearts (and ours) are being broken by events in the world.”⁶

The global demands that arrive at our threshold are shaping our life here at Macalester. But it not lost on me that our common life happens under the United Nations’ flag flying overhead. We “on the ground” are challenged by a world that is anything but united, but we have the opportunity, in living our life in this place, to be exemplars of a united heart, mind, soul, and strength. We have the opportunity here at Macalester to shape on this soil the world in the way we want it to be outside this place. And in our actions we have the opportunity to build a bridge from this place into the frontiers of the future, as stewards of our life and the life of this planet. ●

Notes

1. Diana Chapman Walsh, *Trustworthy Leadership: Can We Be the Leaders We Need Our Students to Become?* (Fetzer Institute, 2006), p. 3.
2. Huntley Dupre, *Edward Duffield Neill: Pioneer Educator* (St. Paul, Minn.: Macalester College Press, 1949), pp. 89–90.
3. Martha Nussbaum, in her book *Cultivating Humanity*, cited in Walsh’s *Trustworthy Leadership*, pp. 17–18.
4. Robert McAfee Brown, *Creative Dislocation—The Movement of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), p. 57.
5. Quoted in Paul Rogat Loeb, *The Impossible will Take a Little While: A Citizen’s Guide to Hope in a Time of Fear* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basic Books, 2004), p. 9.
6. Walsh, p. 26.