

**Augustana College  
Chapel of Reconciliation**

**On the Nature of Sacred Ground**

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When we walk across this campus, we walk across sacred ground.

The word sacred comes from the Latin *sacrum* (say-crum). It speaks to that which is highly valued, holy, and set apart as a place that possesses the power to awaken wisdom. Many here believe such awakenings occur through the grace of God. For others, an awakening bespeaks the nature of our humanity and the necessity of an interior life. As human beings, we all hope for depth of consciousness; we all hope to be awakened to our individual potential; and we all hope to know our place within community.

What does it mean, really, to believe a place to be sacred? If I affix upon Augustana the label sacred, what am I claiming, what am I saying about this place? Further, I wonder what is required of those who stand on sacred ground? How should we conduct ourselves in such a place? When we stand on sacred ground, are we ethically bound to conduct ourselves in some particular fashion? Does what we do on sacred ground provide us with insight into how we ought to conduct ourselves in any place at any time?

The answer might be found in thinking about the nature of the encounter one has with a place that is sacred. In part, at least, I believe the answer is this: The sacred calls us forth to connect deeply with the world. Toward that end, the sacred requires the whole-hearted participation of the human emotions. The contemporary philosopher Martha Nussbaum has said that the emotions are “essential elements of human intelligence” not just “props” for it (2003, 5). Robert Solomon, another contemporary philosopher who died just a few years ago, described the emotions as “the defining structures of our existence” and feared that our propensity to devalue them would cause “suffocation of the soul” (24). We worry that the emotions will lead us astray, muddy our vision. Such worries, quite frankly, are what will lead us astray—lead us away from our potential.

So what are the emotions—these things that define, perhaps, the very structure of our being—that arise out of an encounter with the sacred? What is it that defines my relationship, our relationship, with Augustana? I required an analogy to help me think this through.

Most summers my family and I spend time with my sister at her cabin on Bad Medicine Lake in northern Minnesota. When I am there, I often arise early, throw on my sweats, make coffee, and then slip out the front door, through the trees and down to the dock on the shoreline. There, I sit and absorb the morning. Sometimes, I read. Always, the busy-ness of life is left behind. Aside from the moments when the morning crow patrol flies raucously past, it is intensely, softly quiet. When I am in this place, I am always cognizant that I am in a sacred space—one that has been created through my relationship with the natural world, a relationship carved out of wonder, love, respect, need.

If I crack open the emotions I feel when I sit on the edge of Bad Medicine Lake in the soft morning air, mist rising from water's surface, crows cawing, what will I find?

I decided to take inventory.

ON the dock in the mist of early morning I know these emotions: Love, tenderness, compassion, deep longing for the ineffable. In this space I comprehend bliss and joy. I am delighted by the tiny chipmunks scrambling up huge pines, by the hummingbirds seeking nectar in north-woods flowers. I know elation—great happiness. I am glad and grateful to be in this place. I am content. I am enthralled by just about anything: the mist on the lake, the magic—as my sister puts it—of sunlight on morning water, the melodious birdsong that works as a balm for any lingering weariness, the bald eagles that cruise the lakeshore scanning the waters below for a rainbow trout, a perch, a walleye. Sometimes, what I feel takes on a bittersweet quality, for I know that the lake and the woods have suffered the consequences of human disrespect. It's not that I have to be alone in these moments. Sometimes, my husband or my sister or my daughter will join me, and then we commune together on this sacred ground in a sacred moment.

And Augustana? Yes, here, too, I have known love and tenderness, longing and bliss. I have been delighted countless, truly countless, times by the hearts and minds of students and colleagues and friends. I am glad and grateful to be part of a community 150 years old. Augustana brings forth from me another emotion—one that I don't know as well at the lake: Hope. This place educates students, faculty, staff for the whole person: body, mind and spirit. In that there is great hope. Whole people will know better how to work within and preserve the integrity of a world that must be known in its fullness.

Granted, it's not all sunshine here at Augie. I'm not particularly prone to silly sentimentalism. That way lies denial. I've had plenty of cranky moments over the years—the sort I don't tend to have in the north-woods. It is when those moments strike, though, that I believe I need to remind myself that this place is holy, that this ground is sacred and that as such it invites me to live through love, compassion, joy, gratitude, elation, bliss, astonishment. This is, I think, at least in part, what Mr. Solomon meant when he said that the emotions are the defining structures of our existence. Indeed, they are—or, at least, they can be. Our emotions allow us to make conscious choices about how we wish to live. And that's our question here at Augie, isn't it? How then shall we live? Fully. Completely. With the integrity of our comprehensive intelligence working toward the integrity of our fullest humanity.

On Friday, when we go on pilgrimage, the object of our emotions will be Augustana—a place about which we care deeply, but about which our caring can become a more intelligent caring if we give our attention to the history, the details, those mallards that stop here every spring (I'm hoping they'll join us), the people forever connected with this place. This particular pilgrimage will offer not just the beauty of quiet moments but the splendor of song and the wisdom of people who have been called to serve humanity from various perspectives.

At Augustana we believe it important that an individual nurture an interior life. We know ourselves to be on a journey, together and as individuals. The pilgrim is a person willing to step across the threshold of everyday comfort into the unknown. This stepping forth is a simple yet heroic *act*, for embedded within it is one's recognition of and response to the call to live deeply. This act defies a passive nature, defies fear as it reaches toward the unknown, yearns for the stirring of the interior life, the spirit. This journey comes with risks. Tis always so. On Friday we might get cold. We might be called into the heart of painful memories. One cannot know what thresholds will

be crossed, what barriers—physical, psychological or spiritual—confronted, what wisdom internalized. The pilgrim, fed by the forward motion of his or her footsteps, nurtured by determination, hopes to land, eventually, somewhere new. He or she understands that sometimes effort must be made to acknowledge the sacred, to internalize it, to know it as a place where the spirit moves, where the interior life can be heard, where wisdom flows. For us, Augustana becomes the destination, the sacred place toward which and within which we travel daily.

Amen.



## CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

**BULLYING WORKSHOP** - SD communities can join together to prevent tragedies due to bullying and cruel, disrespectful behaviors. Attend a FREE evening with **Dr. Carl Pickhardt** and **Shane Windmeyer, M.Ed** as they discuss bullying in communities and schools, gay and lesbian issues, and promoting environments of respect and safety. **Thur., Apr. 28, 7-9:00 pm, Our Savior's Lutheran**

**SOUTH DAKOTA SYNOD ASSEMBLY, June 10-11, 2011, Sioux Falls.** We need two delegates from the student congregation, a man and a woman, to represent us at the synod assembly. All expenses are paid...a great opportunity to see and hear the church active around and beyond congregations! See Pr. Paul or Carol if you are interested. Preference will be given to students from the S Dak. Synod, ELCA.

**AN AUGUSTANA PILGRIMAGE** - Friday, April 15 at 3 pm. Meet on the east side of Old main for this reflective walk around campus. We'll discover artists beneath the artifacts, stories and spirit that sustain Augie for 150 years! Everyone is welcome!

**CAMP COUNSELOR COMMISSIONING SERVICE** - There will be a commissioning service to bless summer camp counselors on **Monday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, at 10 am**. If you and someone you know is planning to work at a camp, please let Carol in the chapel office know. The Admission Office is providing all the counselor with brand new long-sleeved Augie t-shirts!

### CHAPEL SCHEDULE

Friday (15<sup>th</sup>) Morning Worship, 10 am - Ihoby Rakotomala, Sr. Spk.  
- Pilgrimage Walk, 3 pm-start on east side of Old Main

Sunday (17<sup>th</sup>) Palm Sunday Worship, 11 am - Pr. Paul

Monday (18<sup>th</sup>) Organ and Poetry Meditation, 10 am - Marilyn Schempp/Pr. Paul

Wednesday (20<sup>th</sup>) Holy Communion, 10 am - Pr. Paul; Sr. Acad; Augie Choir  
- Christ Walk - 6:30 pm - Start at the chapel

EASTER BREAK - Fri., 22<sup>nd</sup> - Monday, 25<sup>th</sup>.

Wednesday (27<sup>th</sup>) Morning Worship, 10 am - Peg Preston, Hist. Dept.

Friday (29<sup>th</sup>) Morning Worship, 10 am - Brianna Weigel, Sr. Spkr.