

Anchor Report
Greenfield Group—Spring
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A smaller than usual Greenfield Group, only 19 of us, gathered shortly after 3:00 for our hellos and a brief check-in. Some things that we shared:

Professionally

Enjoying the busyness of a new call
Enjoying the busyness of retirement
Congregations with issues, often around staff
A quote from Whitman, “Now understand me well. It is provided in the essence of things that from any fruition of success comes forth something to make greater struggle necessary” informed us of the most difficult year ever in a long ministry
“Checkbook charity” vs. face-to-face social action
“Fine” is big news
In the “neutral zone”

Personal News

Struggles or joys of parenting
New grandchildren, others on the way
Losing weight
Renovations at home
Grandchildren to the zoo; “amazing creatures”; who?
Protest and arrest at Wal*Mart
Baseball birthdays
Ten year wedding anniversary, thanks to Greenfield

Those not present with us were brought into our circle by name. Some were not here due to illness, others due to a baby on the way. Several had work conflicts, one was celebrating in D.C. Car troubles prevented another from getting here.

Check-in went quickly and so we had an open conversation around the issues of right relations between colleagues, specifically around the UUMA

guidelines and sharing a hurt or pain about a colleague without speaking ill of said colleague. Can the guidelines offer enough latitude for sharing and seeking support? We are reminded to talk with compassion when it comes to colleagues and to walk gently. Still, there is a reported increase in conflict between colleagues and an increase in calling in good offices. To be further discussed. A thought, is this related to the increased stress level in society?

The planning committee of this convocation was innovative in their unique presentation of the topic: “Our Religious Predecessors and Native Americans.” Instead of a major paper on Monday evening, we all took part in a play called, *Maud and Ida: The Meaning of War*. The play was written by Brian Kopke of Ottawa, Ontario fame. The play had not only many players expanding centuries but had layers that upon further reflection continued to unveil themselves. The characters—wives, soldiers, writers, lawyers, and ministers, spoke of King Phillip’s war and in several different ways reflected on the meaning of war. Pointedly, the only silent voices were of the Indians, that is, until the final speech. Bush, Cheney and Frumm had parts, too, that showed us too clearly how things have not changed.

After the play, we reflected on what it felt like to play the characters we were assigned. Some phrases: can imagine the image—horrified; mixed reaction of awe; walking up to the edge, *who* is the savage; naïve; I had the easy role because I played who I would want to be but would I have really been like this in the same situation; what is the role of women here; extremely frustrated; conflicted; disassociated; what is the role of faith; fear, anger and confusion; personal revulsion which was dealt with by adding humor; connected with powerful figure so had some understanding of getting to the objective previously decided; amoral.

The narrator tried to stay neutral but it was difficult. A tension was present for her.

Those in the meditation room (the native Indians) felt invisible in the whole structure of the play. Felt outside, didn’t feel connected. It was alienating to be out of the room, invisible, but making stereotypical sounds of the Indians.

The last speech, the only voice of the “savages,” was read from offstage. Being offstage gave the player a different lens by which to view the play. The speech at the end was hard but powerful. Sadness about our own violence and that we dance around it. A powerful reality in the words: we are cursed by our history of violence in that it operates in our national narrative still today.

Further discussion led to acknowledging that the speech at the end was romanticized and when performed in the original play of the 1930’s, the speech was applauded. How much do we romanticize our role in the world? In the current West Wing, one hall is lined with Remington paintings of Native Americans. What do these paintings mean to Americans? What do they mean to Bush? We tend to idealize and at the same time vilify the Indians.

One person noted that in the play, the reflecting on the meaning of war was done by ordinary people whereas the leaders made decisions about war. Would there have been a different discussion by the leaders in reality? On the left, we stereotype without understanding motivation.

Thank you, Brian, for a powerful and brilliant play that asks us to look more deeply at war and violence and how it has set the tone of this nation. Where is it taking us? Or perhaps the question should be how far will we let it take us?

Chapel Monday evening was led by Bill Gardiner. His empowering theme focused on the hurricane Katrina and the strengths that have been discovered out of that disaster.

Continuing on with the alternative programming, the planning committee again left papers and books behind to give us the experience of the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center. (As I type this, I discover that the Indian names do not get red lined. I had expected Microsoft not to be so with it.)

What can I say about this experience? We arrived early in the morning. First, we had a quick overview of the archaeological work being done at this state-of-the-art research center by Kevin McBride. We then toured the

museum with Trudie Lamb Richard. The museum was simply amazing. I kept hearing comments like, “we could spend days here” and “I need to come back.” Last thing before lunch, we saw a film about the massacre at Mystic. The film was heart and soul wrenching; difficult to watch; a rich experience that was overwhelming. Many of us are still processing the film and may be for quite a while.

After lunch, two more lectures by Jason Mancini and Steve Cook. So much! So rich! One important point brought out towards the end of the day was that we (white people) put certain expectations about place and ancestry on Native Americans that we do not place on ourselves. This point was made in the midst of a display on Native American quilts, each telling a story. It is easy to expect one thing and be given another in learning about the Native American cultures.

As I walked thru the museum, I often found myself behind a person wearing a t-shirt with these words by Thoreau, “Only that day dawns to which we are awake.” Awake! Awake! The word keeps going through my mind.

After this convocation are we yet awake? Are we awake to the savage within us? Are we awake to the possibility of a world of peace? Can we ever be awake enough to not repeat our past mistakes? Only that day dawns to which we are awake.

Thank you to our resident expert, Bob Thayer, and the rest of the planning committee on putting together a thoughtful, provocative, and memorable program.

Chapel on Tuesday night was led by Anita Farber Robinson. Her prayerful service had us passing a stone around the circle for each of our ill or deceased colleagues.