

VISUALIZING CAMPUS MINISTRY: LOOKING UP—OUT—TO JESUS—AND WHERE OTHERS MAY NOT LOOK ¹

The Ministry of Rev. Dr. L. Lang Brownlee



How grateful I am to have the opportunity to serve the University of Indianapolis community on behalf of the United Methodist Church and to minister in the name of the God who loves the world and offers us the way of life through Jesus the Christ!

When I was baptized as a boy at Beech Grove

Methodist Church back in the sixties, I then and there joined the ministry of all Christians. It was later, in my high school years, that I began to sense God's call to a more specific form of ministry. I realize now how the pastors of my local church in Beech Grove were incredibly important influences to me on this journey of discovery. The Reverends David J. Lawson and Susan W. N. Ruach were especially powerful models of both Christian discipleship and ministry for me to know and emulate as a young Beech Grove UMC parishioner. They prepared the way, by their own words and lives, for me to develop the ability to *look and see*; that is, to really have insight into the sense of call that was to soon claim even me and the commitments in life that I would make.

Yet it was not until my undergraduate years that I became acquainted with a model of ministry that truly spoke to me as that which would unite my sense of being called as *pastor* with another direction to which I felt led—my love of *teaching*. This model I observed and experienced in four years of working with another important Christian figure in my life. His role was that of a *university chaplain*.

Since those years it has been a long and convoluted journey for me, but I am honored to minister now as a university chaplain myself, here at the University of Indianapolis, where I can be and work with people as both a pastor and as a teacher.

In the words that follow, I would like to share with you my own take on being in ministry as a university chaplain. I want to do this by way of suggesting that *campus ministry is service to others, inviting persons to look and see!* The invitation I seek to give and live is contained in this approach: **to look upward, to look outward, to look to Jesus, and to look where others may not be looking.**

This way of ministry involves living with a set of values and commitments that connect me with the living God. In all my relations with others, I strive to share this invitation: *look and see!* Through four works of art that have special meaning for me and for my approach to campus ministry, I hope to share some of the values and commitments that provide me with vocational meaning and aspirations. I invite you now: *won't you look and see?*

I. LOOKING UPWARD

With the challenge, “**looking upward,**” I ask you to look at the painting *Lift Up Thine Eyes*, by Norman Rockwell ² (see next page). In this painting, the canvas contains a large urban church—a magnificent, beautiful, inspiring structure. It could be a Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church or a Roberts Park United Methodist Church in Indianapolis, or a Riverside Church in New York City (where my wife and I attended often while I was a seminarian). In this painting, there are numerous persons going by on the sidewalk in front of this church, all with their heads cast down. To a person, they seem busy, distracted, worried, sad, fearful, uncertain, unhappy, or just plain tired. They tread by the massive edifice unaffected; seemingly unaware of its presence, relevance, or meaning for their lives.

At the top of the steps into the church, there is a man putting up the sermon topic for the upcoming Sunday, at the direction of the pastor. In capital letters, the topic upon the church board reads, “Lift Up Thine Eyes.” We are drawn to

symbols of the faith all around, including the beautiful and suggestive colors of stained glass. Even higher on the canvas, Rockwell has a group of white pigeons flying in an upward direction. Or could they be doves, inviting those who see this painting to look upwards themselves, to find that there is more to reality, more to life, more to this day, than the pavement in front of us, the tasks at hand, the requirements of the job?

I read into this painting a commitment that helps to shape my role as chaplain. I am no massive cathedral, no impressive edifice. Yet, I believe that I am here to be one who prods, reminds, urges, encourages, and helps our members of the University of Indianapolis community to “lift up your eyes” and be attentive to the world outside our immediate tasks and concerns. Further, the church edifice symbolizes my faith in the God working in the world, here and now, in amazing and wondrous ways, if we but have eyes that see. Rather than a bother or complication, this awareness is an inspiration for our work, our studies, our challenges, the very days of our lives!

Of course, “looking up” isn’t limited to doing so literally, but also to have an attitude of expectation, of excitement, and of hope for what God is going to bring before us each day. If I can help people—by a smile, a prayer, a word of encouragement, or simply time together—lift up their eyes and take in the possibilities and promise of this day, and to recognize God in it, I will have been of service as university chaplain to this community.

II. LOOKING OUTWARD

The second painting I would call attention to directs me to think about “**looking outward**”—it is *October Suite, Grand Canyon* by Wilson Hurley.³ Many times when I hear the first verse of Psalm 19 I am reminded of this painting I dearly love, a painting that instills within me a passionate concern. When I hear, “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1), I do think of the natural world, with its incredible beauty and immense complexity. And though I love starry nights and rocky mountain views, I can often and readily think of the part of the world imaged in Hurley’s depiction: the Grand Canyon.

You’ll find this magnificent painting at Indy’s own Eiteljorg Museum—three huge canvases almost overpowering you upon entrance into the museum of Native American and Western art. It certainly takes my breath away every time I visit, and I can sit and view it for lengthy amounts of time. It carries me to the Grand Canyon itself, and I can recall vividly the time that my family—Jeanne, Nathan, Jeremy—and I walked along the South Rim and took in the beauty of the canyon through both cloud and sunlight.

Now, lest you wonder just why thoughts surrounding the out-of-doors connect with a pastoral commitment in campus ministry, let me just say that we all, in town and gown, need to be reminded that not just the Grand Canyon,



but all of God’s Creation comes to us graciously as both *gift and responsibility*. How startling it is to me to see how we tend to take for granted the natural world around us, and how we assume that it will always contain the character of the past, despite our own behaviors that adversely affect it and negatively alter it for the future.

What we draw from the natural world has not only a practical dimension; it has a theological one, as well. The immense beauty, diversity, and intricacy of our natural world points us to an amazing God, whose artistry and passion are painted upon our environment with wild and glorious strokes! Of course, this is not intended to be a teleological argument for the existence of God (in the technical sense). It is simply my way of boldly claiming that our world “proclaims God’s handiwork,” and that we rightly ought to stand up and take notice. We ought to truly appreciate God’s earth, whether it is the cold and barren fields of northern Indiana on the way to a conference at Valparaiso University, or the rolling hills of eastern Kentucky on the way to Jonesville, Virginia, and the Appalachia Service Project. (And students can tell you: *I do* remind them of this on every such trip!) We are blessed by the natural world. We ought to celebrate it as the delightful and good gift that it is.

However, we must also take responsibility for it in the ways that we can, by our commitments to careful and thought-

ful use of its resources, and by behaviors that embody good stewardship of God’s creation, rather than ways of living otherwise. If I help people—by my example, my words, my teaching in the PHIL-210 Ethics course and other classes, and by my encouragement to explore alternative patterns of care and sustainability—not to forget that this created world is telling the glory of God, and that we have a responsibility to it, I will have been of service as university chaplain to this community.

III. LOOKING TO JESUS

A third piece of artwork I find extremely evocative in my “**looking to Jesus**” is the drawing, “Jesus My Lord,” by Melvin McGuire. A framed copy of this artwork is found in my office on campus. It is almost always the first thing I look at upon entering my office each morning. Jesus in this drawing is portrayed as a dark, pensive fellow, whose penetrating eyes see into the heart of the matter at hand, and into my heart. His gaze is not direct, but to me his eyes invite me to look deeper, look carefully, and look at what is really important.

What does Jesus look at? And what does He want me to see? You need to know that this copy of the picture of Jesus was given to me by my own university chaplain at my graduation from the University of Evansville. Having worked with the chaplain for three years as an undergraduate, I knew, without being told, who Jesus was looking at, and what was on the mind of this prophet, this teacher, this servant of God. I am indeed indebted to Reverend Emerson Abts, my beloved university chaplain, who gave me this visual reminder of the Christ whose gaze is upon hurting persons in a broken world. For part of our campus ministry programming was to look upon and respond to that very hurt in ways that young adults can.

We were admonished to look to Jesus, and Jesus was one who did not accept the status quo, but who challenged the ways that humans are inhuman to one another. Here was one who sought to bring change into the hearts of persons, and to stand up and act for justice, for peace, for lives of purpose and meaning together in community that overcame brokenness. Jesus looked upon people and our ways of interaction, and he saw so much more in us and for us than our common attitudes and ways of behaving suggest. He championed another way of living and interacting. He calls us even now to be about building this particular type of kingdom.

Just as then, so even now Jesus looks upon *us* with attention, concern, and hope. Jesus is attentive to our situation and our hurts, as reflected in the power of the stories of his healings and solidarity with those whose lives were filled with uncertainty and need. These are stories that continue to touch and transform us even today. Jesus is concerned for those whose lives are made unlivable because of structures of oppression and violence against them, and for those whose decisions lead to disease and brokenness. Jesus has hope that repentance is possible, and that people can truly turn around and live with values and commitments worthy of God’s children.

Jesus talks about the first of the commandments for living in the gospel accounts. He calls his followers to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with our entire mind, and with all our strength. Without skipping a beat, Jesus adds that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. (See Mark 12:28-34.) The ramifications of these greatest of commandments are immense!

I am challenged and I am heartened by these words of Jesus. Surely we are called to be about this life of discipleship—offering to God all that we are. I strive to live, and to preach from, such a holistic understanding of the Good News of Jesus Christ—God wants us to reflect this discipleship in all parts of our being. If I am able to do so, it is due to God’s grace. Maybe those around me will sense the eyes of Jesus upon our lives’ brokenness and claim God’s grace for themselves, too. Amazingly, we are called to live a life of love, a life of care and compassion, a life of peace, with our neighbors. Flawed as I am, this is my hope: that I may seek to embody such concern for others so that this aspect of my faith is never called into doubt.

To be a part of an institution whose motto is *Education for Service* is to be at home for me, because I am convinced that this is indeed the purpose of our education, including our religious education—to be empowered to be in service in our lives. This happens through our *vocations*, and it happens often even in our *avocations*. This happens as a result of our love for God, and our love for our neighbors. This is that which Jesus sees, and that we see when we look to Jesus. *Education for Service* then translates to *Life for Service*.

I celebrate the fact that, as university chaplain, I am charged to lift up the life and teachings of Jesus, to speak his Good News, and to strive to embody its transformative power, with God’s help. If I am able to help others—by my communicating this Good News to the students, faculty, and staff with whom I work, by my attempts to love God with all that I am, and with my attempt to love my neighbor as myself, through times of worship, service, formation, and fellowship—to receive this holistic and enriched Gospel message, and encourage them to follow this Lord, and honor these commandments more closely, I will have been of service as university chaplain to this community.

IV. LOOKING WHERE OTHERS MAY NOT BE LOOKING

Finally, as I think about **looking where others may not be looking**, I have been influenced by a painting once found in Reverend Bob Koenig’s office at Roberts Park United Methodist Church, a painting whose name and whose artist I simply do not know,⁴ but whose effect has been immense. It was a painting hanging upon Bob’s wall in the senior pastor’s office at the church in which I served with Bob for three important years in my life. I am grateful for those years working with Bob at Roberts Park, because I saw so clearly in his ministry the actions and embodiment of the sentiment reflected in this

painting. Its message was evocative of yet another dimension of campus ministry for me.

This painting returns us once again to a church, but this time it is the church's interior that we see. In a large church sanctuary, we note in the center, toward the altar, a gathering of people; there is no doubt but that some form of communal worship experience is taking place. Yet on the left side of the nave, at the far back of the pews, we see a solitary woman, kneeling fervently and apparently in some degree of dismay. Her head is buried in her arms, and one senses that she is in need—but what is it that she needs? Comfort? Encouragement? Forgiveness? A friend? We do not know what help she so desperately seeks, but we see there beside her the figure of Jesus, whose hand on her shoulder is there for her. His attention, his love, and his healing, reaches toward this one solitary and suffering woman, so apart from the experience of the group up front and at the center of the church. But wait—maybe what is taking place between Jesus and this woman is the clue to the message of this work of art!

The power of this painting cannot be overestimated as I seek to offer my sense of my ministry as one of our University's chaplains. I am moved to interpret this painting this way for our context: there are indeed many people on our campus who are assured and committed Christians who are right there at worship (in spirit) with that community gathered square in the center of this painting. And I celebrate their sense or assuredness, confidence, and commitment. I will do all in my power to be of assistance, and to be a pastor, to these dear ones as they grow in their discipleship while at the University of Indianapolis. The witness of their devotion and worship is so significant to others, and their continued spiritual growth so connected to where they are on their journey.

It is the case, though, that I encounter and serve many persons whose journey is at a different point right now; they are the unsure, questioning, struggling, hurting, maybe even unaccepted persons on our campus, too. They're in our midst, seeking to understand what being a spiritual person means for them. Where they are now is a place where assurance, confidence, and maybe even commitment are at issue. They may not know the language or have quite the intensity of experience; or, they have honest doubts and serious questions about life and God, which makes them not quite fit in with the worshipping majority and at some times are put at odds with this majority. In a manner of speaking, they are in the back pew, away and apart.

But the wonderful thing is that they are not alone, even there. Jesus stands with them, ready to touch their lives in all its ambiguity and pain. For they are hurting, and as I take my model from the compassionate Jesus, my ministry includes the vital importance of being aware and attentive *to these persons*, as well as the others whose sense of connectedness to

God is more evident. My ministry includes those who seem to be outsiders to the recognizably religious traditions as well as those others who need the help of a listening ear, an honest soundboard for hard, serious aspects of living and of understanding. Finally, those who are hungry for the taste of faith, hope, and love offered to them and for them to share are persons for whom I am called to minister in the name of Jesus Christ.

As chaplain, I strive to be a pastor to these folk, too; these who feel for whatever the reason to be on the margins. For the marginalized of whatever kind, I want our office—and I believe my role—to be one of befriending, being with, and being supportive and caring for them, even in the midst of the ambiguities of our lives, in what Dr. Everette Freeman, our senior vice president and provost, calls “the inconvenient gray of life.”

If I can be helpful by my willingness to be open to the struggles that are part of various students' lives, I will have been faithful to my calling as chaplain to this community. And if I can provide friendship and compassion by my attempts to serve as pastor and friend to those on the fringes of our campus religious community when they perceive misunderstanding and hostility, then I will have been true to my calling as chaplain to this community.

V. VISUALIZING THE WORKS OF ART THAT INFORM MY CAMPUS MINISTRY

These four pieces of art I have here lifted up reflect values that I have come to view as central to campus ministry and that inform my approach to my work as one of your university chaplains. I offer my commitment to make disciples of Jesus Christ and to be hospitable to all members of the University of Indianapolis community by serving as chaplain alongside my colleague, Sister Jennifer Horner. It is my honor and privilege to do so. I pledge to serve to the best of my abilities by speaking and acting in ways that invite others to the meaning and value of taking a look around, and deeply, at that: to look **upward** to God, to look **outward** to God's creation, to look **toward Jesus** and the way he gives and lives for us, and to look **to where others may not be looking**, to be in ministry to all for the glory of God. I hope that, together, we can see more clearly that which is of God and from God.

It is a testimony to God's amazing graciousness that I am permitted to be in service at the University of Indianapolis at this time—on behalf of the United Methodist Church, and for God's sake. And so I end where I started: I truly thank God for this enormous opportunity to be a part of an incredibly gifted team in campus ministry. While I serve, I will always seek to live and give this joyful and challenging invitation: *look and see!*

PHOTOGRAPHS

- A Professional photograph of Chaplain L. Lang Brownlee provided by the publications office of the University of Indianapolis.
- B “Lift Up Your Eyes” used with permission from print in Norman Rockwell’s Christmas Book edited by Molly Rockwell (new York, NY: Abrahams, 1977), 29.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ This reflection is a revised version of the address that Rev. L. Lang Brownlee gave at the University Chapel on October 3, 2003, the occasion at which he and Sr. Jennifer Horner O.S.B. were commissioned for service as co-chaplains of the University of Indianapolis.
- ² “Lift Up Your Eyes” used with permission from print in Norman Rockwell’s Christmas Book edited by Molly Rockwell (new York, NY: Abrahams, 1977), 29.
- ³ This painting is available for viewing in Co-Chaplain Brownlee’s office (Schwitzer 203-B) at the University of Indianapolis.
- ⁴ A copy of this painting is also available for viewing in Co-Chaplain Brownlee’s office.