

Where Citizenship Matters Most

The following is the text of an address given on June 3, 2016 at the 10th annual FCCMA Inspirational Breakfast during the 2016 FCCMA Conference in Orlando, Florida. The speaker at the sold out event was Randall Reid, Past President of FCCMA and presently Southeast Regional Director for ICMA.

Colleagues,

Good morning. It is a pleasure to be here this morning; to be among so many friends and in a community of public servants gathering in recognition and celebration of the importance of faith in our profession. I am particularly pleased to see Debbie Roberto here this morning. I am honored to speak again at this breakfast as I have done on occasions since the first time I spoke in 2005. That was when several of us, including Mike Roberto sought with support of FCCMA staff to have a time together at each conference to speak of the importance of the faith and to inspire us to persevere in the difficult work we do.

Remember Faith Matters

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Faith is an action and power. Whenever we work towards a worthy goal in our communities we exercise

faith. We show our hope for something that we cannot yet see and seek the power to accomplish it.

Mike Roberto, would have been pleased to see this event continue because he understood how important faith can be. It was in 2004 when I returned to my office one day in Alachua County and my secretary in a serious tone said “Mr. Reid you need to listen to this voice mail.” She played it for me and I heard a weakened voice I did not recognize say “Randy, this is Mike. I need to talk to a man of faith. Please call me.” The number was from New York and I knew no one in New York named Mike. I called. The same voice picked up and it was a weakened and seriously ill Mike Roberto, who was waiting in the hospital for the arrival of Debbie and had experienced the unexpected failure of his kidneys and was facing the reality of death. We spoke together for some time and he asked for prayer and with my secretary standing in my presence we prayed with Mike. He survived and returned to Florida in remission and we continued to dialogue about his condition and medical challenge as he fought his illness.

John Adams and Thomas Jefferson were both founding fathers but often bitter political rivals. In their final years they wrote letters and also became close friends. Once Adams wrote to Jefferson that “you and I ought not to die without explaining ourselves to each other.” That is good advice to all of us. Mike

and I were surprised that despite being so professionally close we had denied our friendship the additional closeness we had obtained through our openness about our religious faith during final months of the long relationship. We had accepted until those months the secular “wall” dividing work and faith that we often feel appropriate in our compartmentalized public professional lives and our private personal lives.

In the brief months Mike remained in remission he expressed the desire to have several of us assist developing an opportunity at our FCCMA conference to talk about the importance of faith. Ken Parker, Mike Abels and I offered our assistance. You know as FCCMA members when someone has a dream you come alongside them to assist. The first meeting in 2005, held before Mike passed from our physical presence in 2006 was an evening discussion of the book “The Purpose Driven Life” I led. The book begins with the words “It is not about you”.

Martin Luther King said “our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter”. Many of us have very shallow professional relationships despite our shared experiences. The conversations and the sharing between Mike and me as professional friends was often about the code of ethics, credentialing, and struggles with commissioners or egotistical pride in our achievements. But the ones I hold most dear but were about our faith, the legacy we wanted to leave for

friends and profession, love of our families and where our final citizenship would reside.

Mike and I discovered that our years of professional friendship needed to go to a higher level of understanding as he finally faced death. Like Jefferson and Adams we became closer as the end drew near. I remember my final visit with him setting in the hospital holding his hand; odd thing for typical managers.....we were spiritual brothers, not professional peers in final days. I look forward to seeing him again.

As you know after six tours of duty in cities and counties, I work now for ICMA. I know we have members of many different faiths in our 34 plus countries. So I ask this morning we recognize that even within FCCMA and the Christian community as well we are not monochromatic, like a flower arrangement in a vase of all red roses. We are more like a vase with a bouquet of wild flowers, with many different forms, colors and hues visible and a mixture of worship fragrances rising up to a Holy God or Abba Father, as my Christian faith calls Him. Perhaps Yahweh, Buddha or Allah for a few of you gather here this morning.

FCCMA has proven over the past decades that people of faith can meet together in mutual respect, so let me indicate to you that everyone is welcome here. If you are one of those of us seeking to represent in our public actions what is right and good, if you recognize you serve a higher power and purpose as a community leader beyond your self-interest, if you have the

heart of a servant (whether servant leader or public servant) you probably belong here this morning.

Managers don't talk about publically about prayer much; meditation or reflection is permissible occasionally. However prayer should be a power tool in every manager's tool box. One of my favorite bible verses from the book of Jeremiah says "Pray for the city to which you have been exiled for in its welfare lies your own welfare." I have felt exiled at times in my mobile career as I am sure many have in our profession.

Many in our professional community wish us to avoid religious or particularly Christian references in public or professional meetings except of course in emergencies or tragedies. However, our professional mores and our desire for tolerance makes us avoid some religious references like this verse even when very appropriate; even while the language and the lexicon of other religious beliefs which are "trending" in popular culture (i.e. mindfulness, centering, self-visualization) are acceptable.

Civic and religious illiteracy are both increasing today. The silver-lining to our unfortunate fear of faith based dialogue and strident political correctness is the fact that so much of our historical and cultural references have faith based foundations. Solid research show us today most college graduates can't

identify a single Supreme Court justice or identify the three branches of the federal government. That is tragic.

But they also don't know a "house divided against itself cannot stand" is Lincoln quoting Christian scripture. Nor could his phrases "better angels of our nature" and "with malice towards none" in the second inaugural address be placed by them historically into a context of spiritually inspired wisdom from Lincoln's deeply religious, often melancholy, heartache for the Union he sought to reunite. Lincoln's words expressed the compassion and mercy he desired to extend to heal the civic wounds of his rebellious but clearly beaten southern brethren is representation of the Beatitudes and Gospel.

While I respect all of those who are seeking Truth, I also believe we must always insist upon and practice reciprocity and mutual respect. When speaking with different faiths I ask them to understand and respect that as your speaker I am unapologetically Christian. For me this is better described as being a follower or disciple of Jesus. And I am fully committed to His part in the Trinity and God-Head. Our relationship is personal and alive in my life. He is principle reason I have maintained a servant's heart for public service and have cared passionately about my employees and citizens. We all have to find "the Way" and I have found mine and bear witness to that fact today.

ICMA recognizes there are many motivations for people choosing and remaining in our profession. For some of you paying to gather today in this safe place, it is an experience in a vocational or civic ministry, and the exercise of a stewardship of a public service institution or community you have been entrusted. A job or vocation can be a ministry; 'like Paul the tent maker' we all have to earn a living. Yet many of you gathered here clearly understand that for some of you, your work is a vocational "calling"....even our non-religious managers use the phrase if they even if they can't recognize the One who calls.

Like Gandhi's twofold mission to "live in truth" and "practice nonviolence", our professional values are built around "integrity" and "service" to others. And in this business, like with the religious heroes we admire, there can be times of persecution, isolation and disappointment. Many managers experience both the exhilaration of reaching the mountain top, times of wandering in the wilderness and experience the deep valley of despair. Like Moses we do not always get to enter the Promise Land we are leading our organizations toward. Fortunately we have our community of peers to keep us both humble and to assist each other and give encouragement through our informal friendships and FCCMA's formalized Member- In-Transition program.

Matthew Fox an author speaks about doing “the great work”. He said “Work comes from the inside out, work is an expression of the soul, our inner being. It is unique to the individual; it provides meaning. Work is the expression of the Spirit at work through us.” In a career of service to others and in the human relationships as complex as exists in the “public arena” of which Teddy Roosevelt wrote so elegantly. Many of us embrace the “servant leader” within us and the model of sacrificial leadership. Jesus Christ for me has been an outstanding model during the worst of times of professional suffering and inspiring when facing the most challenging public problems.

We have all shared together the **great privilege** of having the responsibility for the welfare of entire communities and numerous employees. Like me, you know in your “heart of hearts” that there are lives and places that are improved because of your service, your influence that has been faithfully employed. As city and managers we have the positional and legal authority and personal position to influence better outcomes in our communities.

For many, our spirituality gives us the humility, motivation and energy to persevere in the race. To improve the lives of the less fortunate, implement just practices, administer fair procedures with compassion, and courageously uphold the stewardship for the “commons” and providing the public goods and services

citizens require is indeed “righteous” work. And “to whom much has been given much is expected” so let us continue to diligently exercise and understand authority like the biblical centurions of old.

Remember Spirituality Makes Us Whole

Stephen Covey who has been probably the prevailing leadership coach for many of my generation of managers has said, “Spirituality cannot be something a person toys with, a little compartment of their lives. It has to be at the very core, in a way that affects every other part of their lives”.

In the book *Politics of Hope* by Donna Zajonc, leaders who are aware and in tune with their spirituality, like a Gandhi or MLK are frequently the ones who become transformational Level Four leaders. Their integrity and perseverance create sustainable movements or galvanizing actions that change the status quo and inspire others, bringing hope to those citizens trapped in hopelessness or resigned from the political process they feel disenfranchised from or not served by equitably. Bob Stewart, a friend from my graduate school, became the city manager of Xenia Ohio, where my wife grew up, only weeks before the town was devastated by a major tornado. He spent the next decades faithfully committed to rebuilding the town and its economic recovery and transformation.

This transformational leadership is employed with a deep awareness of the interdependence of members within any community. It embraces and accepts the motivation and legitimacy given through the power of the spirituality in our lives – it takes us from a “me” to an “us” – from performing my “tasks” to my bringing my “gift” to the community. The recognition that you were intended by God to be here at this appointed time and to be a part of solving a community problem through exercising your unique “gifts” you bring to a community or team is an empowering and sustaining motivation.

I always enjoyed watching Tim Tebow play at UF. All coaches know there are some players that will play every game with “heart”, who can persevere and overcome obstacles skills alone cannot do. So it is with those of you I know in this room; you are managing with “heart”, you are committed and using your “gifts” as intended to be brought to bear in the problems you face in your community. Perhaps you won’t reach the pro-bowl, (or the ICMA awards program) but in the end does that really matter? Let’s not place our emphasis in this career on the wrong priorities. Whose arena are you playing in, man or Gods?

Remember Civic Values Are Essential to Democracy

Like all of you, I take pride in my citizenship in this country and enjoy the religious freedom and freedom of speech it protects. James Madison wrote that it was doubtful democracy could survive without civic virtue among the people. Without being

dogmatic I believe, as did the Founders, that our liberty is and will always be deeply tied to the civic and moral values within our citizens. At the founding of the country it was my own Judeo-Christianity heritage that was principally the source of religious inspiration. We were blessed in our founding because as Tom Paine said “the cause of America is the cause of all mankind.” Many different religions now continue to provide our country their religious values today; and if positive and community sustaining let’s embrace them.

Like many of you today I am concerned about our country and our democratic institutions; our social fabric and faith in governmental institutions is fraying. Many of us are observers and students of “community” but we need also to be “architects” of civic renewal. De Tocqueville the French observer of our country in the 1800s observed that American democracy was greatly influenced by the willingness of our people to assemble in civic and faith based associations to solve our fledgling community’s problems. He observed more importantly as well that there were “habits of the heart” that democracy required to be reflected in the people to be sustained over time.

Since leaving Sarasota County, in the wake of Ferguson and Baltimore, I have read and studied extensively about civic health and civic healing a great deal as the Practitioner in Residence at the Bob Graham Center in Public Service at UF. We see civic

healing being practice now by leaders on the nightly newscast with each tragic shooting or act of violence or civic unrest.

Paul Palmer, a Quaker, in his book “Healing the Heart of Democracy” identified 5 habits of the heart he felt were essential for us to recognize as civic leaders and understand our significant role as civic healers in our communities.

These are a recognition that:

- We are all in this together; (i.e., we are interdependent)
- We must appreciate the value of “otherness”; (i.e. we learn from listening to those that are different and reflect their own inner light or traditions)
- We must manage the tensions in our communities in life giving ways; (i.e. seek to build connectedness and practice reconciliation)
- We must generate a sense of voice and agency; (i.e. speak out regarding critical issues and identify we are the source of solutions)
- We must strengthen our capacity for community building (i.e. practice civic education, citizen engagement and mentoring civic and elected leadership)

Here is an important question for you.....Have you considered that civic healing is a function of your public leadership and will likely be of growing importance in the future?

Remember to Keep Good Company

The next generation of managers need faithful mentors. We all need three relationships in our professional life to be truly satisfied. An older person to serve as mentor, a companion(s) on the journey for accountability and encouragement and a young person to invest in and mentor. In the Bible this is the ideal of Paul, Barnabus and Timothy.

My life has been blessed by the mentors in my life. My first two professional mentors were polar opposites and disliked each other but I learned from both. Bud Senseman, a public works director captured my heart as a leader of men from the first day he slide down in the mud to shake my hand as a seasonal city worker, providing me respect and with a job to pay for my college. Ted Gaebler, my first city manager captured my intellect as a true professional executive, an innovator and change agent.

There were the other Paul's for me like Robert Kipp, Ken Erickson, Howard Tipton, Sr. and Peter Cheney. Peers on my journey are in the room today and others like Mike Crotty, Ken Parker, Bob LaSala, Robert Lee, Rex Taylor, Russ Blackburn, Bill Horne, Tom Bonfield and John Darrington have been the Barnabus giving me encouragement. I now have many former employees and former interns who are my Timothies at this

conference and managing communities around the country today with whom I remain in touch.

Remember to look to four sources of “good company” for the journey.

Professional mentors. Watching our bosses and fellow professionals like Bob Kipp and Buford Watson, Ken Erickson and Flip McConnagh, Tom Kelly, Dan Kleman, Lee Feldman, Jim Keene and Robert O’Neill can help you along the journey. We all can recall different yet meaningful names.

Historical mentors. Reading biographies of famous people teaches much wisdom like the legendary city manager LP Cookingham, or Roger Williams (founder of Providence, RI and advocate of religious freedom 100 years before our founding fathers), or Founding Fathers like Washington, Jefferson, Adams; Presidents like Lincoln and Roosevelt, and Kennedy, who called my generation into public service. Fictional characters in literature like Atticus Finch in “To Kill a Mockingbird” and even movies and television from Ben Cartwright on Bonanza to Clint Eastwood’s Outlaw Josey Wails can reveal character strengths and serve a models of

behavior. Of course, all are flawed but give insights and pathways to dealing with the issues we face.

Transformational mentors. Teachers impact us but arise from many venues; Harry Eastridge (a high school teacher who taught a great men and ideas class) and Bob Davis (a band director who exposed me to classical music and jazz), Emerson and Thoreau (self-reliance and transcendentalist thoughts), Gandhi and King (social change, civic disobedience and non-violence), Albert Schweitzer (reverence for life), Detrick Bonhoeffer (grace and confronting evil) John Gardner, David Suzuki and Peter Block (ICMA speakers on diversity, ecology, and community systems thinking), EF Schumacher, Wendell Berry and Aldo Leopold, (all authors on place-based thinking , environmental economics and community sustainability).

Divine mentors. Biblical mentors in scripture live on as mentors for us today. Their words and the stories of their lives, even when going through turmoil, failure and not always remaining faithful, serve as daily inspirational lessons on how to live. Abraham, Noah, Moses, Jacob, Joseph, David, Solomon Nehemiah, Ruth, Peter, James and John these are the reason that bible study is valuable. There is certainly likewise wisdom in many

religious traditions and literature as truth and the human tradition are a shared experience.

My parents were mentors like many of yours. Dick Waggoner, my first mayor who protected me as a young 28 year old manager is a father figure to me second only to my three scoutmasters. Senator Bob Graham remains a Florida political figure I respect, still dedicated to public service, my state and who I volunteer to serve with to promote civic education.

Remember Citizenship Is Seldom Singular

Citizenship in its broadest definition is a way of “being” in the world rooted in the knowledge that I am member of a vast community of human and non-human beings that I depend upon for the essential necessities we can’t provide myself. The Greeks did not think you became fully human until left your home and you entered the public realm of the city. The Romans called the civic feeling of belonging within citizenship as “civitas”. A common characteristic of citizenship is usually that one is naturally born into their citizenship or they have to make a conscious declaration and expressed desire to belong to hold citizenship.

This definition also describes the vital sense of communal relationships between civic participants in sustainable communities. Philosophically it can enable us to more easily determine honestly what is in the “common good” of all citizens and that of individual members. As Wendell Berry points out “what is always in my self-interest is not always in the common interest but what is the common interest is always good for me as well”. MLK envisioned an empowered spirit of citizenship with people living in harmony and achievable only through love and reconciliation between citizens as the “Beloved Community”.

The Apostle Paul is an example of someone who focused on the importance and multifaceted experience of citizenship. While associated with the Jewish Sanhedrin, he was a respected Jewish leader, community member and theologian. When he became a follower of Jesus on the road to Damascus he learned he was a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. When accused by the Jewish authorities, because of his acceptance and advocacy of Jesus he appealed to a Roman centurion lashing him to stop the intended punishment and at other occasion’s petition Roman rulers for the right to speak, on the basis that he was a Roman citizen with Roman rights. As such and could not

be beaten without due process and he exercised this powerful worldly citizenship to advance his ministry until he came into conflict between Roman law due to his spiritual beliefs. We need to understand as Paul did which citizenship matters most today; we are members of communities, professions, nations and for some spiritual Kingdoms. When in conflict these loyalties may require we choose which one matters most.

Most religions seek a place of ultimate perfection, wholeness and peace. My religion speaks of a Kingdom, not of this world. Today some of us, like Paul then, know we are working with our feet planted firmly in two kingdoms. Jesus said multiple times that the kingdom of heaven is at “hand or within”in that kingdom we do not have to wait to live in a more ethical and faith based existence; we are empowered to experience it now. The recognition of the duality of our existence with a foot in two realms or Kingdoms, earthly and spiritually, often provides us the ability to choose to decide in many situations not in our earthly self-interest, but to act on a higher power and principle outside ourselves and to sacrificially serve our families and communities.

Making the right decisions in your work, even if there are negative repercussions, is much easier if you can

understand that you can choose to see things from a Kingdom perspective. Life will go on and blessing arise from such stressful decisions; even a firing maybe seen as only a message it is time to move on to a better assignment. Having been fired “without cause”, as is commonplace in this profession, I believe the fear of it for some of you is worse than the reality of it in this business. It has become the mother of Grendel you face nightly at some point and causes you to temper your recommendations and vacate your executive authority.

I have come to the conclusion that the greatest proof of a demonic force in this world is the elaborate self-deception people are capable of enjoying or employing and the magnitude of evil mankind can collaborate with others on in order to inflict pain within this world. Sometimes it only takes a skillfully contrived but believable false narrative to substitute for your own conscience to justify unethical actions. Police officials and many of us have known people literally not smart enough to come up with the complexity of the evil they inflict on others or the mental darkness and depravity they dwell in by themselves alone.

So if in a struggle between good and evil, light and darkness or ethical and unethical, I desire the good, the

light and the ethical. We can at all in times of need or inadequacy call upon the strength and promises of that Kingdom as we walk in faithful service. In my Christian beliefs I serve the King of Kings, who has all authority, is concerned with my well-being, honors my obedience and sacrifice, and I will one day be able to live eternally in that Kingdom and in that Light.

Remember we are building sustainable and resilient communities.

If as public administrators we seek to build stronger, healthier communities, ones that are sustainable over time and resilient in the face of economic challenges, civic unrest and disasters. We need to recognize the power and the capability of the faith community to assist our communities. Civic health research shows us that levels of community cohesion and connectedness of citizens is the greatest single indicator of civic resiliency and the faith community can excel at that function in our communities.

For 10 years I have been an elder of a large non-denominational church in a medically skilled university community. On occasion we have fielded the equivalent

of a MASH style medical unit into an international natural disaster in days and regularly dispatch crews of volunteers for post disasters clean ups and distribution of disaster supplies regionally. We have had over 40 home groups grounding people who are lonely into extended family and assimilating new members to connectedness of community life. We have had a recovery ministry that has had scores of folks attend a special Friday night service to help people beat those things that hold them in bondage and addiction. We have ministries that seek out both the homeless and widows who need food, shelter or household repairs. We offer child care for working mothers regardless of religious belief. My church leadership cherishes remaining nonpartisan politically, yet teaches on issues in society and encourages civic participation with respect for governmental authority and public officials. We say we are here to pray “for” our government not “at” government. What community is not strengthened by such faith based civic involvement?

My religious beliefs and the concern I have for the Kingdom and God’s creation has required me to consider the kinds of ethics that a sustainable community would require and could be replicated and transmitted across cultural barriers. I found this applied sustainable ethic readily available in the Golden Rule of

Christianity “do unto others as you would have them do unto you“. This is truth, this is an absolute truth and reflects the law of reciprocity. It is therefore also found articulated in different wording and in similar variations in every major religion in the world. As stewards charged with caring for Creation and loving our neighbors and our enemies this can be easily be applied to all living things. Wendell Berry describes this Golden rule in simple community terms as “Don’t put anything in the river affecting the people downstream that you would not want the people upstream to do to you”.

This is applied sustainable ethics, simple but revolutionary in local and global settings; is harder to do consistently than one can imagine because we are not perfect but human. It limits the advantages of wealth, geography, caste or and class. As city and county managers we can strive in our community dealings and intergovernmental relationships to place our own personal and jurisdictional actions and public policies on this empowering and conflict reducing ethical rule.

Looking back on my 40 year career I don’t regret dedicating myself to public service. But can’t imagine having done so without my faith. I urge each of us to leave here this morning with the full armor of a faithful

public servant put on and go back to your communities and fight the good fight, run the good race till it is finished. Resist people who try to steal your well-deserved joy commonly experienced in public service. Be still and know there is a greater power assisting you as you serve. Know you will see future lives improved and influenced by ripples in the civic streams you have waded and the bridges you have built for the next generation of managers you mentor and the crowd of witnesses who are watching you today.

Keep the faith. Your life is your message and your personal example is the strongest and most enduring form of leadership. Again, thanks for listening and attending our breakfast. Go and serve well.