

Opinion

The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.



To A Higher Degree

Michael Hemesath
Guest columnist

Avoid the college mismatch

Many important public institutions have had their credibility called into question in recent years, including Congress, the press and the Catholic Church. In recent months it has been higher education's turn.

Operation Varsity Blues is the recent higher education scandal that has shocked and disappointed so many. This debacle has implicated a number of wealthy parents, varsity athletic coaches and college placement professionals, as well as some of the country's most well-known educational institutions.

Some observers have suggested that this scandal simply revealed the corruption at the heart of the college admissions process. I think this claim is far too strong and largely unfair. After nearly 40 years in higher education, I have found most educators and institutions to be deeply committed to the mission of educating young people and changing their lives for the better. Certainly corruption and dishonesty do exist in higher education, but they are probably less common than in other institutions.

The real drama and tragedy of Operation Varsity Blues was the deep misunderstanding about what is important in a college education.

The United States has about 2,500 four-year institutions, and that number reflects the tremendous variety across virtually every dimension of a student's educational experience. The parents caught in the Varsity Blues scandal focused on one thing: "prestige."

Usually prestige is measured narrowly in terms of academic selectivity. The Ivies, Stanford or Williams are prestigious by this measure. Prestige can be measured in other ways in different communities as well. One of the schools prominently involved in the scandal was the University of Southern California, a strong institution but not typically considered an academically elite one, but in California it is considered prestigious among the Hollywood professional community.

The misguided parents in this scandal cheated and bribed on behalf of their children to get them admitted to a more prestigious school than they would have gotten into on their own. Yet in most of these cases the student was mismatched with the institution. In other words, the student was not of the same caliber academically or otherwise as his or her peers.

This mismatch was likely to lead to a poor experience for the students involved. Economists that have studied such issues have concluded that when students are mismatched with the institutions they choose, they often perform poorly and in many cases even fail to

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OUR VIEW



It's time for St. Cloud to stand up against fear and hate. STEPHANIE DICKRELL/ST. CLOUD TIMES

Problem is cowards — not the refugees

Vocal group of racists now defines St. Cloud to world

St. Cloud, we have a problem. And it's costing us dearly in respect, dignity and treasure.

Our problem is not refugees.

It's not even an image problem, although we most certainly have one of those. If you don't think so, Google "St. Cloud" and click on the first New York Times article at the top.

Our real problem is that there are too many cowards in our midst.

Yes, we said it: Cowards.

Cowards who blanch at the idea of Somalis "just walking around" on a public trail.

Cowards who cost local businesses thousands of dollars by overreacting to a mismarked security vehicle out of fear of Sharia law — which isn't coming for us. It just isn't, and only cowards believe it is.

Cowards who festoon their pickup trucks with loud mufflers and confederate flags to strike fear in others as they attempt to cover their own inadequacies.

Cowards who are too afraid to shop, dine or relax in contrived "no-go zones" also used by people "not from Norway" who like to shop, dine and relax.

Cowards who let discourse run into the sewer because it wouldn't be Minnesota Nice to ask a keyboard warrior or blowhard relative to support their wild claims with facts.

Cowards who say #notallSt.Cloudians then carry on meekly as if that absolves our community in the eyes of the world.

Or, say, the cowards who, behind the rhetoric and the "facts" they use to promote their hate, so transparently and deeply fear a future in which they might be a minority. And get treated *just like one*.

All of that gutless timidity by a vocal flock — and we

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do believe they are outnumbered by Central Minnesotans who can see someone who is "other" with enthusiastic curiosity or at worst benign disinterest — is what defines St. Cloud to the world now.

That's going to cost us dearly if we don't get a handle on it — rapidly.

Corporate America is not, by and large, interested in associating itself with hate of any kind. The cowardly among us keep perpetuating a local brand that makes it less likely we will be in the running for the next tech outpost or national call center.

Convention schedulers are also keenly aware that attendees will look for details about our city and find our darkest side. Already this newspaper has been

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Engagement requires empathy, compassion, love



Ben Ament

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Catholic social justice worker and peace activist Dorothy Day said that "So many in these days have taken violent steps to gain the things of this world — war to achieve peace; coercion to achieve freedom; striving to gain what slips through the fingers." She said this in 1957. It appears that the world has not changed much in the ensuing decades. Many of Day's writings dealt with the need for empathy and compassion in a violent world.

I, too, often write about the need for empathy and compassion in the life we share on this Earth because I believe that they are two arms of the same body. Each helps us get the most out of the

other.

I am sure that some readers will say to themselves, "There he goes again with that old saw about unconditional love." However, when I groan to myself about the difficulty of constantly writing about love, empathy and compassion in an all-too-tense world which for far too many of us become times of terror, I think of those other readers that I run into on the street who thank me for reminding them that the world is not without those three beads on a string that ties us all together: empathy, compassion, love.

We all want, we all need, to love and be loved, in our families, in our relationships, including at work.

Dorothy Day reminds us that "Even the most ardent revolutionist, seeking to change the world, to overturn the tables of the money changers, is trying to make a world where it is easier for people to love, to stand in that relationship

with each other."

In an increasingly violent world, we need to see other human beings as fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers. That takes empathy.

Spring is the time of new beginnings, but in the timeline of life June is probably the month of change with the most lasting impact. June is traditionally the month of graduations and weddings. Success in those endeavors (education and family creation) are not usually thought of together, but they are inextricably intertwined. Without passion, empathy and compassion in both we are destined to live lives that are unfulfilled, if not unhappy.

Empathy and compassion give us the insight into others' lives that help us to see their needs. They also help us to increase our engagement with subjects we study and with those with whom we have relationships. And that includes work relationships.

Stanford researcher Denise Pope, in a recent interview with Krista Tippett, says that engagement does not mean getting good grades. In fact, she says: "No, it's the opposite. Some of your most engaged people get the worst grades because they're out there going deep into what they want to do, and they're not following the rules, and the teacher doesn't know what to do with that."

When students and lovers are fully engaged, they become mindful of the world around them. They get excited. They get passionate. They get involved. Empathy, compassion and, yes, love make this possible.

Pope further says that this carries over to all parts of life. When we are fully engaged, fully mindful, it does not matter if you are at school or the bowling alley, in church or at home, you feel a part of the place.

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