Virtues in the Pursuit of the Common Good
(Forgiveness)
March 16, 2016

The Common Good
Throughout some two thousand years of history, Christians have a long and rich tradition of serving the common good. To be sure, some Christians have withdrawn from civil society. And in places where they have faced persecution, sectarian violence, or discrimination withdrawing may have been the most viable option. But the normal pattern has been for Christians to constructively engage society. From the early history of Christianity to today, believers have found a sturdy biblical warrant for engaging culture and serving the common good. Through the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord told His people living in exile in Babylon to “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jer. 29:7). “Do good to all men, especially the household of faith,” the apostle Paul wrote the churches in Galatia (Gal. 6:10.) Paul unambiguously commands Christians to serve the interests of not just fellow believers but also their non-Christian neighbors. Like the prophet Jeremiah, the apostle uses the imperative. It is not an option but a biblical command. In short, to work for the common good of one’s neighbors is a deeply biblical principle.

To some, however, the phrase “common good” echoes Communism's demands that all lesser goods yield to the construction of a paradise here on earth. People on the political left sometimes use the phrase to talk about “humanity” in some sort of collective fashion. This can lead to thinking that the state has a right to improve humanity's lot by taking away people's personal property. Conversely, a society built solely on individual pursuit of wealth is equally atrophied in the eyes of the Gospel. Peace and stability built only on the accrual of more goods disregards the corporate nature of responsibility and understates the effects of sin. But a more Christian vision of the common good rejects such utilitarian reasoning and offer a prophetic word to all political realities. More robustly biblical understanding of the notion sees the common good as the sum total of social conditions which enables both individuals and communities to flourish more fully and more easily.

Colleges are by definition civic institutions and as such they are designed to serve the common good. In fact, woven through Grove City College's institutional objectives is language which stresses the development of students' personal and social responsibility and the importance of becoming effective local and global citizens. One of the stated objectives of Grove City is to “promote a sense of responsibility to the larger community and society.”

In a society deeply divided by racial tensions, religious violence, and economic unrest, Christians cannot retreat into sectarian enclave without abandoning the biblical call to serve the common good. Although this particular moment in history poses many dangers and threats, the challenge Christians now face is to learn to speak and act as Christians for the common good of society.
Forgiveness in Pursuit of the Common Good

Opening Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

What is Forgiveness?
1. According to Aristotle, forgiveness seems to be found chiefly in the character of the magnanimous or high-minded person. It is more of a forgetfulness or an indifference than an active engagement with the one forgiven for his or her good. “...[F]or it is the mark of a high-minded man not to bring up the past, especially what was bad, but rather to overlook it.”
2. The Christian view of forgiveness is one of active reconciliation. “There is the forgiveness of those who are perfect: when he that is offended seeks out the offender.” (Aquinas)
3. Modern conceptions of forgiveness oscillate between two extremes:
   a. Therapeutic forgiveness
   b. Eclipse of forgiveness
4. Reconciliation is an ongoing process involving forgiveness, repentance, and justice that restores broken relationships and systems to reflect God’s original intention for all creation to flourish.

Organizational Virtuousness
1. Virtuousness in organizations refers to transcendent, elevating behavior of the organizational members. Virtuousness by organizations refers to features of the organization that engender virtuousness on the part of the members.
2. A general definition of organizational virtuousness, then, includes individuals’ actions, collective activities, cultural attributes, or processes that enable dissemination and perpetuation of virtuousness in an organization.
3. Alasdair MacIntyre contrasts internal goods (derived from practices, both the excellence of products and the perfection of the individual in the process) with external goods (fame, power, profit, success, etc.).
   a. “A virtuous corporate character is the seat of the virtues necessary for a corporation to engage in practices with excellence, focusing on those internal goods thereby obtainable, while warding off threats from its own inordinate pursuit of external goods and from the corrupting power of other institutions with which it engages.”
   b. “Those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices, but which will sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good”
4. Research findings

Discussion Questions
1. What does forgiveness look like in a person? What does forgiveness look like in a community or society? How have you seen this in your own life?
2. Do you believe forgiveness is only a matter between individuals, or is it meaningful only in the context of communities? Why or why not?
3. In what ways, if any, have you seen the campus community promote a culture of forgiveness and reconciliation? What recommendations or suggestions would you make to help us improve our efforts in this area?
4. Who is our neighbor? How might we more actively engage our neighbor in local and global issues concerning reconciliation? How might we take a proactive approach to addressing issues that divide us from others?
5. How have you seen the virtues (i.e., forgiveness, justice, humility, etc.) work together in an organizational context (e.g., student organization, corporation, non-profit, etc.)?
6. Do you have a job or internship lined up for this summer? In what ways might you contribute to the level of organizational virtuousness? What are potential barriers you perceive that may limit your contribution?
7. In the spirit of self-examination, identify one thing you want to be forgiven for and one person you need to forgive. What first step can you take in each case?