

Danville news Column  
Robert John Andrews  
"The Measure of My Success"  
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I guess I'm a coward. Over the years I've drifted to the rear of the room, away from the shouting. Why voice my opinion on the big social issues which concern plenty of my colleagues? Same-sex marriage. Ordination of practicing homosexuals. Abortion. Health Care. What I have decided is to step behind the politics of right opinion and help pick up the pieces. After every debate and vote, there be those wounded. I'll hang out with them.

Which is all ironically surprising to me given how I got into this business in the first place. Me: a precocious child of the sixties, of protest rallies and placards. I once debated Congressman Ed Koch. I sat-in the Pentagon. Me: a child of the Civil Rights movement. I grieved the cowardice and incompetence of my church leadership, and I decided then to become a 'mover and shaker' of the religious world. God needed me. I would ascend the ranks of my denomination and sit behind desks of power and authority. My church would get its politics right. I was a connoisseur of social crusades.

God chuckled, then maneuvered me into serving as a bumbling pastor of a dumpy little congregation in manure-laden Lancaster County.

Over these years, I've drifted into a pragmatic mood. My age isn't helping matters much. I'm too tired to become important, or at least irate. I'm much happier planning my drive to visit our daughter in San Francisco. Other days it's enough to hold someone's hand at the hospital. Hmm, let's see: I can attend another mandatory conference on ethics, or I can read Dr. Seuss to first graders. Not even close. I use to spend hours counseling churches in conflict. Why didn't we spend our energies instead helping orphans find parents? What is the best remedy for congregations in conflict? Often it's a good fire.

A 99 year old church member was dying. I was new to town and curious about local history, so I prodded her. She reminisced about the conflicts that led to the origin of some local congregations. She mentioned how the old canal

was a big deal, dividing the community. Her deathbed evaluation of those days made me smile. "We thought it was real important," she muttered. She added: "It wasn't."

What will it take for you to look back on your life and say, "I've been important. I've been successful?" What's your measure?

The NASDAQ is back. And the AMEX pays for my duplex. Of course the SSRB depends on the PIA (that ruthless fiscal Ayatollah). So how's my COLA? Payola from the GNP. GDP. S&P. FRB. FTC. SEC. GHG. CD? POD. OD. YTD. Free ATM? Not with my SSN. Or PIN. TIN. NNI SSI.

Supply side day for the EPA and DJIA. 401(K) ? IRA! Laying woes for the NGO's. But never the CEO's, CFO's, COO's, CTO's, CMO's, CIO's, or CCO's. Is there plenty of dough from the EIS to report to the IRS? No, sadly: NSF.

I'm reminded of a conversation ages ago with a really rich and influential couple; how the wife sighed when she said how much happier they were in their first home, a cheap one room walk-up.

There is a clever movement afoot. One of our church book club books - Three Cups of Tea -- mentioned it: "the true measure of a nation's success is not gross national product, but 'gross national happiness.'"

In fact, there is a survey with metrics to measure more than a nation's consumption or commerce. It measures the level of a society's satisfaction in seven areas: 1) Economic satisfaction (savings, debt and purchase power); 2) Environmental satisfaction: (pollution, noise, traffic); 3) Workplace satisfaction (job satisfaction, motivation, ethics, conflict); 4) Physical health (Severe illnesses, overweight); 5) Mental health (usage of antidepressants, self-esteem, positive outlook); 6) Social satisfaction, family and relationship satisfaction (domestic disputes, communication, support, sex, discrimination, safety, divorce rates, complaints of domestic conflicts and family lawsuits, public lawsuits, crime rates); 7) Political satisfaction (quality of local democracy, individual freedom, foreign conflicts).

So how is America doing? What's our 'GNH' index? What's yours? Better yet: what is your neighbor's GNH? How do our children fare? That'll tell you.

If we have learned anything these decades, let it be that we are better than materialism. The power of things lies not in themselves but in what we make of them, the power we give them over us. So I'll stay weak and cowardly. For the greatest failure in life is the indifferent man.