

What have you been doing the last 52 years?

It can be an interesting question.

It was the topic of conversation the other night as I visited with Dr. Paul Olsen of Augustana College who is retiring after 52 years as an English professor and track coach. His career is longer than most of his students' lives.

He is lauded for his work. A legend at the college. As an English professor, he has been known for his love for African-American poetry and literature. He became friends with author William Styron and probably knows more than anybody on the planet about Styron's *Sophie's Choice*, which won the National Book Award for Fiction in 1980. As a track and field coach, he helped produce 44 Academic All-Americans in track and field/cross country, ranking Augustana first in all three NCAA divisions. He is credited for knowing each individual on his 100 member track teams.

Throughout the dinner, we toasted the career. We toasted the mentors. We toasted his radiant wife. Near the end of the evening, I asked him, "What is the eternal life in it all?" "Thanks for the question. It's a good one," he answered. He knew what I meant. Not 'what will you be remembered for?' Not, 'what was your greatest achievement?' Not even, 'Where did you make an impact?' But what is the enduring, substantial, feature of your work that that will live on beyond you?

His answer: "On our bulletin board, we have a picture of two athletes, one white and one black. Neither's face is showing. They are embracing."

That, he thought, is his legacy. In a competitive game, in a dog-eat-dog world, in a push for success, love is the ultimate. In this case, it would be a brotherly love that is the ultimate goal.

That's what 52 years have taught this acclaimed teacher in the classroom and on the field. I hope his students learned the lesson. And I hope the rest of us do, too.

Sincerely,

Pastor Dan