

Building the foundation

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They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life (1 Timothy 6.18-19).

For the past two months, our neighborhood has been a construction zone as crews have been adding sidewalks. Like many things that will be beautiful in the end, it is a mess during the preparation phase. Catherine and I take evening walks, so we have been able to view this work up close. I am sure that the neighbors are sleeping better knowing that I am keeping a careful eye on the construction of these sidewalks.

As you can imagine, this is requiring large amounts of concrete for sidewalks with strong foundations. We all know the importance of a good foundation for a structure. If you've ever watched a work crew pour a foundation, you know that much preparation is required before the foundation is ready to be poured. In addition to clearing a level space and taking exact measurements, a foundation needs a strong core to hold it together.

When a foundation is poured correctly, carbon steel is added to the core. This steel is commonly known as "rebar," short hand for "reinforcing bar." Rebar is a very important component of reinforced concrete as well as masonry. Rebar is needed because, while concrete is a material that is very strong in compression, it is virtually without strength in tension. To compensate for this imbalance in the concrete's character, rebar is put into the core of the structure to allow the concrete to bear the load under tension.

I have been reflecting on how similar this analogy is to our life as Christians, particularly in the Diocese of West Texas. I want us to begin to think about a strong, core foundation that will guide the vision, purpose, mission, and ministry of our diocese in the years ahead. This is a conversation that we will engage on a diocesan level over the next months as we seek to discern the "core values" that guide our life as followers of Jesus Christ.

At the April meetings of the Executive Board and the Standing Committee (your elected leadership), we discussed the importance of West Texas charting our course for the years ahead, especially in the uncertain times in which we find ourselves. Rather than waiting for someone else to "fix" everything, it is important for us to take the initiative as a diocese in defining the core values that will define and guide us as a large and diverse diocesan family. Preparing the "landscape" for this "foundation" begins with establishing a strong core so that we might have, in the words of St. Paul, ***a good foundation for the future.***

The preparation for laying this foundation has already begun and will continue throughout the summer. In April, the clergy of the diocese gathered and began to engage this conversation.

On August 30, the Executive Board and the Standing Committee will have a joint meeting with a two-fold purpose. First, we will come to understand what the phrase “core values” really means and how we might identify those values as a diocese. Second, we will establish a process for the vestries, bishop’s committees, and other leadership to engage these questions in the fall. On Saturday, October 20, we will have gatherings in six areas around the diocese to explore these core questions, and I hope that all vestries, bishop’s committees, and other congregational leadership will be present at one of these sites. More details on these gatherings will be forthcoming in August, but please reserve October 20 on your calendar.

Core values are closely linked to the vows we make, whether those be baptismal vows or ordination vows. We are blessed with a faith and an Anglican identity rich in history and deep in theological reflection, so we need not create these core values from scratch. We will center our conversation in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ as reflected in the gospel. We will also be able to draw from the deep wells of our Judeo-Christian tradition and our Anglican ethos. This is what it means, in part, to ***let down our nets into deep water***, (Luke 5.4), our diocesan theme for 2007.

Please join me in praying for holy contemplation, spiritual creativity, and Godly wisdom as we move forward to consider the “rebar” that will reinforce our foundation in both times of joy and in times of tension. Like those sidewalks under construction, it can be hard to imagine that something beautiful is right around the corner; but I have every confidence that these core values will indeed serve us well in the coming months and years, and will enable us to ***take hold of the life that really is life***.

Finally, as spring gives way to summer, I encourage you to hear Jesus’ words in Matthew 7.28-29: ***Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls***. Amen to that. Have a blessed and restful summer.