
Lenten Dust

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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Construction dust settled into my shoes this week, as I walked into the area that was once my office. I remember days when I wished I could do to my office what these demolitionists have done! (I am sure my predecessors remember those days, too). The area is now a wreck. We removed all the beautiful wood paneling, which I hope to make available to some of the generous heroes of this campaign. But the interior cinder blocks and straggling wires remained a mess this past week. They, too, are gathering dust, like my shoes.

What a week this is!

Lent begins, of course, on Ash Wednesday. Maybe we'll use some of the dust from the construction as dust for our liturgy. "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." We are all dust, and our buildings are also dust. Yet, we can do tremendous things with our bodies and with our buildings, when they are baptized, spirit-filled, and sanctified. I resolve this Lent to let the very dust praise our God.

Our Cathedral Lenten challenge is this: Learn the names of twelve new disciples in the next forty days. That is our Lenten discipline as a parish. We are large, and we are often scattered. We come to church and find many folks whom we do not recognize. Take on the challenge. Purposefully learn the names of twelve new people before Easter Day. Every Sunday, we will provide name tags in either the parish hall or the narthex to help you out. Even the clergy will wear name tags. It is a voluntary discipline: none is required; all are encouraged. God himself names these individual pieces of dust, brings us together, and so builds the Body of Christ.

On the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, after finding our way through the glorious construction protection, we baptized twenty-one new Christians into the Church. All our services were loud. Babies cried. Families smiled. Friends laughed. We sang and prayed. At lunch I spent two hours with a sterling confirmation class. Then, we invited our friends from Peachtree Road United Methodist Church to sing Anglican evensong at 4:00 pm: my good friend and colleague, Don Harp, preached. They both did well! The Body of Christ is large and growing larger.

Last Saturday, I was invited to speak in Charleston, South Carolina, to a group of Episcopalians who disagree with some of the actions of their Diocese. While many of their parishes are set to join a network of folks who want to leave the American Episcopal Church, this group is seeking a way to remain loyal. I was honored to speak a painful word to them: stay in your local parish. I say the same thing to folks in our own diocese who are upset, but on the other end of the theological spectrum! Whether you are conservative or liberal, I said, remain engaged and committed to your local Episcopal parish. That is how we will get through this season of dust and reconstruction.

On Monday, I met with representatives from two Episcopal churches in other parts of the south (Tennessee and Texas). They had traveled to Atlanta to discuss how it is that we can hold together as Episcopalians. We noted an amazing thing that is happening in strong Episcopal parishes around the country: people who disagree with each other continue to love each other and to stay loyal to their local parish. It has been a painful time for many of us. It is as if we are learning anew the suffering of Christ. So be it. We will share in the resurrection of Christ, too.

On Thursday, I will see, twice, Mel Gibson's much-hyped movie, "The Passion of Christ." It will be violent and gruesome. I will lead discussion on it during the Dean's Forum class on Sunday (the First Sunday of Lent). Many of us have already begun discussing it with our friends, and with our Jewish friends in particular. How can this suffering Christ save not just us, but the world around us, too?

I know Lent is supposed to be somber and tough. I know that renovation is supposed to be dusty and hassled. I know that the Episcopal Church is being accused of disintegrating. But I do not believe those things this year. I am actually excited. I am excited this Lent. I am learning new saints, and God is teaching me more and more about the Body of Christ. This Body suffers, it even gets dusty and demolished. But that is not the end. We are preparing for the event which changes the world forever. We are preparing for Easter, the Resurrection itself! Whoever you are, and wherever you are, you are welcome to be part of this risen Body of Christ!

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