



Not Just Nice Words on Paper

September 5, 2018

Rachel Yates

When I first interviewed as your Presbytery Executive and explained what intrigued me about the position and this Presbytery, I referred to your core values...or, at least what I could discern were your core values. “There’s a short list and a long list,” I noted. “I’m not sure if both are valid or whether one is outdated.” With that caveat, I shared my excitement about the value of “risk” that you claimed. So much can be done when people are willing to take a risk, particularly a risk for the sake of the gospel!

One of my first tasks with your Council was to decipher why, in fact, there were two lists of core values. The lists contained wonderful words: trust, acceptance, diversity, hope, faith, leadership, and more. I counted more than a dozen words, and I can’t fault you for wanting to claim all of them.

But, there’s a difference between a value and a core value. Our “values” represent worthy principles or standards of behavior; they are one’s judgment of what is important in life. We can value courage in the abstract, but not actually want to undertake courageous ministries. We can value generosity in others but decide to approach our budget and expenditures with fiscal conservatism.

When we speak of “core values,” however, we have to be prepared to go beyond nice words on paper. We are accountable to our core values. If we act in ways contrary to our core values, we can expect to be called to task – in a loving way. When we decide on our budget or ministry priorities, we must make sure our core values are amplified.

With those parameters, it’s hard to have a dozen or more core values. Inevitably, they will conflict, which can muddle our decision-making. Or, we find that we keep resorting to just a few and don’t regularly practice the others. For me, it’s also harder to remember a list of twelve core values!

So, the Council has been working for several months to reduce the two lists into one in the hope of articulating the Presbytery’s core values. I hope they’re not too surprising: authentic relationships, risk taking for the gospel, and collaborative leadership. Just three. They represent not just nice words on paper, but our intentions for how we live in community as the Presbytery and what we want to accomplish together. Your own congregation or organization might have other core values, and that’s fine. These three phrases are for the Presbytery itself – the collection of all of us.

You will hear them at the September Presbytery Gathering and will vote on them in November. We ask for the Presbytery’s vote because we’ll be making decisions and modeling our behavior based on them. As for me, I would be proud to be part of a Presbytery that committed itself to authentic relationships, risk taking for the gospel, and collaborative leadership.