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## *Grace, Excellence, and Hospitality*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Rev. Sam Candler,  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

Grace, excellence, and hospitality. The entire Cathedral community, and certainly the staff of the Cathedral, hears me say those words a lot. Every time a new staff member meets in our staff meeting for the first time, we rehearse the words. Every time I speak to a confirmation class, every time I try to tell people what the purpose or mission or vision of the Cathedral is, those words emerge: grace, excellence, and hospitality.

They are not mere words, of course. They are values. If someone wants me to put them into a mission statement, I usually say, "The mission of the Cathedral is to serve the gospel of Jesus Christ with grace, excellence, and hospitality." But, personally, I don't value mission statements that much. Communities have been truly helped, and communities have grown, when they work on a mission statement together. But my experience has been that the statements begin to flag after that initial energy.

What remains are values. And the values we respect at the Cathedral are grace, excellence, and hospitality. Of course, they can mean different things to people, and that is okay. But, for me, the meanings are these: Grace is simply the elegant love of God; it is the love of God expressed in as simple and beautiful and economical a way as possible. Excellence is the desire to do things well, according to whatever the standard of the event or project is. Hospitality is respect; hospitality is welcoming everyone, including everyone, dignifying everyone. It is serving others more than oneself.

On the Cathedral staff, I also use three different words for what we value as a team: initiative, communication, and optimism. Good members of the team take initiative and do not just wait for instructions. They take the opportunity to communicate, too, over and over again, in whatever way they are skilled in communicating. Finally, healthy members of the staff take the optimistic point of view. We don't want to be naïve or Pollyannaish, but we take the hopeful point of view, not the negative one.

Again, there are lots of ways to interpret all these words. I have sometimes called "initiative, communication, and optimism" our "values," and "grace, excellence, and hospitality" our "virtues" (using the word "virtue" because I believe that ultimately those things are gifts, gifts from God). But, again, it doesn't matter how we categorize the words—as either values or virtues. The important thing is that we are guided by what they mean.

On this Sunday, the Cathedral of St. Philip will gently recognize our patronal feast day, as we recognize the Feast of St. Philip the Deacon. We will baptize new Christians, and we will say special prayers, and we will sing special music. But the strongest way we will honor our identity is by honoring our values: grace and excellence and hospitality. Join us! Help us to serve the gospel of Jesus Christ with grace and excellence and hospitality, and with initiative, communication, and optimism!

