

Tell the people that the devastation in New Orleans was not the result of being hit by Hurricane Katrina. The devastation in Mississippi was the result of being hit by Hurricane Katrina. New Orleans was destroyed because the levees broke. -John Boutte, May, 2006

John Boutte, a gospel musician, shared this passionate invitation at a concert as he testified about not losing anything important in the flood, like family or faith. He only lost all his material possessions.

When the levees were built, foundations were less than half as deep as recommended by engineers at the time. Many knew the levees were inadequately constructed. I heard this explained five years before Katrina. (Jerry and Marilyn Teel would be happy to take you much deeper in this conversation!)

Ignoring foundational matters is a universal human tendency that is spiraling out of control in American culture. It's evident in the following philosophies: image is everything; out of sight, out of mind; fix it quick; find someone to blame—ignore the real causes; the priority is happiness now—don't be concerned about the misery it will inflict on future generations.

Foundations cannot be seen. For many, foundations are boring--they get more boring the deeper you have to bore. Who gets excited about concrete? But foundations are essential, require expertise, and can appear to take an eternity to construct. Cutting corners on foundation work, can have catastrophic consequences in the future.

Jesus focused on foundational matters as he taught his disciples for three years to trust in God's grace, forgiveness, and provisions.

After the founding of the church at Pentecost, the vision began to take shape for Jesus' followers...but not overnight. It took time. It took expertise from outsiders, like Paul and Cornelius and those "unclear on the concept" foreigners (Acts 11) who broke the rules by telling non-Jews about Jesus. It took people who realized *it really was all about trusting in God's grace, forgiveness, and provision of material needs.*

A blueprint is found in Matthew 16:18: Jesus builds his church *on the solid foundation of transformed lives, like Peter*. Many of us value the importance of foundations in early childhood education; a society based on community, not individualism; preventative health; etc. Do we apply equal value to foundations for Jesus' church?

Harold Bender's *Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision* (1942) offered three foundational aspects of 16th Century Anabaptism: discipleship; church as community; and non-resistance. Franklin H. Littell, a Methodist historian of the 16th Century, challenged Bender (my paraphrase): "Harold, you missed a fourth pillar--missionary zeal." Bender acknowledged Littell's corrective at a conference in Belgium, but failed to put it in writing.

Some say Bender took *missionary zeal* for granted because in his day, Goshen College and Seminary students were immersed in evangelistic oriented church planting. Regardless of that, it is significant that two generations of Mennonite scholars and leaders have embraced an Anabaptism with a three pillar foundation.

MC USA's "vision" statement (1995) brings some corrective to the three pillars, by including power of the Holy Spirit, growth, and our transformation: *God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world.*

Shalom's vision statement, is an edited version of the above: *Shalom Mennonite Church seeks to follow Jesus Christ and to become a community through which God's healing and hope flow to the world.*

As we begin a focus on clarifying our current identity (Who are we? Why do we exist?), I invite you to reflect on the differences between these two statements. What do the differences say about Shalom's foundations? -Gary Martin

Looking ahead....

>>>Table group responses from last Sunday will soon be available<<<

June 26: "God's Legos" I Corinthians 3: 1-23, Brian Bither

July 3: Sermon, Sabrina Falls

July 10: Congregational Dialogue #2, 11:00 a.m.