Groundbreaking

Ladies and Gentlemen, Bishops, Mr. Mayor, Representatives from the City, Members of Immanuel Church on the Hill, Faculty, Staff, Students, Alumni and Alumnae, and old Friends and new Friends, it is a great honor to gather for this moment. It was three years ago that we watched a chapel go up in flames. And on this day, we gather to watch a chapel emerge which will be with this Seminary long after we have all gone.

For thousands of years, men and women have been creating sacred spaces. Deep in our past (just look at Jacob in our Old Testament lesson) to this moment at Virginia Theological Seminary in our present, this has been our human identity. We need, we must, we feel the urge just to create some space that reflects our conviction that human life is part of a bigger picture – a bigger picture that recognizes that we are not just complex bundles of atoms, but beings intended by God and ultimately living for God.

Of course God is everywhere. We create these spaces not simply out of love for God but also for ourselves. We are just not that good at remembering exactly who we are. We need the tower. We need the architectural shape and form that invites us into the holy. We need the space into which we come and pray – not that we couldn’t pray elsewhere, but in the very form of this building prayer is made easier. And so the spiritual intertwines with the physical. As countless people
struggle, relax, worry, weep, pray and praise in a particular space – that space changes, it feels different. It is a place where we know God has been and continues to be present.

To get this right is our challenge. And so we gather to break the ground – to start a project that will be a gift to the future. We do so in the context of liturgy; we do so in the context of community; we do so with our friends in the wider Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion, with the City of Alexandria, with Immanuel Church on the Hill, with the neighborhood, with alums representing the past, with our connections with Episcopal High School, with friends who have made this moment possible, and with the Seminary community all present.

In the end this is too big to be about us. This must be about God. So with Christ as our foundation cornerstone, let us all do this for the Glory of God.

Amen