

Planning is Faithful

In an episode from *Alice In Wonderland*, Alice comes to a fork in the road and asks the Cheshire Cat:

"Cheshire-Puss. . . would you tell me please, which way I ought to walk from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

"I don't much care where," said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you walk," said the Cat.¹

In acting, we need to know where we want to go. We need to begin with the end in mind, with a plan.

Churches that are consistently bringing people to Jesus have a plan. But many churches do not have any real plans. They operate more "by the seat of their pants," dealing with issues "as they come up" either based on "where we happen to be at the moment" or "the way we've always done it." Excuses for this are that "we want to be open to the Holy Spirit" and "we don't want to run the church like a business."

In fact, people often resist planning because they don't like to be accountable for results. But God holds us accountable (e.g., Matthew 25:14-46), and the absence of a plan frequently contributes to fragmentation and chaos in our spiritual communities.

Planning does not mean ignoring the past or the present. We need to listen to what has happened and is happening to understand where and who we are. And we especially need to spend time with God in the present to begin to understand our special relationship with God and God's plan for us. Processing our present cares and concerns is not enough, however. From our listening to God and one another, we need to be as clear as possible about God's calling to us and then plan to follow that calling.

Planning is a discernment process. God has a plan (e.g., Isaiah 14:24-27 and Ephesians 1:8-10) that we need to get in sync with as much as possible. Because God's plan is unique and individual (based on our own gifts and settings), it is our own responsibility to discern our response to that plan. We can look at other church development plans as models, but not as formulas or rules.

Planning is a learning process. Planning enables us to look at our objectives and evaluate potential challenges and contingencies. This gets us ready to understand the road we will travel. We will not know everything about the route we are taking, but planning helps us prepare to meet opportunities or challenges as we encounter them. Planning is learning and

¹ Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap undated Paramount Photoplay edition) Chapter VI at 63.

learning involves designing capabilities in advance to embrace opportunities and challenges as they occur, and later adjusting based on new understandings.

Planning is more tangible than determining values, vision and mission. Planning flows out of these activities and includes specific goal setting, action planning and assignment of duties, as well as eventual follow up to evaluate results. Planning describes and initiates the disciplined actions that will accomplish our vision.

Planning is the foundation of the spiritual path we will travel. As we act on our plans, our actions bring us closer to our intention and even more opportunities become evident. This may happen because as we move nearer to something, we can see it better and also better see the means for achieving it. Or this may happen because our planning enables us to determine which activities are important and to focus on them more successfully, with fewer distractions. Certainly this happens because God responds personally to, and supports, our actions in accordance with God's plan. We become more aware of God's love by moving toward it in our choices, in our creative acts.

For these reasons, healthy churches plan to accomplish more or to make themselves ready to accomplish more. To journey spiritually, they work to become more conscious of God and God's plan and accept the challenge and reality of acting upon that consciousness into a better future. Planning is an important part of developing consciousness of God's plan and acting upon it.

Planning is a response to God. "Those who plan good find loyalty and faithfulness" (Proverbs 14:22), and "Those who are noble plan noble things, and by noble things they stand" (Isaiah 32:8). We plan to do God's work and work God's plan.