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JESUS ON STRATEGIC PLANNING

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!”

—Matthew 7:24–27

This is probably Jesus’s most direct comment on strategic planning. Though it is not the only one, this teaching is the reliable guide to directions that follow. These verses are meant to anchor, frame, and guide the process of strategic planning. They show that Jesus believed his teachings to be foundational to all livable and human futures.

In our age, we are likely to think this either a bit too bold or a bit too backward—perhaps both—for the choices that are made towards our best possible future. We are, like most modern people, guided by a commitment to efficiency in our structures. In this, we draw deep from the wells of the social sciences, the principles of corporate business structure, and models of governance that have integrity with the predominant political systems that govern the larger society. Referring to these is not bad in advising our best possible choices about the future, but Jesus says that all human planning must bend a knee to the commitments, values, and ideals of the World that he promises is coming.

In Luke 10:1-12, we can see that our approach to the world—its future, and our future—is a way of acting and being that is absolutely shaped by the proclamation of the World that Jesus promises. In his resurrection and Eucharist, he demonstrates and makes living and present God's future. Because we are often dense to the implications here, he makes it clear: love, generosity, compassion for the marginalized, especially the poor, and a primary and active devotion—above all else—to the God who saves us and, thereby, gives us a first taste of the reality that is, even now, coming upon us.

To our regret and to the pain of others, our planning on church placement and survival has often been

strategic with respect to financial considerations, based on the lifestyle preferences and comfort of our primary ethnic constituencies. At the same time, our planning has, overall, not been strategic when it comes to the safety, well-being and pastoral needs of the people at the margins. Often, as St. Bernard said, “The food of the poor is taken to feed the eyes of the rich.”

This is not to say that all the structures of our life together—our buildings, our leadership, our congregations—are defective. It is absolutely certain that they do in some measure today, and will possibly in a great measure in the future, clearly demonstrate the vibrant presence of the World to Come in our common life with humanity and creation. This has great relevance to those who have deep human need, at the margins, and certainly within our congregations.

Indigenous elders have advised us that our spirituality is to be our governance. This has multiple connotations, all of them important and relevant. At a minimum, however, it means that our spirituality is our strategic planning. Our way of life, by and in Jesus, through Word and Spirit—yes, informed by other disciplines and ideas, always making the gospel living and real in the disciplines and ideas that help us along the way—is the birthplace of a strategic planning that embodies and hastens the World to Come. ■