

KIRBSTONES

ALONG THE NARROW WAY

curb-stone (kürb'stön') - *noun* - one of the stones or a range of stones forming a curb, as along a sidewalk or roadway. Historically, the curbstones were placed vertically along the edges of the roadbed and the paving material was backfilled against the row of curbstones. The curbstones served ⁽¹⁾to hold the material in the roadbed, ⁽²⁾to prevent the scattering of the material along the edges, and ⁽³⁾to define the road itself from all the adjoining areas.

¹³ "ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW GATE. FOR WIDE IS THE GATE AND BROAD IS THE ROAD THAT LEADS TO DESTRUCTION, AND MANY ENTER THROUGH IT.
¹⁴ BUT SMALL IS THE GATE AND NARROW THE ROAD THAT LEADS TO LIFE, AND ONLY A FEW FIND IT." - MATTHEW 7:13-14 - NIV

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While there have been numerous attempts to capitalize on this new year's number, the most successful seem to be centered on the obvious subject of vision. Can we best this playful expression of the year to come?

- **2020 Vision** -

Maybe we should play a stanza of Johnny Nash's 1972 monster hit: *I Can See Clearly Now!*

Either way, our focus—*pun intended*—must be on the clarity of our vision of the future, as well as how we plan to thrive and to flourish in an unknown, rapidly advancing time in front of us. This is not only timely advice for our denomination, but it is especially true within local congregations.

While our collective future—as *United Methodists*—remains uncertain with the advent of our 2020 General Conference on the immediate horizon in Minneapolis this spring, it arrives on the heels of a contentious meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, last year.

Peter Drucker contends that historically corporations have found the most success by following a carefully thought out and executed *business plan* vs. hiring world-class analysts to map out a *financial strategy*, with the hope of advancing corporate profits.

Apparently this is common knowledge in the business world; however, our large, tall-steeple churches and the denominations that provide oversight to the local churches are not all on board with this greater concept of having a *plan* versus a *strategy*. And, while we may be disturbed at the suggestion of a comparison between the corporate secular and the corporate religious, the validity remains.

Mergers and acquisitions have long plagued our mainstream Protestant denominations just as in the business arena. Larger does not equal more effective. And, lately, rifts seem to be the rule.

29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

Mark 12: 29-31 — NIV

Here is a wild idea! What if we focused on our *spiritual development*, followed by an analysis of our spiritual gifts, and then laid out a plan based on where God is calling us. Following these steps the plan would be executed and adhered to without exception, as the church moves forward, regardless of denominational failure or pastoral leadership change.

Apparently, Peter Drucker has observed corporate successes and failures based on the premise that we all need a plan, and that strategies will ultimately fail.

The same is true of local congregations. When I arrive in a new setting, and we begin to set expectations for the time that I will be at the helm, I stress the necessity of an overall plan versus a short term strategy. We have known for years that "*culture eats strategy for...*"¹ breakfast, lunch, and dinner, but most congregational leaders continue to seek the latest guru for more butts in the pew or more money in the treasury.

What if...? What would it look like...? How might we...? ...follow a simple plan for the fulfillment of Jesus' teaching in Mark, where he stresses that we are to love God above everyone and everything else, and we are to love our neighbors as ourselves? Sounds good? It is good—as *a matter of fact it is great*—until we get into the trenches of the day-to-day plan.

How might we love God in such a way that we faithfully respond to his love for us, and we intentionally build a solid relationship with him, and then we go out and share Jesus Christ with the world? Has humanity fallen so far that we no longer value anything that (1) we must nurture, (2) takes time to develop, or (3) makes us wait to see the results?

Let us all get on board with a plan in 2020, using **2020 Vision**. Let us get started, and let us stick to God's plan!

¹ Peter Drucker

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