

## Where do words come from .....? A Personal View (Roy Love, Friend)

How do we as Quakers negotiate our way through much of the jargon associated with planning for the future? In our stewardship of the resources of LMs, AMs, BYM, and other Quaker organisations do we find expressions like 'Strategic planning', 'Action Planning', 'Development planning', 'Horizon Scanning', 'Contingency planning', 'Vision', 'Mission statements' and so on a worldly distraction, driven by managerialist enthusiasts, from our traditional and time proven processes of discernment of God's will on whatever issue is before us? In the opening paragraph of Advices and Queries we are asked to trust the promptings of love and truth as the leadings of God. We are not asked to follow them up with a strategic plan! For many Friends such language is also redolent of its origins in military campaigning, which is not what a church of peace should be about.

On the other hand, if we truly believe that Quakerism is a small jewel in the great necklace of world religions, with a sparkle of worship and witness to be nurtured for future generations, then surely it is only prudent to look to that future and to plan the right use of our present resources, personal or corporate, to ensure that the sparkle is kept alive and bright. It may be argued that this is what our Quaker discernment is all about, that in every meeting for worship for business, whether at LM or CC level, we are led by the spirit, inward light, or Christ within, in the knowledge that our decisions are for the future as well as the present. True discernment of right action on any issue, in other words, will take account of the future, not to be wrapped up in a strategic plan but as a step towards a vision of what some would call God's Kingdom on earth and others a world of universal peace and love and justice. In this way, each step, properly discerned, will not preclude the next step which will be discerned in its turn, and all trusting the leadings of the spirit.

But does this mean that we should take no account in our discernment today of potential risks in the future? What does the development of HS2 at Euston station imply for our lettings income at FH, and hence our central work, during the years of construction, for instance, or the long-term impact of aging and declining membership? What is our vision and how best can we use our resources to move towards it? Can we define how we would like it to look in, say, five years' time? Is it in right ordering to be focussed on certain broad aims or objectives? If so, then is that not planning of a sort? I believe that we should not get bogged down in divisive terminology when what underlies it is a common purpose. Those Quakers who are comfortable with terms such as 'strategic thinking' and 'outcomes' do not use them as straightjackets from a secular world, constraining the scope for the direct inspiration of the immanent spirit, but as a guide to how our limited resources might be best nurtured and efficiently applied across the very wide range of activities that we have been called to undertake in BYM, while at the same time always being open to the unexpected.

I believe that Trustees, in particular, though prompted by the same spirit that is at work in our various committees, have a particular responsibility for the stewardship and right uses of BYM's resources over time, and for that they will depend upon their own gifts of the spirit to look beyond the immediate future, for the benefit of all Friends, young, old and yet to be born. In doing so, they need to set the hopes and aspirations of the present membership against foreseeable risks, also to be able to rank these risks according to their likely impact on the future life of the Society. To do this effectively, they need to know what the hopes and aspirations of the membership are, and to discern what this means in practice and what resources will be needed. Whether this is called a 'strategy'

or not is immaterial. It should be a mutual understanding of our common purpose and how we may best work towards it under the leading light of the spirit within.

I have found it useful to see how other Quaker meetings and churches have wrestled with these issues, and Friends in BYM may find the following of interest.

### **Faith and Strategic Planning**

#### **Johnson Center, Grand Valley State University**

##### *Can Faith-based Organisations Listen to God AND Engage in Strategic Planning?*

When I interact with my faith-based colleagues, they express their fear that having a set plan means exhibiting a lack of faith and trust in God. Seriously? I think that strategic planning trusts that the Holy Spirit is already at work. As leaders of faith-based organizations we are simply entrusted to carry the work out ....

.. the goal of the planning process is to structure the conversation people need in order to pursue what they believe God calls them to be or do...

... While an organization's faith-based mission and foundations never change, the programmatic forms they take must change in order to stay relevant. I hear so many faith-based leaders saying, "But where does faith fit in to all of this???" It is absolutely appropriate and necessary to prayerfully seek God's guidance in setting goals and plans for your organization, but strategy is what will enable you to implement programs to reach goals.

#### **From Friends United Meeting**

##### *Local Church Strategic Planning. A Stewardship Responsibility*

Stewardship and finance are synonymous terms in the minds of most congregants. Yet our meeting has found stewardship involves more than financial matters...

.. A familiar story from the Talmud tells of a man walking down a road and noticing an elderly gentleman planting a carob tree. He asked the elderly man, "How long will it take for that tree to grow?" "Seventy years," replied the old man. "How do you know you will live that long?" asked the traveler. "I don't," came the reply, "but just as my grandparents and parents planted for me, I am planting this tree for the generations to come." That is an example of "stewardship," it can also be an example of strategic planning.

#### **From The Lambs War (blogspot)**

##### *Can Strategic Planning be Spirit Led?*

As Quakers, our emphasis has long been on the quietistic, passive side of faith. By stripping away our own thoughts, ambitions, rituals and programs, we have sought to be radically open to the moment-by-moment inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We embrace a religious culture that downplays human understanding, effort and planning...

... As creations of God, we are finite, limited beings. We cannot see the big picture, and we must rely on God's grace and hidden power to guide us into lives of faithfulness. Yet God also purposefully created our human faculties of reason. God leads us, yes; but God clearly expects us to do our own share of the heavy lifting. God has given us all manner of gifts - including the ability to do strategic, long-term planning - so that we might be the tangible presence of Jesus in the world.

#### **From Philadelphia YM**

We Quakers have shied away from using the words "strategy" or "strategic." Some have said these words sound "too corporate." I like them, however, because I think they call us to focus our thinking on the process of getting from where we are to where we want to be.

What's our strategy? Strategic planning is the process of developing strategies for realizing a vision. We want to develop strategies for becoming the faith community we believe we are called to be. This has been the work of the Long Range Planning Group. (LRPG).

#### **From FWCC of the Americas**

Strategic Plan 2015-2020: Weaving the Tapestry

In a world stretched by divergent forces, strained by distances of many kinds, yet in great need of what our Quaker way can bring, we felt called to weave Friends into a new, more vivid tapestry of connection that could deeply serve the needs of our time.