

The Resurrection of Saint Luke's, Ballard: An Anthropological View

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Background:

I was asked to serve as the diocesan liaison between the Board of Directors and the Property Stewardship Team of Saint Luke's, Ballard beginning in early 2017. In that role, I was invited to all the congregational meetings, committee meetings, and other planning events and activities. While I proffered my opinions on a number of matters, my primary role was to communicate the concerns of both the Board of Directors and the congregation to each other. Like an anthropologist, I was in both groups but not of either group. This gave me an unusual perspective to observe, analyze, and record the progress of this extraordinary project. What follows are ten catchy phrases that attempt to capture some essential truths or elements about the overall project.

1. *To Thine Own Self be True* – one key truth is that any project of this size and complexity must reflect the deep values and beliefs of the whole congregation – not just the leadership or clergy or current Bishop's Committee. Getting a whole congregation to that truth about itself is not easy and takes time and risk. But it is the foundation on which all else is built. This step cannot be skipped or slighted.
2. *It is a Marathon, not a Sprint* – a second key truth is that projects of this scope and complexity take years to accomplish. Having key leaders stay the full course, having patience in the face of adversity and setbacks, having a deep enough bench to weather departures and losses of people over time, are key requirements to make this sort of project happen. It is likely that the Saint Luke's Project will take almost a decade to accomplish.
3. *You Need Help from your Friends* – no project can be done inside a congregation. And any project that changes the property use must have allies outside the congregation. The immediate neighbors, the local businesspeople, the local politicians, the local media, all can be friends, or they can be enemies. You choose.
4. *Know what you know and know what you don't know* – No congregation has the expertise to do major projects. You must learn what expertise you need to hire and then you must choose wisely among your vendors and advisors. You will kiss more than one frog along the way. Do not buy a dog and then teach yourself to bark. But always remember rule #1 – To Thine Own self be True. This is your project not that of your advisors/experts.
5. *Early Estimates are Always Low* – the cost of any project is always larger than the initial estimate. You must build in cost over-runs, inflation, change orders, and general surprises into your budget. And then add 10% for good measure.
6. *Location Matters* – if it is real estate, location matters. Not all church property was created equal. Many churches are on land not suitable for other developments. That is why someone donated the land to the church in the first place!

7. *All Change is Hard and Risky* – proposing major changes in a congregation reveals that its members differ greatly on matters of risk-taking. The bigger the project, the longer it takes, the more likely there will be carping and complaining. Remember the Israelites in the Sinai. You may lose good members along the way. That is not trivial but may happen.
8. *Diocesan Leadership and Support Matters* – in our polity, you must have the diocese in your corner to conduct any major project. Moreover, the diocese has resources and connections that can help your project. Clear and continuous communication with diocesan leadership is critical to the outcome of your project. And please remember that the diocese has other issues before it. Yours is not the only issue facing the diocese. And many of them are volunteers, just like you.
9. *Some Events are Unavoidable* – timing of the project cannot be fully controlled. Pandemics occur. Health issues happen. Wars break out. Hurricanes and earthquakes occur. No matter how carefully we plan; life happens.
10. *Lean on the Holy Spirit* – we are players on a much grander stage. We all have small parts, but we each can be great actors. If we lean on the Holy Spirit and walk humbly with our God, we can do much to build up the kingdom.

Bonus Advice

Were it possible, my single best suggestion would be to clone Britt Olson and Barbara Wilson and hire them. That is, sadly, not possible. But each of us can strive to be like B and B. The origin of these ten phrases is the work they have led so ably these past years.