

A relationship with Jesus is the real source of joy in life

by Randy Bright <http://www.tulsabeacon.com/?p=5165>

Having inadvertently become a student of urban planning, each day I go to several websites to read articles and to see what planners think about trends and what demographers have discovered with statistics.

Each website has their own agenda, naturally quite opposite from each other, and it is interesting to see how some of the contributing authors have deep-seated views, while others are only interested in proving their points by ridiculing those who oppose their own.

The common theme that runs through all of them is this: if you believe as I believe, and do as I think you should do, the world will be a better place.

One of the main themes is that cities should be working to create “community,” and though its definition will vary from one author to the next, somehow its creation will mean a better life for city inhabitants. And just as Mark Twain once said that humans were the only creatures on earth with “true religion - several of them” - it seems that even though there are many urban planners with their own philosophy that is, of course, superior to the others, all of them believe their particular philosophy will improve the quality of life for the humans who live in the cities of their making.

Although I agree that a well-planned city can improve the quality of life for those who choose to live there, I see a fundamental problem in that urban planners, city administrators, developers, et al, confuse quality of life with joy.

That group of people, who have so much to do with the built environment, be it buildings, roads, parks, sidewalks or bicycle lanes, believe these things create quality of life. Coaxing people out of their cars and into homes that are near enough to walk to work or shopping will improve their health, reduce stress, and prevent or even cure obesity. Perhaps some entertainment venues or workout gyms to improve their mental and physical health as well. Arguably, all of these things are beneficial - but do they bring us joy?

When we find ourselves in urban planning saying, “if only we had (fill in the blank, mass transit, mixed use developments, etc.), we would be happier,” are we seeking joy or simply looking for distractions that create the illusion of happiness? And when we mandate by law the distractions, do we really believe that fulfilling that law will create joy or are we just settling for the perception of a good quality of life at the expense of others?

In one of the last Rowan and Martin Laugh-In shows, they performed a pantomime skit where two people met at the corner intersection of two sidewalks. Each person motioned repeatedly “after you, no, after you” until they finally passed each other and got into their cars. Then each of

them pulled up to a four-way stop and began shaking their fists and honking their horns because they wanted to be the first to drive through the stop sign.

Everywhere you go, you find people who are unhappy, angry, rude and selfish, with a “me-first” attitude and nowhere will you see it more than in the way people drive their cars. But will taking away their cars change their hearts and give them joy?

Joy is something that abides in an individual regardless of their circumstances, and it is not produced by improving that person’s quality of life, no matter what urban form is provided. Someone with joy can be equally happy living in the most sophisticated, sustainably planned community, the drabest of towns, or anywhere between. But for someone who does not have joy, all of the architecture, landscaping, mass transit, recreation and entertainment might provide some temporary relief and distraction, but it can never fill the “void.” As I told one urban planner, good city planning means little to those who go home to broken marriages, dysfunctional families, alcohol and drug abuse, troubled teens or loneliness.

I believe that void can only be filled by God. Yet, across this nation, we find urban planners and city administrators routinely forcing God out of community by prohibiting or even forcing churches out, all in the name of fiscal responsibility. They equate quality of life with joy, not understanding that joy is not something that is theirs to give. They fail to understand that when people have joy that comes with a respect and relationship with God, the community can truly be enjoyed.

This is the human attribute - the spiritual side that longs for a relationship with God - that the planners miss - that and the fact that people yearn to be free. A community is made up of individuals, not of bricks and mortar. The built environment merely reflects the real condition of those that live there.

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Randy W. Bright, AIA, NCARB, is an architect who specializes in church and church-related projects. You may contact him at 918-582-3972, rwbrightchurcharch@sbcglobal.net or www.churcharchitect.net.

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