
Dialogue

Volume 6 Issue 2

Strength for the church's journey into wholeness in Christ

May 2004

The subject: *Living in Community*

When our mission to build the church for the next generation first got going, we tried to make a statement for people who would be entering into our community of faith. We weren't sure how strange it would seem, so we attempted to be as straightforward as we could. Have you ever read this flap of our brochure about cells? (Or read it lately?)

If you are already a follower of Jesus, be sure to read this:

When Jesus said, "*Love one another as I have loved you*," he was serious. So are we. We want to be a community in which people get an opportunity to be knit together in love. If you follow Jesus, you are probably figuring out how to be an authentic part of a living church, because, "*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*" (1 Corinthians 12:27)

We are always growing cells, so that new groups are available for friends and acquaintances to be included, encouraged, loved and healed, as well as given the opportunity to learn and share. We'd like to keep expanding an authentic church in this way.

The Bible says that the earliest Christians "*continued to meet together in the temple courts*" [publicly, in a large group for worship and teaching and "*broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts*" [privately, in small groups for encouragement and mutual care] (Acts 2:46-7). We follow that example.

There are many different kinds of people in the world, so there need to be many varieties of cell groups. However the circle is formed, when people sit down together in love, with Jesus in their midst, good things happen. We look forward to the gifts you will bring to your circle of ten!

It still makes sense!. This issue of our Dialogue expands on this foundation. We are "in community" in many ways. As a result we are an influence of God's love "in the community."

— ED

Another Way Your Cell is Not Your Mother's Sunday School

**Cell is community ...
even in the midst of multiplying"**

There's a nice little page in our cell plan titled, "How a Cell Is Not Your Mother's Sunday School." I like it because it reminds me of what it looks like to foster community in our cells rather than just to create another program. For instance, here at Circle of Hope we have an "informal family setting" rather



than a "formal organizational setting." We reach towards the "transformation of life" rather than the "transfer of information." We hope for "holistic learning: cognitive, affective, psychomotor," not "primarily a learning experience." The list goes on and if you're interested you can ask a cell leader – each leader has a copy. It is helpful to return to it again and again in order to refocus our picture: every cell in our church has the potential to be a full, intentional community and we limit ourselves and God's work among us when we slip back into the "program" mentality.

One interesting aspect of this is that cells groups, because they are centered on the work God is doing in the members' lives (rather than a series of curric-

ula), will necessarily end. A program can continue interminably almost on its own: everyone participates in the structure and as long as there is somebody interested in the structure, it keeps on going, like the Energizer Bunny. People are moved by God, not structures. Sometimes those who were disciplined are ready to disciple. Sometimes people feel ready to start a new cell group with a specific focus. Sometimes people have children and their needs shift as their families grow. Sometimes so many new friends join the cell community that it becomes time to form two cells. All of these scenarios come about because the people in the cell are the cell and because the cell is a community. It seems that being a real community also means that the community will change and perhaps even end. This is scary. It's so scary that maybe it makes us hesitant to try out the whole community idea in the first place.

God offers us some encouragement for this. This exact struggle with community shows up a lot in the New Testament, and we've bumped into a couple of the stories in our cell group through the last couple months. We've been reading Acts together, where we've found many stories about small home churches. The Christian communities described seem to resemble the communities of our cells in many ways, including the expectation that the group is fluid and will change over time.

Two stories in particular come to mind. Both show groups of people interacting in ways that demonstrate deep experiences of community. The first takes place in Acts 12, when Peter is miraculously released from prison. Think about this scene: a group of close Christian friends meet at Mary's house to pray for a friend who is in need. Because the group is a community of people, we see their diversity (men, women, servants) and some of their weaknesses (doubt and fear). When their prayers are answered, they hear the story from their friend and

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praise God together. This sounds a lot like a cell community we'd like to have at Circle of Hope.

Also consider the community that Luke writes about in Acts 16. A small group of Christians (at the least, Paul, Silas, and Luke – just like one of our teams of three) goes to Philippi to share the new life found in Christ. They form a community that is so close and trusting that they actually live together in Lydia's home. Paul and Silas have some difficulties that result in their imprisonment. Immediately after being released they come to Lydia's home to encourage the brothers and sisters there. These people sound pretty close, too. They might be another community that is attractive to us because of how committed and rooted in love they are.

However, both communities are rather abruptly ended. In Peter's case, just after he shared his story with the folks at Mary's house, "he left and went to another place." In Acts 16 Luke writes, "when they [Paul and Silas] had seen and encouraged the brothers and sisters there, they departed." It's amazing, isn't it? These Christians pour themselves into their small groups, caring deeply for one another and sometimes even living together. Then when God calls, they part and move on to do the same thing in another place, another home.

Hopefully these stories can encourage us to see that God's idea of community is much bigger than a tangible experience shared with other people in the moment. God expects us to move on to new cells and new communities. God knows that we may spend two or three evenings a week with a close friend in cell one year and then the next year see that friend only occasionally, or at Love Feasts. God defines this, too, as community. There is a deep richness in loving each other after parting, knowing that we will be joined more fully in eternity than we ever can be joined here on earth, even if we were to stay in the exactly same cell group for fifteen consecutive years.

It is after Paul has left his community in Philippi (we could call this "multiplying") that he writes, "I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now." This is exactly the kind of community that our cell

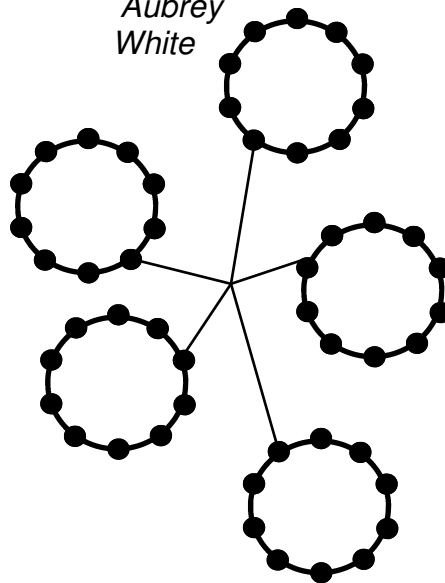
groups offer to us. We journey with each other for a time in a tangible way, meeting together and struggling together. Then we have the joy of journeying with each other in other ways for the rest of our lives. Maybe the reality of the end of the tangible time together can feel threatening, but Paul shows us how it can be freeing, too. We are free to try out this idea of intentional community, knowing that there is no expectation that we have it all figured out in any particular cell. Remember how Paul wrote the Philippians about the good

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work that God had started? Well, that's what we have the honor of doing in our cells, too: starting good work. Maybe our cell will end or people will pass on before the work is completed, but that's okay. In fact, it seems to be at the heart of what God desires.

So as you examine the nature of our cells as communities, consider that one aspect of a strong cell community is its ability to change, multiply, or even end. This part of the "life cycle" of a cell demonstrates that the cell does have a "life" tied to the people of the cell, not tied to a program, duty, or Sunday School class. Let's keep encouraging one another to go beyond programs and to reach faithfully towards the fullness of community in our lives, our homes, our church, and our cells.

Aubrey White



“The Church Community”

We may be missing one of the great expressions of the Kingdom!

This school year has been the deadliest-yet for Philadelphia school-age children. Almost 30 students have been killed since school started in September. There's been death by stabbings, shootings, strangulations, beatings, fires, and vehicular manslaughter. Down the street from our meeting place and our after-school center, in the auditorium at the local high school, a 17-year-old boy hung himself, according to police. But according to a lot of the students at the school, he was beaten and hanged by a group of thugs (hopefully, the truth will come out soon).

I've spent a lot of late nights and

Dialogue

WHY? *This quarterly journal is a gift to everyone who wishes to be a part of the ongoing dialogue we share in Christ that forms us and deepens us as a real church. Whether you just arrived or have been with us from the beginning, we want you to be part of the conversation and an informed member of the team. We hope you will work with us to build a safe place to experience and share the love of Jesus Christ. Dialogue is a crucial part of that.*

If you would like to respond to any of the articles printed, that would be great. We have never turned a response away, yet — but we reserve the right to do so.

early mornings up worrying and praying about this horrible epidemic. I haven't seen anything close to this in such a short time frame since the Atlanta child-murdering spree during the 80's. The majority of these violent crimes have only produced a handful of suspects, most of whom are teens. A lot of the neighborhood teens that I know and come in contact with carry a gun. They tell me it's essential for their protection. While I think that their concern for their safety is very legitimate, I also think that today's youth culture has so glorified violence that they are intrigued with it and enamored by guns and drugs.

But even as I have been praying about the violence digging into teen lives, I have also been thinking about all the young people I know who don't participate in any violence and abhor the thought of it. What keeps these children from giving into violence? What makes them value life and respect others and others' property? What makes them deal with their anger and conflict in a non-violent way? The key ingredient that I noticed was family! Those young people who have a strong family or extended family members who are heavily involved in their lives, tend to be a lot more conscious of their actions and how they affect others.

The felt needs for our children are: the need to be loved, the need to have security, the need to belong to something. And the greatest need is to know Jesus Christ. These needs are felt by everybody, the well-being and success of each individual is really determined by whether these needs are met. God instituted family as the primary caregiver for people (Gen. 1:27, 28). If the immediate family couldn't address a child's felt needs then the extended family did, like Abraham raising Lot, Mordecai raising Esther or even a kinsmen redeemer like Boaz who redeemed Ruth. The community was expected to step in when no family was around for a person, that's part of the reason for the Jubilee Cycle being instituted (Lev. 25). We, the church, may be missing one of the great expressions of the Kingdom, which is to be a Family.

Parenting is such an essential component for everyone's life, that when it's not there or is perverted in some way, long-term damage is inevitable. Knowing this and spending our time and money on things that don't lead to the enhancement of family life is fruitless and negligent. Community is defined in the dictionary as: "A common possession or enjoyment. An agreement. A society of people having

rights, work and interest in common." We, the Church, have substituted vain, repetitious activities and institutional information processing for being a family. We concern ourselves more with running our programs and teaching people how to act when they are at the programs, than loving our neighbor as ourselves.

The New Testament church was a church at a place. It got its identity by where it was (the church at Corinth, at Ephesus, at Rome, at Philadelphia, etc.). The church was alive, reachable and touchable even during persecution. Each church (although alike in Christ) had its own uniqueness and cultural flavor according to where it was and what families or persons were a part of it. It didn't rest its identity solely on the pastor or how great the pastor preached, how big the congregation was, how well they sang or how well they dressed. They were a family committed to a place who wanted to adopt others who lived around them into their family. That's why Jesus commissioned those early disciples and said that they would be his witnesses, first in Jerusalem (where they lived), then Samaria (a neighboring area) and to the world (Acts 1:8).

A lot of churches these days operate like middle class or upper-middle class social clubs, catering to the privileged and creating an environment of exclusivity. The commuter-church model (live in one place, go to church in another) has left the inner cities and other hurting communities void of good leadership, economically fragile and absent of strong family models. Consumer-Christianity (get a little Bible teaching at one church, get a little social life or good worship at another) has distorted our theology and has made the commitment to live as a family with others conditional and half-hearted. If we are really going to live "in community", we have to settle in a neighborhood for a significant period of time and love the people around us and make a covenant (relational agreement to walk in Christ together) with them. As people in the neighborhood experience our communal love and come to faith, our family/church affirms their adoptions into the body where they can grow, be parented and be full participants in the family.

What if the inner city churches really decided to obey the scriptures (James

1:27) and parent those children/youth that are not being parented at home? What if we all adopted (legally or relationally) an "at risk youth" and loved them as our own? This would have a major impact on the violence and equality of life in the hood. I've been in ministry for 13 years now. We've been a part of a lot of great programs (a couple we are running!). But the most significant experiences and accomplishments have come as a result of being a part of a church family and having the privilege of helping to parent some amazingly gifted young people. We can't put on our church blinders and ignore the larger community around us.

The reason the church exists is to have an impact on its surroundings (Matt. 5:13-16). We can't huddle in our little Christian clubs and make it difficult for anyone else to get in. God has given us the mandate to "be fruitful and multiply" by giving us that great commission to make disciples.

We are a church living in "community" and we should spend ample time nurturing one another. But we are also equally a church for and of the "community." We exist for the next family member yet to join. While we are children of God, it is not yet revealed who (or everyone) we are going to be in the

The Value of *Intentional* *Communities* in the Church

future (1 John 3:2). So, we are a family eagerly waiting for and preparing for the adoption of the next family member.

Bryan Robinson

Many years ago, now, when I was being interviewed to be the "youth pastor" of the First Baptist Church, I asked the board if it would be OK if, at some point, I asked them to write my check out in several names. I was planning to live in what we called an *intentional community* before too long. For some reason, the visible sign of sharing my money like that seemed like it might be important. It was also a way to ask, "Are you going to accept my 'radical' ways?"

They said, "Yes."

I'm not sure they had much of an idea about what they were saying yes to.

Eventually, we did have an unusual household in the church that included over 20 people at times. Some people were married, most people were not. Some people were unwed mothers, Cambodians, wayward relatives and people between homes, most were just the same people who had inhabited the church before.

We ended up being a good thing for the church, but many people thought we were a bad thing, too.

We were a good thing because we unleashed all sorts of energy for the mission of the church – living in community is cheaper, sharing the work of housekeeping and child rearing makes life easier! We were a good thing because skeptical young people thought we looked like we really meant it when we said we were Christians, and that rubbed off on the other people who attended the church – people who live with radicals get a spiritual "tan" from their sunshine and look healthier, too.

We were a "bad" thing, though, as far as some people were concerned, because we were not normal – we looked like some kind of cult. We were a "bad" thing because people thought we were probably having sex with each other all the time – we actually had parties and invited the congregation (especially our detractors) to come see our houses and verify that we did not all sleep in one bed! We were a "bad" thing because it looked like we might inspire other people to take up an alternative lifestyle – even though we were paying for all sorts of people to go to school (unlike their parents!), we looked like a bunch of under-employed drop outs and likely communists.

If you ever try something out of step with the world, people notice. So the various intentional communities connected to the Circle of Hope Network, when they get noticed, get a reputation. Just like with each of us, they can have a very good influence and they can also be not so helpful. "Good" or "bad," we are committed to risking such love and forming them. The main reason to do so will probably always be Acts 2 and 4 (edited for inclusion):

Acts 2:44-47 *All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as they had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the*

temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 4:32-35 *All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions were their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as they had need.*

These verses do not say, "Go form an intentional community." But they do teach us that sharing life in radical ways that are not like the rest of the world is normative for people who are

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following Jesus and filled with his Spirit. We are happy to have so many people among us who are willing to follow Acts 2 in so many ways!

When you have people in the center of your church who intentionally live in the most radical, Acts 2 way they can, it brings a lot of life. They are very good. The Simple Way community, the Camden House, and various other households among us are a huge asset to Circle of Hope. Like the medieval monasteries that kept the flame of prophecy, integrity and mission alive in difficult times for the Church, these kinds of households can keep us centered and stimulated. I think they should be a part of every local expression of the church. They can be spiritual, relational, and missional greenhouses for growing faith. Quite often their radical nature keeps the rest of the church from falling into mediocrity. In our culture, they demonstrate, as the

Bible teaches, that nuclear family is not the only way to live, and suggest that there may be a better gift from God. They often allow people to serve and share in extraordinary ways. They can be such generative places for deep things and hard things to come to fruit! We really need them.

These communities-within-community also be damaging if they are not conscious of their part in the larger church. Any group of idealistic people and any group following a vision is going to form a strong identity -- households often even give themselves a name, like a family shares a name. So the group can easily become less "another household in the church" and more a "little church." If that happens, the household can become a strong presence in the church that does not connect. Members of households can get into the habit of using the church as a fishing pond for recruits to do their own thing. They might share all their money with each other and do all their fundraising for themselves and not share with the rest of the church. Strong leaders of households can feel a power struggle with the leaders and vision of the church. These things create tension.

I long for strong households to create healthy tension for holiness in our church, and to do the generative things they do so well. I want to work at ways to encourage more intentional community without encouraging more of the disconnection and self-centeredness of our age. I don't think anyone particularly wants to be separate or individualistic, but it is easy to get absorbed in "us" and to enjoy being so different you can't fit in. Faithful people long to do radical things and they don't want to be held back by fearful "conservatives." (I know. I've wrestled with these temptations as a member of such a household!). It is ironic how these intentional communities, devoted to togetherness and to demonstrating love, can also end up being divisive if they aren't careful. This kind of tension has arisen just enough among to cause the Coordinators to think about whether we should invent a way for a *household* to make a covenant with our church, as well as an individual. Then we might have a better idea of who wants to be at the generative center of us and who is just connecting like a distant friend. There will be much more talk about that.

We have problems in all the groups

we inhabit and the groups have problems with one another, at times. That doesn't make them less valuable. The turmoil shows they are alive! We know God is all about creating and restoring relationships and building his church. So we go at it in every way we can and let his Spirit bring all the ways together as the church of Jesus. Families, cells, 6 people in a house, 20 people in several houses, whatever, these are all forms of community we can celebrate. But we will always have a special place in our hearts for those people who can invent new ways to share in a big way and demonstrate in a deep way that the kingdom of Jesus is not an abstraction, it is something people sink their teeth into and live out in a love so rare it has to be from God.

Can an "alone person" find a place in the church?

Rod White

With all the talk of loving one another and the current definitions of love which tend to be heavy into "hanging out together," one might wonder what happens if a person prefers to be alone? We call them introverts in my line of work and they are generally people who gain energy from being alone rather than from contact with groups of people. They regenerate their inner resources through time to themselves without the "interference" of

others. Churches tend to be populated with extraverts, who regenerate through contact with others and seek relational contexts in order to gain energy. Of course, no one is purely extraverted or purely introverted, but people can generally identify their tendency by asking themselves a simple question: does time with others generally drain me (even when I like it) or does it energize me?

My guess (unresearched, but based on thirty years of observing churches from CA to PA) is that most church-goers will tell you that they gain energy from being with others. Ideas banging together, the

possibilities for affirmation and challenge, reassurances, prospective new relationships, these all appeal to many people in churches.

But there are also people in churches who experience life differently. They enjoy long periods of time alone and feel edgy and hemmed in by groups if they cannot find some time to process away from the masses. These people, I believe, are often misunderstood in church settings. They tend to be connected to their own internal world more closely and do not look to others for the same kinds of inputs as do their more extraverted counterparts. This does not mean that they do not value or enjoy relationships, but that they have a different tolerance level for contact.

Given the disarray of our culture's messages about relationships and the struggle so many of us have in them, introverts often get typed as unfriendly. Nothing could be farther from the truth, although you probably won't get one of them to tell you so. They simply expend more of their internal reserves on the interactive "work" of relating and need to retreat to replenish their equilibrium. The majority extraverts send out messages that this behavior is unfriendly or worse, unloving. If the extravert did this, s/he would probably be doing it out of decidedly a unfriendly motive, to get back at someone who hurt or snubbed

Let people know you're going to skip some "group time," not because you don't like the people in the group, but because you have another purpose in mind for the time. Then let yourself go away so you can come back to offer what God calls you to offer.

him/her in some way or in a desperate attempt to attract attention by absence. But the introvert is motivated, not by pay-back, but by pay-in that is needed. Time alone gives this. Jesus, the master of interaction and love, often shuns the crowd in order to be alone and then returns to offer open contact.

So what can an introvert do in the middle of a church like Circle of Hope so full of cell meetings, PMs, Love Feasts, and every manner of relating imaginable? I'd recommend a healthy dose of believing yourself. When you feel unable to relate any more, don't. But don't do so in silence. Introverts don't think to explain themselves. It doesn't seem necessary. But for all you introverts who are reading these lines, communication (you can be brief) really will help you in the long run and it will especially help

those who are different from you. Let people know you're going to skip some "group time," not because you don't like the people in the group, but because you have another purpose in mind for the time. Then let yourself go away so you can come back to offer what God calls you to offer. Be careful that you are responding to the Spirit's appeal to you rather than some other mandate.

Now all of you extraverts who are reading these lines, give these people a break. They are not abandoning you or our corporate cause, but are enabling themselves for interaction at another time. Space is not always a bad thing. It can allow room for God. My suggestion is that this continuum of extravert/introvert is yet another example of God's love for diversity. Neither introverts or extraverts have "the right way," but they compliment each other and would do well to honor each other's differences and learn from each other's ways. So can an "alone person" find a place in the church? I do hope so.

Practical Things to Think About Before You Move In

Gwen White

Many people among the Circle of Hope are interested in "living in community." Basically, this means that people are living together in a common space. It could be a couple of couples, some single people, or a mix. The households among us in which unrelated people are sharing common space fit on a spectrum anywhere from "monastery" to "boarding house." We are experimenting with many variations on a theme, with many motives: sharing expenses, sharing work, avoiding loneliness, staying safe, giving a helping hand, and working out a conviction or philosophy.

As a church, we promote this kind of living. A long-term goal of ours looks at us in the future and says: *We have given birth to more intentional communities. We support a variety of intentional communities that express the gospel in radical ways.*

We assume that most of us living in

common households have some consciousness about trying to follow God in the process. We want to love and serve each other, we want to *be in* community; we may even want to live out Acts 2 for today. Much love has been built, already. For some of us, these days of “living in community” will be days we always remember fondly.

However, living in community does not always create fond memories. People who join in an experiment that puts together a variety of personalities crammed into a common space, may feel like they are experiencing a bit more of *The Real World* than they’d hoped. So here are a few practical suggestions for ways to save yourself some grief and perhaps get closer to what the Bible epitomizes as the way Christians are called to live together. Reader beware! The unsolicited advice-giving now begins. I don’t know your specific situation, so you’ll have to sort out how much of this applies!

Answer these questions before you move in (or now that you are there):

1) Why are we doing this?

If you think your household is all about being a radical community of faith and your friend thinks it is a short-term way-station on the way to grad school in another state, there will be problems. It may be worth waiting to find a person who shares your assumptions rather than grabbing the first person who can pay the rent. This means you need to have a talk about “what this is all about.” It may be your first lesson in the radical loving you purpose to do.

WRITE DOWN your agreement about what you are doing together. I know writing things down seems awfully formal. But having an agreement to which you can refer, which can be changed, is usually better than living in *Survivor* mode, where the strongest wills dominate according to their whim. In community, people often act out of their old family instincts and don’t even know it. Unless you want to replay those scenes endlessly, spontaneously, you will want to agree on some common patterns that everyone can shoot for, mutually. So write down the kind of life you want to live together. Begin with an honest statement of why you live together. Here are some examples:

- *our house is for people who want to help each other realize the fullness of their faith and gifts*
- *our house is for people to share the expense of rent*
- *our house is about serving the poor*

- *our house is one way we preserve the radical nature of the church within Circle of Hope’s various means of creating community*

Some households make rather elaborate covenants with one another. Yours may not be so intentional. However elaborate, it helps to have a good understanding of “what this house is all about” if you don’t want to create distance and experience unnecessary hurt feelings.

2) What are the financial agreements?

Again, I say that anything about money, especially, needs to be written down (if it isn’t already in your lease). It is very hard to talk about money, and people often react out of their “default” mode. For instance, some people *assume* that everyone will chip in because that is “how it ought to be.” Some people might assume that if a person breaks their stuff they will pay for it. Don’t trust your assumptions. People need to know what their share of the expenses will be up front. Everyone needs to know what is going to happen if people don’t pay. Who is in charge of collecting the money and paying bills should be agreed upon.

3) How is our space to be used?

After several experiments in community living, I personally don’t think Americans should be crammed together too tightly. They often explode. It probably shouldn’t be this way, but we need our space. To enjoy a long-term common household, consider how to get enough room.

Ask a lot of questions about how the common spaces will be used. *For instance:* Does my TV belong in the living room? Is that where I hang up my mom’s picture? *For instance:* When my friends come over every night do they hang out in the living room, or is that where you get to curl up with a book? Do I have to include you in everything that happens in public space?

Likewise, talk about what is private. *For instance:* Are bedrooms off limits? How about my bathroom? Should I have my bath clean in case your cousins visit?

Another reason I like things written down is that someone will move out and the next person will not have been in on the discussions and then they will have to bump into a lot of unspoken

“rules” and get offended.

4) How do others relate to the household?

A household soon arrives at an identity of its own. It is a “thing.” People are either in it or out of it. This creates yet another set of boundary issues. *For instance:* Can people come and spend the night, eat our food? Can they stay for weeks in your bedroom without sharing our agreements (like paying)? What do I do when I don’t like what one of your friends is doing? It makes sense to have some kind of regular meeting of the household to keep talking about new things that come up. Since communication is so key to harmony, perhaps it should be stated up front that when you stop communicating you may soon be “out.”

5) How do we do community work?

Since no one usually likes to do any housecleaning or yard keeping, whole friendships have gone down the drain with undone dishes. I’ve known of idealistic groups who just let the work get done out of the goodness of hearts. But those groups often build in a lot of resentment. There is always someone who is “too busy” or “too unskilled” to do any of the upkeep. And there is always a person who can’t stand to have the place a mess. There will be someone who feels that doing housework means love and one that feels doing housework means bondage. Set out some kind of approach that works for you. Make an agreement for a set period of time and then check to see if it works and remake it for another period of time.

6) How does it end? How do I leave?

Have you had the roommate, yet, who got more distant and less involved as each day got closer to the end of the lease period? Have you had a partner who just took off because another opportunity came and now you’ve got an empty room or worse, an empty heart? It often seems sort of cold-blooded to talk about this “great, new household” arrangement changing or ending. But I think we guard our hearts when we talk about what “could” happen. Unless you are on the “monastery” end of the spectrum, things will probably be changing at some point. Should a person give a month’s notice? If an intentional community has common assets, how will they be distributed? If you own property

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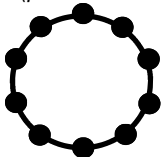
together, can the person leaving demand a buy-out or do they have to wait until the community dissolves?

7) Is Jesus at the center?

I think you have to hear housemates say this, and often: "Jesus is Lord, here." It is sort of like husbands, wives and children reaffirming that they do, indeed, love one another. If you haven't heard it lately, it may be inappropriate to assume.

As for my life, I would not make any household agreement with a person who could not be glad that "Jesus is the Lord of our household." Even if they don't know what they are talking about, or they haven't even made a relationship with Jesus, I can at least hope for some respect for what is central to my life in my own house. Community living can be very hard. At the same time it is irresistibly wonderful and life-transforming, as well as downright practical and just. Without Jesus at the center it is even more likely to be only hard. So at the very least, make sure Jesus is welcome in the house before you move into it.

*Rod White
(previous version - 2000)*



We are called out to be a living organism, building community together in love

A section from our statement: Who We Are and What We Care About (our 'proverbs')

- The "Great Commandment" (John 13:34-5) is to be obeyed. One's ability to love others unlocks their life.
- Our cells are the basic components our living body in Christ.
- Following the example of Paul, we

have a 20/20 vision of ministry, teaching one another "publicly," and from "house to house" (Acts 20:20).

- Our cells are the primary place where we help one another grow as disciples, face to face.
- In our cells, Jesus is the "agenda."
- Living in covenant, like a family with a common Father, is basic to being a Christian.
- The Love Feast is a corporate expression of who we are as a people, a family reunion, and a network celebration.
- One does not join our church. One joins our team.
- The church is not a "thing" that does things; it is not a building. We are the church and we support one another as Jesus expresses himself through us.
- A congregation and a cell are always larger and deeper than their meeting or meeting place.
- We are living as a created organism, not creating a religious organization.
- We are called to develop a trust system.
- When we talk about accountability, we are talking about mutually helping one another fulfill what we have already agreed to be or do.
- Everything a Christian does happens in community. Thus, we express who we are by being cells and we express

Readers, please respond!

One article we did not get written had this for a theme: *Why our household did not work out the way I had hoped it would.*

So we thought we would put this question out there for you to respond to, briefly (a few paragraphs). Think through your past experiences and tell us a little story!

We think acknowledging what doesn't work, or what fails is important to learning together. So it would be great to hear some of you experiences of living in community (in a household, a cell, whatever) that did not work and what you learned.

E-mail to editor@circleofhope.net or bring a hard copy to your pastor.

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cism

We had 4 people attend the Damascus Road Anti-Racism training at our NW site in Feb. We are finding ways relationally, in our cells and personal lives to keep learning together.

5. Be financially self-sustaining by 2005

Right now we are on target to not have any deficit at the end of the year.

6. Develop strong relationships with neighbors, neighboring agencies & businesses, etc.

New Kensington CDC has organized 2 block cleanups that we have participated in and met a bunch of our neighbors. By leading the rehab of the Circle Thrift and East sites we have befriended many of the local business on our block.

Circle Venture

Megan Scott, Director, assessing

1. Provide new methods of support and guidance for Mission Teams in collaboration with Circle of Hope Network Pastors and Coordinators, and with the support of the entire network.

We have birthed two new mission teams, the Community Education Team and the Book Ministry Team.

2. Help Circle of Hope develop its prophetic voice.

We have plans to host lectures on the History of Greater Kensington, and to partner with writers in our church as they discuss violence and non-violence.

3. Communicate how we share God's love in practical ways within Circle of Hope, Philadelphia and beyond.

We spoke at several Brethren in Christ Churches, sharing our vision with them.

4. Define how we will journey with the simple way, Project H.O.M.E., Covenant House, Kingdom Builders and other groups within Philadelphia and beyond that resonate with our purpose and mission.

We have done little so far to make this happen.

5. Fertilize the effectiveness of Circle Venture.

We are regularly updating the website and learning how to maneuver as an arm of Circle of Hope.

6. Raise \$60,000.

We have applied for 3 grants, and created an effective brochure to describe why we need money.

Goal Check *Jan-Mar 2004*

This is a regular feature of this publication. We want everyone to have some facts so we can have authentic dialogue! We adopted these goals in January of 2004. Every quarter we evaluate our progress toward meeting them.

Network

Rod White assessing

1. Deepen our vision and capability to be one church with many unique congregations and entities.

We have our pastoral assistant (Missy Stoner) helping to knit us together. Circle Venture, Circle Counseling, Circle Thrift and other mission teams have become more integrated, mainly through the work of Megan Scott.

2. Redefine our Leadership Team responsibilities

The Cell Leader Coordinators have been designated as our Leadership Team. The Pastors have a weekly team meeting in some form.

3. Accomplish an ant-racism analysis of our church and congregations

The Damascus Road made a major effort when they hosted the regional training in February.

4. Call out the volunteer leader who will organize the elements of "Circle University"

We have a volunteer.

5. Provide ongoing opportunities for apprentice pastors to prepare for future service.

Rod has begun calling together a group of women to consider leadership on various levels.

6. Hold a network-wide retreat

Joshua Grace is organizing this.

Center City

Rod White, pastor, assessing

1. Retool to be more local and to reach into the vast unbelieving population that drew us to Center City.

We tried our lunch-time connecting. Many people have found us through the internet. On Pentecost we will present ourselves on the street. We formed a team to pray for people coming to faith.

2. Expand our capacity for public

meetings and counseling.

Rod and Gwen took it upon themselves to find a larger space for Circle Counseling. A purchase is pending. We instituted the 9PM.

3. Expand our capacity to relate to children and parents

After a productive Parents Forum: We created the Parents Listserve. The Children's Team reorganized and found more capacity. Serious talk about forming a cell circulated.

4. Call out a mission team devoted to opening our hearts to artists and their art

The movie nights are some kind of response to this goal. The short films fest was a great success.

5. Encourage more diverse PMs

The Damascus Road Team trained people, and took more of a live interest in monitoring our actions.

6. Lead the church in addressing debt slavery

No significant action this quarter.

Northwest

Bryan Robinson, pastor, assessing

1. Bryan Robinson becomes pastor, taking a half-time salary starting in January

The half time salary has been a blessing, my hope is that we can get semi-full time with the Mustard Seed Grant & the BIC giving. Brotherly Love has struggled to pay me a consistent salary, mainly because of up and down giving.

2. Double our Cells through multiplication and developing new cell leaders.

I believe we started with 4 cells and we're at 5, going on 6 cells right now. I believe we will have 8 by the end of the summer and 10 by the fall.

3. Double the number of NW covenant members.

We have spent allot of time lately discussing our covenant agreement. We haven't done as well as I would have liked, as far as getting more people to covenant. We had 13 actively involved at the start of this year and we now have 10 covenant members active. I know we have more on our list but, I don't count them.

4. Double our the number of regular

attendees in the Public Meeting.

We started with 43 regular's and we're at 46 right now.

5. Become financially self-sufficient

Our giving has increased, but we still don't have enough partners to reach half our goal right now.

6. Expand Brotherly Love's Church Inclusion Process

We have expanded B.L. plan, at the start of the year we had youth from The Spot participating in our church community. Now some of our basketball team members are connecting and our rappers & dancers. There's many mission projects being planned right now. We're trying to coordinate how they are going to produce disciples connecting to God's church at this time.

7. Create two worship teams

We have 4 teams right now.

8. Coordinate, manage and finance our own publications

Brian J is managing the *NW Beat*. Brenda is managing the monthly info card. We still haven't started paying for this yet.

9. Paint and repair building walls/ceilings.

We have groups line up to work throughout the summer, which should complete most of the repairs.

10. Refurbish ballroom and dining hall floors.

It looks like we're going to shoot for the fall to start this project.

East

Joshua Grace, pastor, assessing

1. Expand the cell network and multiply each cell by the Spring.

Joshua/Amanda, Martha/Jenna, and now Sarah/Chris have multiplied. Fantastic!

2. Create an effective PM

We have grown to 85 regular attenders and 73 attending by May 2! We now have 2 PMs at 5 and 7pm, 2 worship teams; our children's and tech teams are forming now that our space is a little more stable.

3. Devote ourselves to Peace in a time of war

Not much quantitative progress here.

4. Educate people about systemic ra-

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