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# Dialogue

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Volume 5 Issue 1 *Strength for the church's journey into wholeness in Christ* January 2003

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## **The subject: Failure and Disappointment**

It is always hard to decide when to speak frankly and when to "let sleeping dogs lie." The subject of failure and disappointment is so painful, most of us never admit to it, much less talk about it. We're afraid of many things: someone will call us a "whiner" if we complain, no one will respond if we reveal our pain, or our shame will be exposed to the light and we will have to deal with it.

So we are into deep territory, here. Perhaps you should read this issue sitting in God's lap.

*My flesh and my heart may fail,  
but God is the strength of my heart  
and my portion forever.*  
Psalm 73:26

— Ed.

## **Something About Me**

**S**omething about me some of you may already know, I've been sick. I've been sick for a while. In the winter of '98, I was diagnosed with Lupus. Lupus is an autoimmune disease that attacks body tissue (skin, bones, organs) and eventually, its function. Since then, I've suffered anemia needing numerous transfusions, chemo and steroid therapy -- attempting to put the Lupus in remission which proved harder than the actual disease over time. And now, chronic renal failure

has cost me the function of my kidneys that are responsible for clearing metabolic waste or poisons that build up in the blood stream after food is broken down.

I've learned a lot since the diagnosis and have started on going dialysis treatments (a process of cleansing the blood stream and removing excess water from the body), previously at a clinic now at home.

The change in lifestyle has been a dramatic shift. The change in emotional matters has been whole other realm of stuff.



I was asked to talk about physical limitations. Things encountered with an illness that doesn't allow for the things once considered normal. Just the review of this all reminds of how angry I was, and am. I have struggled with not only dealing with these issues, but struggled with God, furious with Him about what seemed to be a lack of hearing, no answers. Wait; maybe it was a lack of faith that didn't get the job done.

Because of all those feelings and the state of decline my body was experiencing in the beginning, I've sought outside help.

Recently, I was in touch with my brother while I was in the hospital. I hadn't seen my brother in some time. My brother had gone through an illness that made it hard for him to be in touch with family. I later

learned it was, in part, being in touch with me. What I had gone through proved hard for my brother, a reflection of some of his own issues.

We got to hang out after I left the hospital and during that time my brother and I opened up to each other like never before. We were both moved. During that time, I was led to pray. I prayed for and with my brother and asked God for healing for the both of us and for God to reveal Himself to my brother, a relationship my brother has hinted at. I am convinced that God used that time in a dramatic way.

What is most, is that while relaying this story and my excitement to a friend having been so moved by it, I exclaimed how God had used my experiences with illness to encourage, bring close the relationship of my brother and I. Words I never thought would fill my mouth.

I'm still not sure what I have to offer the reader of this. I'm not one for 'the happily ever after.' What I know is the story continues and God is listening *and* doing.

*Nathan I. Bowden*

## **On the Failure of Divorce**

**I** have opportunity in this edition of the Dialogue to contribute a portion of my journey through divorce. My divorce was a failure and disappointment I never expected, and a decision I fought against for quite a while. Angie and I were married for nine years, had two children to-

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gether—Sadie and Ella—and finalized our divorce late last year. All four of us continue to be integral members of the Circle of Hope body. Here in my piece I will tell about my divorce, how I faced this failure and disappointment, and provide some suggestions to move toward redemption for any of us dealing with failure.

The interior processing of my divorce took a significant turn during Lent 2002. Upon entering the season I was in an emotional and spiritual stupor. Angie and I had been separated for several months, and I was struggling to keep focused on my personal stability, doing my job, and doing my part in raising my kids. I felt I had failed my family, my community and myself. Although I began to expect my marriage to end, I found myself expending most of my emotional energy on a different scenario: moving back home and re-uniting with Angie. However, as I made my way through Lent to the cross and resurrection, I began to face my personal losses and the deep struggle that simmered underneath my broken relationship with her. It was during Holy Week that Angie and I both came to the decision to divorce.

When Holy Week arrived I was reading Henri Nouwen's, *The Inner Voice of Love*. Throughout these series of meditations he wrote about how genuine freedom comes through detaching from the things and relationships that entangle and confuse our love. He included Jesus' words:

*"...there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundred-fold now in this age—houses, brothers*

*and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life."*

*Mark 10:29, 30*

These words stirred up my most deep-rooted fear: being alone. I was afraid of not just living without

**So often the choices we make create something like fossilized layers of brokenness, pain and sin on top of our genuine self that yearns to be renewed in Christ. Our failures and disappointments are like the chemical reactions that harden these layers. When we fail at something—whether it is something major like a marriage, or minor like burnt toast—our brokenness is confirmed. In other words, we reaffirm to ourselves that we are the failures we believe ourselves to be.**

my spouse of nine years, or of being without my children each day. I was beginning to face the pain and brokenness of my own human condition that I had repressed for years. The prospect of facing what seemed like all my emotional and spiritual monsters alone was

paralyzing. When I stepped away from my interior pain I began to understand the ramifications of the external failure of my marriage. I had some objectivity in seeing how choices I made over several years resulted in my present situation. I could then embrace the interior losses unearthed by that failed relationship. God's voice began to be clearer to me. I heard him speak something very basic to me: genuine freedom could only be attained by a loss of my will. Another way to say this is that as I ceased to exert my will (my desires and choices) over others I could discover the freedom of being led by the Holy Spirit. I felt as if I arrived at a new place. Instead of denying the results of my choices, I was now experiencing the feelings I had about those choices and how they affected me personally and others. From here I was led further in my journey.

Failure pointed me—and I believe it points all of us—in two directions. First it directs us to the inner self—the "true self"—that is often buried beneath our choices and desires. So often the choices we

make create something like fossilized layers of brokenness, pain and sin on top of our genuine self that yearns to be renewed in Christ. Our failures and disappointments are like the chemical reactions that harden these layers. When we fail at something—whether it is something major like a marriage, or minor like burnt toast—our brokenness is confirmed. In other words, we reaffirm to ourselves that we are the failures we believe ourselves to be.

The problem with the big failures such as divorce is that they bring up all the failures we may have been suppressing for years. That is what happened to me. Yet for those of us who are divorced, or have failed in other significant ways, we must be courageous. We must take another piece of advice from Fr. Nouwen and "embrace the loss of failure."

There are a number of things and relationships we lose when we fail: a spouse, children, house, reputation, job. There are also some emotional needs that we can lose when we experience failure. Thomas Keating has named these as: security 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.**

survival, affection and esteem, and power and control. When we treasure all these losses as the wounds of Christ, we can begin to move towards the second place to which failure directs us: redemption. Before we go there, allow me to consider this treasure of Christ's wounds.

Our true self lies underneath the layers of pain and brokenness that are a result of our failures (and the failures of others). By embracing these I mean that we fully face the implications of our choices. By examining these choices we can begin to hear God's voice that first says we are his Beloved, and we are forgiven. There is indeed nothing—including divorce—that can separate us from his love. This beloved self rests in the loving arms of our father. It is a safe place of unconditional love. If we can treasure the wounds of our failures, we will know that without them we would never know this deep love of our father. So we must keep our wounds close, yet not be bound by them. God's love is greater for it heals the wounds.

This love then is the launch pad that sends us outward to the place of redemption. There is another life beyond failure. None of us can know this life until we die to the old one that lived in the failure. Yet when we die that death we gain a glimpse into the life of redemption that once appeared to us as only fantasy.

Since the redemptive life is too broad to cover here, allow me to describe three milestones that dot the landscape of redemption in light of failure. The first is forgiveness. I have already explored the forgiveness of self for failure. It is also essential that we forgive others for their failure—especially in divorce. A common place to get stuck when relationships fail is the blame game. In any sort of conflicted relationship forgiveness is basic. Once you find rest in God's loving embrace, bring another person in there beside you. This is where forgiveness can occur.

Another milestone is wholeness. What I mean by this is that our entire

being experiences failure. Therefore, our entire being must enter divine union. For me, intellectualism dominated my faith for years. As I embraced my failure, my body, heart and soul entered the redemptive process. God is interested in redeeming all of our selves. We must open the experience of our five senses, the range of our emotions, and the fortitude of our will to him. Here we will find a full relationship with him.

The final milestone I want to mention is the one of possibility and choice. The brutal truth of failure is that it wants us to believe our choices are limited. We believe we cannot choose anything outside the devastating failure we have experienced. We must regain the discipline of dreaming. Now that our failure is over and we are resting with our father, what can we dream with him? We know the old choices; what are the new? These are just two questions we can ask ourselves in the journey from failure to redemption.

I may sound simplistic in this discussion of milestones. However, I am writing out of limited knowledge and space. I have much farther to travel in the journey towards wholeness. I am now glimpsing redemption in my family, my community, and myself and I am able to dream about and make choices for the future. I am happy and content for the first time in years. I can know and love others and myself. So many of us have gone through significant failures and disappointments. It is my hope that in my few words, redemption can be found.

*Chris Petersen*

*Editor's note: Chris and Angie Petersen participated in a ceremony to recognize their divorce in late January. Rod and a few others close to them in the process of their divorce were present to witness and support them. If you would like to talk more with them, feel free. They will talk to you, as they are able.*

## Church Planting Failures

**W**hen we got together as Circle of Hope we had high hopes, and so many of our hopes have been realized that it is easy to take the grace of God for granted. One hope we continue to have is to be a congregation-planting church. Our vision is to be one church bridging the divided neighborhoods of Philly through a network of cells and congregations, enjoying the benefits of being many people unified in one purpose while also enjoying the benefits of being uniquely present to a neighborhood. We're trying to maximize our ability to give the witness Jesus called us to give: "By this all people will know you are my disciples, if you love one another." Being non-territorial in a territorial town is a sign of hope. Even harder, being multiracial in a racialized city is an even greater example of being a reconciled and reconciling people. One of our basic convictions can be summarized with a John Perkins quote: "A gospel that does not reconcile is no gospel at all."

In meeting after meeting, we have said, "We may fail again and again, but we are going to die trying" to do what we need to do to realize this vision. We have had a lot of experience with failing and it tests our ability to keep trying. Some people might even say they already died trying! But as recently as our last Council meeting in January, we reaffirmed our determination.

I have experienced a sinking feeling at times when someone launched into a new version of the "Circle of Hope Church-planting Failure Myth" as evidence that we are inadequate. You know how these stories get started. It is like when you are mad at your spouse or old friend and you string together various events of your common his-

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tory to make the case for how your loved one is ALWAYS some terrible way. This often happens when you're about dead from trying or some other terrible thing has happened in your life that needs an outlet for feeling. So the epic story of our failures has been embellished and retold until some people who were not even around can recite "Gerry, Joe, Tim, now Mike." We placed our hope and trust in several leaders, as a launch point for our church-planting efforts. So now their names title the myth's chapters.

It is true, we have risked and we have failed. Sometimes this failure feels like we tried to get to the North Pole by dog sled and just couldn't make it ("But great effort, folks! What courage!). Other times it feels like we held Enron stock ("Boy did you get hoodwinked! Get a clue!"). Other times it feels like the Eagles vs. Bucs ("Bad game plan, poor coaching, no-show players!"). I'd say that most of the time, when the failures get lumped together it feels like a big lump on the head or even a lump in the throat. I don't think anyone doubts our good intentions, but most everything else is up for scrutiny.

There is no doubt that we have failed, repeatedly. First, we got a grant from the Mustard Seed Foundation that helped us hire a bright, energetic, brave, musically talented man, part time, to be a partner pastor for me in Center City. The idea was that we would eventually multiply the congregation with Gerry as pastor. As it turned out, he did not want to be a pastor, he really wanted to be my associate, and he ended up not even fulfilling his part-time hours. I remember being in South Africa with a multi-ethnic team of mediators, sweating over using our grant up without realizing our goals. My friends of color heard my story and reflected about five seconds: "If he is not doing what he was hired to do, he should be asked to move on." Failure #1.

Then we made a country-wide, year-long search for another brave person. This time we were clearer

about our expectations. We were not going to move the person into our congregation, we were going to give him or her "hunting rights" for people they could take with them as a formation team to plant a new congregation in another territory. We thought, "Less competition, more autonomy, the Brethren in Christ will help support a 'mothering' approach." So we went for it. I remember meeting Joe in Washington DC. He looked spiffy, had his bright smile, had all the credentials, the references loved him. He wanted a lot of support in his endeavor, but we like to sup-

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port and help leaders grow. So we took a risk, balancing out the pros and cons and emphasizing that he was willing to try a very hard thing. He really got the method we were trying because he came from a big church that was basically doing the same thing. He improved us. But personally, the responsibilities of church planting about killed him. He left us with a small congregation, and a great building. Failure #2.

At this point one has to wonder. Are we experiencing the adage, "There are no successes without failure?" The fact is, we have done a lot of maturing by this time, and we have learned things that we would never have learned had we not made the attempts. We do have that proverb in our collection, you know: *Accepting failure and*

*moving on in hope is basic to living in the grace of God.* Plus, we did gain a foothold in Germantown and made a new relationships through Circle Venture and Brotherly Love Urban Youth Services.

At the same time Joe was struggling, we accepted Tim into our network as a gift from the BIC. They tested him, funded him and gave him the assignment to plant a church from scratch. This was not even a mothering situation for us, although many of the people who ended up in the small congregation were from the network. Tim is still with us, so he can tell you his own story. But in the myth, this is failure #3.

Then we connected with Mike and New Dimensions. We thought we heard, "We are a cell church and we will marry you." Mike is bright, entrepreneurial, experienced, from the Germantown area and was pastor of a cell church needing a building while we were a cell church in the same neighborhood needing a pastor. Mike made the same agreements we all do as cell leaders and covenant members. But as it turns out he didn't hear how serious we were about what we are doing. He saw us as so flexible that he didn't need to be one church spanning two neighborhoods at all. He met a lot of resistance to this, since he was unilaterally changing course after years of investment in time, heart and money (the money amounting to about \$80,000 in grants and offerings). Before we could work it all out, his financial and physical problems, as well as the stress of disagreement, forced him to resign. This is failure #4. We're in the throes of it.

I am an optimist by faith and nature. So it is not too hard for me to wipe the dust off and say, "We'll get'em next time." I can definitely envision how God is going to pick us up and build on what he has done. I still believe he gave us the vision we are going for; he needs us to succeed and show his glory in

how we reconcile, love and extend the kingdom. But it is also easy to feel hurt with those who feel the failure deepest. I, for one, have been intimately connected with each church planter and have suffered with them and because of them. Many people who have been lead to take risks for the vision feel let down and burned out. It is tempting to quit and agree with people who think our ideas are grandiose, foolish, narrow, racist, inadequate, fill in the blank. A lot has been said about our attempts, rarely in public, and feelings of failure have a way of seeping into a body, just like they do to us personally; they are depressing. Risk breeds both unity and division. And you don't always know what is behind the door on when you knock on it.

So now we have plans for restarting our Northwest mission in ways that learn from our reservoir of failing. I'm excited over what could be. I am heartsick over how many people feel betrayed and bitter over the last round. If we can keep going, it will surely be another sign of God's grace. I think tackling impossible dreams gives us an opportunity to prove his grace. At the same time we are gearing up to "hive" the Center City congregation and plant another congregation. This includes another unknown experience to enter. We have never really done this, even though it was our preferred method from the beginning. We never had a congregation get to hiving size until now. For years we wondered if we would even survive to the next season. So we are looking for a pastor from among us (another innovation born of experience) and imagining what God will make of us.

Honestly, a lot of people don't have any interest in this risk. They are barely believers or barely able to connect with us as a body. What's more, some people suspect we should not even bother. They like us as we are or they would like us bigger, and less face -to-face. Some people feel like they have been through the ringer already, or their lives are too busy or

they are too weak for more big efforts at extending our mission. We may fail again. I hope not. I'm going with the apostle Paul on this. I got saturated with something as I was reading through Philippians: "I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Christ, what has happened will turn out for [our] deliverance. I eagerly expect that [we] will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now and as always Christ will be exalted in [our] body, whether by life or by death."

*Rod White*

**"...those who are  
free to fail are the  
most free."**

*Eugene Peterson, Traveling Light*

**T**ake a moment to read that quote again. At first glance, it seems like such a cliché. Read it again. Allow it to enter into to your soul. The rest of this article will be an attempt to understand the wisdom of this small sentence and relate this wisdom to career failure. Many people have failed in trying to build a career; I am one of them. I spent the better part of my life preparing to be a pastor and then actually doing the work of ministry, first at New Life Church and then at Circle of Hope Northeast. Today, I am no longer a pastor. This is what I mean when I say "career failure." From this failure, a new type of freedom has emerged in my life.

My ultimate goal is to walk you, the reader, into this space of freedom and grace. My favorite way to take this type of journey is by offering my story. I want to attempt to be incarnational. Incarnation is the process of putting yourself into

someone else's life, sharing your story with them while listening for the threads of narrative in their journey. It is my favorite form of ministry. Each time I make this step of incarnation, I realize an important truth – my story is not my own; it belongs to other people, even as their stories belong to me. So for this journey, my story of career failure belongs to you. I offer it as a gift.

I became a pastor because of Carl Rosenblum, the pastor of my hometown church during my high school years. I grew up in the church, but never understood what church was. I went because my parents wanted me to and because I had friends there. Church for me was recreational – a chance to goof around with my buddies. Carl changed that. He took a specific interest in the youth of our church and entered into our world. There is one moment that I remember about Carl that serves as an amalgam of all my memories of this wonderful man. One day, Carl announced that he was going to read a book to us. We sat around in his office and listened to him read C.S. Lewis' Out of the Silent Planet. It changed my life. We actually never finished the book, but having him read the first few chapters led to a conversion in my life. I now understood what church was all about. It was about relationship, and connection, and imagination. It was about story. From that moment on, I wanted to be a pastor. I wanted to place my story in the bouillabaisse of Christian narrative. I wanted to place my story into God's story, and I had the desire to help others make that type of connection.

The next chapter of this journey into formal ministry was college. Carl recommended that I go off to Grove City College to learn the tools of the trade. Many years later he would tell me that he

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made a mistake in recommending Grove City to me. He didn't realize at the time of his recommendation how conservative a school it really was. It turns out that I grew up in a liberal Christian church (categories that were meaningless to me at the time). To make an extremely long story short, I entered into a world that made no sense to me at all. I entered into a world of rules and regulations, a place where being a Christian meant you had to look, act, and believe a certain way. The culture shock completely overwhelmed me. From that moment on, my Christian walk became this internal conflict between trying to fit into someone else's concept of church while all along trying to keep the spark of Christian narrative alive and well in my soul.

This conflict led me all the way through the Presbyterian Church to Circle of Hope. I laugh as I write that last sentence. It is humorous to condense life that way. It represents so much pain and suffering, learning and discovery, joy and grace. If I were to write that journey for you, the whole world could not contain the books. It is God's story played out in my life over a span of 20 years. If you want to know more of this story, ask me sometime. I'll tell you what I remember. My guess is I don't really need to tell you because my story is yours and yours mine. Redemption, spoken or written, always has a familiar ring. "No temptation has seized you except what is common to all people." (1 Cor. 10:13)

For the purpose of this article, the next key part of this narrative is the failure of Circle of Hope Northeast and the eventual end of my formal ministry. My desire for the Northeast was to create a place where liberal and conservative Christians (actually Christians of all shapes and sizes) could come together and learn to love each other. Truth be told, the core team of Northeast actually accomplished that work. Circle Northeast was a small band of believers who were all very different. We drove each other crazy most of the time, but

there was always this sense of love, or potential love. We were on a quest for love. The problem was that we weren't marketable. People weren't signing up for this version of church and we didn't have the resources to continue the work. In December of 2001, we closed the doors to this church. I looked to our Bishop for another place to pastor, but none came available. In a strange twist of fate, the door that did open to me was a position in sales as a realtor.

So here I am. I have spent all kinds of money and time, got all kinds of education, did a variety of ministry, and now I am a Realtor. In the eyes of the world, it is a failure. Initially, it was a failure for me, too. It did not make sense. People who know my journey often

ask what it feels like to be working in sales now. To them being a pastor and being a salesman are worlds apart. My answer creates surprise as I tell them that this new terrain is strangely familiar.

Now here is where the freedom comes in. It turns out that I am wildly successful at real estate. I am having so much success I barely know what to do with it. All the connections I have made in ministry have naturally led me to helping a bunch of people find homes for themselves, their family, and their extended community. I am already immersed in helping people from New Life and Circle of Hope buy and sell homes. I am constantly connecting to their hopes and fears as they journey toward the fulfillment of their story of what home should be (what it was for them as they grew up and what it will be as they start a new family or new community). In many ways, I am the keeper of this story. I intrinsically understand the subtle movement of the narrative and ap-

preciate the connections that are being made.

By God's grace, I am back in the soup, the bouillabaisse of God's story, reconnecting with imagination and beauty. I would never have discovered this place of freedom without the failure of my formal ministry.

The biggest discovery of all is the knowledge I now have that there is no failure for those who belong to Christ. Failure only comes by accepting someone else's version of your story. There are plenty of people out there who would say that my spending all

that energy to be a pastor only to end up a realtor is a failure. God says something opposite to my heart. He says, "That everyone may eat and drink, and find

satisfaction in all his toil – this is the gift of God." I find myself grateful for this gift.

As I put energy into real estate and no longer look to the church for a paycheck, I am beginning to realize that I no longer have to try to fit into anyone's "version" of church and Christianity. The burden I placed on myself in college has been released from me. Praise be to God! I mean it: Praise be to God! I am truly free to love others and invite them into this marvelous place of freedom. Some will come, others won't. My only responsibility is to keep offering the gift.

*Tim Bathurst*

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## Mythical Cocoa

**C**rouched in my closet. I try to block the noise from outside. Glass on pavement, glass on bricks. They are playing tag with bottles, flinging them at one another as if they were pillows. Loud voices have infiltrated our apartment since the corner filled with "them" around 10 pm.

Now it is 1 am, and I am desperate for sleep, for calm, for peace in the form of quiet. Don't they have anywhere to go? Don't they know that people live here? Would they care if they actually knew me, if I knew their mothers?

David calls the police. It is too late now to go outside and stop them. The police arrive. They tear off. The night is city-silent.

I work with teenagers everyday, and yet when these kids arrived so late at night, I was nervous. Why? They were African-American. I'm not. They were on the street, where they control the environment. They were not in my community center, where I set the tone, where I have authority.

I work with people of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. African-Americans raised in Philadelphia, West Africans who have just arrived in the US, Chinese students from Hong Kong, Italians of South Philadelphia, Cambodian immigrants struggling to speak English. I work to remain accountable to each individual. Each person has different needs based on their individual personalities as well as their cultural heritage.

Sounds great, and in my isolated yellow brick bubble, my community center, I can fight racism. I do not tolerate racial prejudice.

But when these black kids were on my street, on my doorstep, I was terrified. We live in a neighborhood which is 50% African American, 50% Puerto Rican. But these kids were not *my* neighbors.

Over the next few days, I tried to reconstruct what had happened. We fit

pieces of the night together as we talked to other neighbors. Nina, an African American mother of four, had run out into the middle of the game, pleading with the kids to stop. The police arrived while she was still out there. She had not been afraid.

Oscar, a Puerto Rican man and father of teenaged boys, had stepped onto his stoop. He had two guns on him and was prepared to threaten the kids if they had thrown bottles in the direction of his property. He said if the kids came back, friends from North Philly would "take care of it." He seemed nervous.

Were our responses based on race? Would David or I have been able to approach these kids if they were white? Asian? Hispanic? If race is a social construct, why did it feel so palpable that night? If racism is racial prejudice plus power, was I racist? Perhaps, even as I felt powerless, we called the police. David's Caucasian voice calmly telling 911 that there were kids

throwing bottles on Mercy Street while his pregnant wife sat up terrified brought the police instantly to our alley.

I tried to be angry with the kids. But I kept getting stuck worrying about them. Where were there parents? Why didn't they have warm beds to sleep in? Warm couches where they could watch TV? Where do they live? If they are out this late, do they go to school? Do they work? Do they sell drugs? Are they having sex?

Are they scared to be out on the street? Would they be scared if David walked downstairs, a big white stranger? Are they loud because they are inconsiderate or insecure? Do they need someone to tell them they are loved?

I tried not to be angry with myself for not knowing how to react. I tried to tell myself that there was nothing I could have done to remedy the situation. I attempted to excuse myself from this problem because I am pregnant and shouldn't put myself in dangerous situations. But in the end I knew I had failed myself. I believe in peace, and I believe in the

ideas behind racial reconciliation. Mostly I believed that these kids were simply people and deserved to be confronted directly.

I determined to take hot chocolate down to them the next time I heard them on our street. To immediately address their presence before they got out of hand. I wanted to learn their names, and find out where they lived. I wanted to give them a chance to be real. I wanted

them to know that this was my home, where I live, that I am pregnant and tired, that I need quiet, because I too am a person with individual needs.

They never came back. I don't know if I would have had the courage to be my flaky self, the white woman with cocoa and cookies. I may have failed again. But at least I have a plan.

*Megan Scott*

**Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.**

**Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.**

**You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:1-8**

## Goal Check *January 2003*

**T**his 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 2003. Every quarter we evaluate our progress toward meeting them.

### Network

**1. Through an ongoing dialogue, make a secure connection between Northwest and Center City.**

First dialogue was Feb. 1.

**2. Enhance network-wide ways of sharing that augment the cell network**

No significant action yet.

**3. Increase the activities and awareness of Circle Venture**

We are in the process of finding a Director.

### Center City

**1. Prepare to multiply the Congregation in 2003-4 – call out an Apprentice Pastor from among us**

We have been soliciting names of people who can be in a mentoring group.

**2. Prepare to multiply the Congregation in 2003-4-- Find a creative solution to our space needs.**

The next Building Team has been working on a fundraising plan. We continue to look for usable spaces, both in Center City and other locations.

**3. Prepare to multiply the Congregation in 2003-4 -- Grow to a com-**

### *fortable living size*

We are prepared to train further Cell Leaders on February 24. We are exploring further PMs. Week 3 is planned for February 15 which sets our sites on having a more deliberate and influential mission at Temple University.

**4. Augment the ministry in our cells by offering opportunities for training and enrichment that stoke the fire of our passion for life in God's kingdom.**

A parenting class is being planned. A team to help with debt dilemmas is forming.

**5. Educate people about systemic racism**

People have been encouraged to attend the Damascus Road training and we have subsidized the cost. The Damascus Road Team lead us in an Anti-racism Night during New Humanity Month.

**6. Raise \$132,000 in gifts from the congregation(s). (See budget proposal)**

During January, we received \$8500+, which is \$2500 less than our monthly goal. Randy Nyce is organizing a way to find out how much people will contribute in 2003. We are working out how to make online donations.

**7. Grow the Effectiveness of the Public Meeting**

Farrell Lawrence is organizing a Hosting Team.

**8. Devote Ourselves to Peace in a time of war**

The Shalom House Team lead us in a Peacemaking Night during New Humanity Month.

### Northwest

With Mike major's departure the goal-setting process for our Northwest mission was put on hold. The following goals are suggestive of a direction, when we recover.

**1. Engage the mandate to go into all the world and make disciples**

**2. Raise the overall level and quality of our worship specifically in the area of music. Develop a more culturally diverse PM.**

**3. Develop a more effective ministry to children under the age of 12.**

**4. Continue to develop our Youth Ministry**

**5. Create a cohesive environment in our diverse community.**

**6. Secure the future of our location by June 1**

### 1. Who we are

**We are a circle of hope in Jesus Christ**

*Called to be a safe place to explore and express God's love.*

### 2. What we do

**We build the church for the next generation**

**by the power of the Holy Spirit**  
*Multiplying cells that are authentic expressions of life in Christ*

*Forming congregations as diverse as the kingdom of God*

*Constructing a reconciling network  
To bring hope to the challenges of  
21<sup>st</sup> century urban life.*