
Dialogue

Volume 6 Issue 1 *Strength for the church's journey into wholeness in Christ* January 2004

The subject: *Crossing Barriers*

Here's why we are so interested in talking about being the new humanity. It is not just because the logic of diversity and inclusion is just and loving. It is because Jesus has begun a revolution of redemption and we have been called into it.

Logic can get you somewhere, but it will take God's love to change the world.

Ephesians 2:11-22 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles...were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility....

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

This is a remarkable issue of the Dialogue, put together by Suzanne Bley, Art Bucher and the Damascus Road Team. If it full of people being vulnerable and helpful in their honest attempts to understand how they relate to people across cultural, racial and all the other barriers that keep us apart, thwart love, cause conflict and excite war. Let's hear them and walk with them on the difficult but amazing journey of becoming reconciled to God as that one new people in Christ.

— ED.

Moving Away: Barrier or Opportunity?

There's got to be a ton of couples across the world who are forced to make decisions about moving all the time. Who knows all the push and pull factors that in the past have moved people from where they call home, even those at Circle. In the small town where most my relatives live, about an hour's drive Southwest of Philadelphia, most



people from my parents generation and back have stayed around the area after high school choosing from within the local job market, marrying local, etc. I figure it's a mixture of hometown expectations and a lack of opportunities.

Recently, a job offer in another city has had my wife and I talking and searching a ton for answers about whether to stay in town or get on the bus. I'm writing about this experience because I want to understand some of the unfamiliar and subtle forces at work here, as well as share my part in this very common conversation. This decision is forcing us to talk through what our priorities are and think about life down the road; something that people my age (22) aren't necessarily doing cartwheels over.

Since back high school, I have clung to the Paul's statement to not let anyone despise me because of my youth,

(1Timothy 4:12) which I think empowered me to not wait on some neon sign from above, seize the day, and trust in my inherent power- the same thing that glows in all of us. But the other day at Circle, when someone read Lamentations 3:27 about how its good to wait in our youth, I had to sort of up upgrade my ideas. God was telling me to wait (for once!) No, you don't have to be over 40 to let God do great things through you, but the whole idea of setting my immediate gratification aside, my need to be surrounded by friends and support, feel in the moment and a part of the social scene at school/Philly/Circle is way easier than this other path out there; some kind of strange, slow, sort of molassesey path of preparation.

A good friend of mine always says that its easy to see where great people ended up, admire them and get all pumped up by the their accomplishments, but we tend to overlook the fact that they too waited, prepared and submitted themselves through some often unpopular processes to get there. Thomas Merton went to Columbia to learn how to write. Maya Angelou was an actress who toured the world and continually wrote unpublished poems before she was famous, and Howard Thurman and Dr. King both went to seminary, worked years in different churches, and put in their time in various crucibles before their time with greater tasks would come. It seems that the Master took that same long road himself (So I've at least got nine more years to chill).

Lately, two very interwoven factors about this decision continually fill my mind; money and church. What a great job opportunity this position in a time of economic uncertainty! Rachel and I were basically unemployed until weeks after our wedding- here's a free head's up; don't follow that model if you don't have to. It's a mixture of arrogance and precaution that makes me not want to be in the same boat as everyone looking for a job, sending in resumes, or worse (in my head), having to borrow

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or lean on others financially. Why is my identity so based on my career? Why am I so opposed to trying to find something other than the one field I've set my mind on? Teach for America partially markets the job as a stepping stone to other places; higher places; greener, more powerful, more influential places.

The idea of moving and having to find another congregation is somewhat daunting, yet I like the whole ecumenical aspect to it. In Philly, it seems like the people who try to double dip between Circle in the evening and another church in the morning have a huge task ahead of them. We all know that building unity outside denominations isn't easy, nor is crossing those lines of race and class, especially in this city. I commend people at Circle who are trying to make it more of a community that not only welcomes and challenges people who gravitate around the fringes, but also seeks to maintain contact with those who have left the church, supporting whatever they're currently doing and standing firm in the fact that our primary allegiance is to God, not whose "in". At the small black churches where I grew up,

churches visited other congregations every Sunday after our service, and invited local pastors to speak, creating a climate where we acknowledged the work of other churches who didn't necessarily do the same thing as us.

Balancing all this pro-career me-empowerment talk, I am completely humbled at my wife's willingness to go either way, though she would really desire to stay in Philly. A friend of mine hangs a lot around John Eldridge, the famous Christian writer/retreat leader who wrote *A Sacred Romance* and leads men's spirituality retreats in Colorado. My friend says one thing he totally admires about John Eldridge and his crew is their stories about the sacrifices they've made with some of their dreams for their wives, and how much those decision have meant to their marriages and their wives. This is a process—learning to make this decision as a team, as a member of a community, and especially people who are extremely built up by being near family; both mine and Rachel's. There are costs either way, but its awesome to know that the peace of God and the strength of Christ await us

both, individually and as a couple, wherever we end up.

Ryan Bowers

Breaking Down Barriers

"Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven."

Matthew 8:11

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: For ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:28.

I grew up going to a private Episcopalian school where we went to chapel several times a week. Given that my Sundays were spent at a predominantly black Baptist church in West Philly the chapel experience for me was very different and I enjoyed the singing as much as anything else. One of my favorites was "In Christ There is No East or West" written in 1908 to the tune of a Negro Spiritual. I've copied the words below:

*In Christ there is
no East or West,
In Him no South or
North;*

*But one great fellowship of love Throughout
the whole wide earth.*

*In Him shall true hearts everywhere
Their high communion find;
His service is the golden cord,
Close binding humankind.*

*Join hands, then, members of the
faith, Whatever your race may be!
Who serves my Father as His child
Is surely kin to me.*

*In Christ now meet both East and
West, In Him meet North and South;
All Christly souls are one in Him
Throughout the whole wide earth.*

The idea of crossing barriers has been a consistent, if somewhat uncon-

scious, pattern in my life. Twelve years at a predominantly Caucasian private school, interracial marriage, five years in a predominantly Caucasian church and a career where I've often been the only black person, or one of very few in a department or organization. For all of that, I managed to live in another world as well growing up in a prominent black Baptist church where my mother was minister of music and my father was president of the usher board, a historically black fraternity member and steward (trustee) at what was then an up and coming predominantly black church in the city.

Despite my diverse experiences I've only come recently, and grudgingly, to the table of reconciliation. And I feel like I've only eaten the bread and had some iced tea. I haven't even made it to the appetizer yet! In my core I still struggle with the words of the song and the vision to which Christ is calling all of us.

My schooling prepared me to swim in elite waters, not grapple with issues of race. The common table there was achievement and conformity to corporate, capitalist America. My black church experiences weren't much help either. Black people can generally claim the higher ground in race relations but that doesn't typically translate into full inclusion and reconciliation. The common ta-

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.

ble there was self-sufficiency. We have the means now to do it on our own and we see no real need to integrate. Come join us if you like but don't expect us to conform to your way of doing things. We already have to do that every day but Sunday. While there are aspects of both that are dear to me they don't present the full picture Christ is calling us to. I had an awareness of that inside me that created a general sense of dis-ease with pursuing either option to its fullest.

What I believe we're shooting for at Circle is something closer to the words of the song. To be defined by who we are in Christ and having that as our main reason for submitting to the work and pain of reconciliation and integration. Other reasons may sound nice but they aren't life giving enough to carry us through. Without the Spirit of God guiding and sustaining us we can't fight the tide of sin that concurrently separates and conforms all of us. We're constantly tempted to separate and create barriers from the "other", whether that's race, ethnicity, class or gender, and those walls of separation always call for conformity. No matter which group you fall in, rich or poor, dark or light, educated or uneducated, disenfranchised or part of the establishment, each group wants you to bend your will to what they believe is right. This ensures perpetuation of their ideology and the strengthening of the bonds of sin.

We were painting our bedroom this weekend and my mother-in-law brought "A Wrinkle in Time" in the form of a book on tape, with the author Madeline L'Engle as the reader. It's a great story but the part at the end, where Meg has to save her brother from "IT" and the only weapon she has is her love for him was really compelling. It took me to the line where the songwriter states "In Christ there is no East or West, In Him no South or North; But one great fellowship of love". It is that love that helps us fight "IT" just like the children and the heavenly beings in the book. And it is that love that enables us to break down the barriers that separate us. In my deepest parts as a child of God I don't want to be confined to the outlines of the barriers. I know it won't be easy but I want to get to the dessert table. I don't want to be stopped at the appetizer. And I need all of you to get there. Let's experience the full joy of the meal Christ has laid out for us. Let's keep breaking the barriers.

Dave Valentine

The Guests Who Wouldn't Leave and Other Stories of Cultural Barriers

His name is Fred and he's my neighbor to the left. He hangs out socially with jazz guitarist George Benson, was a music director for Boys to Men, and has worked with many other R & B musicians whose names you'd recognize. I can hear his funky bass drifting through our shared wall as I bathe my children, bake muffins and talk on the phone with my not-so-famous friends. I love hearing his music and I love having him as a neighbor because over the months, he's offered us use of his wood pile, sent us a bouquet of cookies, and when a squirrel died on my front lawn, he became a carcass removal hero.

We couldn't be any more different – and yet we're becoming friends. Sometimes it's this easy. Sometimes differences are an attraction and seem more of a friendship builder than a friendship barrier. And then, other relationships require a little more work.

Take for example the wonderful African American pastor and his wife who came to our house for a visit at 1:00PM one afternoon. We had a lovely time, filled with interesting conversation and lots of laughs. I am always up for socializing. If it were up to me, I'd always be the first to arrive and the last to leave. But by 5:00 PM, the cheese and crackers I had sat out were gone and I was getting tired. I tried as tactfully as I could to give social cues that it was time for them to go.

"Can I get you guys anything else?"

"Yes," they replied.

Yes?!!! They'd have more soda. By 5:30, when they were making no moves towards their coat, I offered to order a pizza.

While we ate, a discussion of cultural differences arose and they used this time to discuss how different this visit would have been in an African American household.

"The pizza is just fine," the wife said. "But in an African American house, I'd be wondering, 'where's the fried chicken, the potato salad?'" Especially

that we're a pastor and wife. A whole spread would have been laid out for us, sweet potatoes, greens.' She went on for a while listing the desserts while I was debating whether or not to say what I was thinking,

"But I didn't KNOW you were staying for DINNER!!!!"

While we had the common ground of Jesus to keep us actively loving each other, there are other relationships that don't carry the built-in mercy Jesus brings. It's these relationships that bring out the awkward in me. The insecure me. The part of me that wants to keep to myself, to nest with the friends I already have and forget about reaching out to people I see as very different from myself.

When we traded suburban Seattle for urban Mt. Airy 10 months ago, differences presented themselves right away. The most obvious was that we were the racial minority and in my insecurities and fears, I wondered how we would be welcomed on this street. It was important to me to build relationships with my neighbors, to make friends, join a community and I was eager to see how easy or difficult this task was going to be.

I have to acknowledge that perhaps, in reality, there are some on my street that would rather not get to know us. It crossed my mind that the hip, black guy next door has not much in common with a very white stay at home mom and has no interest in being pals. Maybe the robe wearing family down the street is militant and angry at whites (and thus ME) – and probably for good reason. More than that, my neighbors probably reconcile to the white race every day – don't they want some time off in their own backyard? Though I've never felt or overheard anything that would lead me to believe these are the feelings of my neighbors, these are the fears I have to fight to overcome. My best defense for these thoughts is to remind myself that I am only responsible for my call to love. I am not responsible for other's disinterest, or even possibly hostile response to me. My job is to do what I can to love. God is free to run amuck in that love.

In the summer, we spent a lot of time on our front porch steps. Our girls played in the yard and neighborhood kids came in droves to dig in my garden and share our sidewalk chalk. People walking their dogs would stop by to let Sonora and Shelby pet them and we'd

chat. Just being on our porch and making ourselves available made it easy to get to know our neighbors- all of different ages, races, sexual orientations, and economic class.

Our casual meetings on the street opened the door for more. My big, first step out: I baked all the neighbors I had talked to a batch of cookies. I was actually embarrassed to reach out in this way, and shy enough that I hoped they wouldn't answer their door so I could just leave the package on their stoop, ring the bell and run! This small act gave me courage to move on to other small things- sending cards, shoveling snow, doing crafts with the neighbor kids.

It may sound corny, but I truly believe my frosted cut out cookies had an impact on our relationships on Westview Street. In only 10 short months, I feel a part of this community. When I wrecked my car, my neighbor recognized my license plate and stopped to help. Neighbors mow our lawn, as a free act of service -and sometimes we mow theirs. Friends have loaned me sugar when I ran out, invited me to private parties, helped to carry in heavy items from the car. I learned over the months that my neighbors were just as anxious about who was going to move in as I was about being new. They wanted to know: Would we be loud parties? Would we take care of the house? Race became a secondary issue to: Would we be nice to live next to?

I'm not silly enough to infer that a cookie (though I make GREAT cookies) can break down all the worlds' ills and that by sitting on our front porch, people will stop seeing color as a barrier. I just mean that there are ways to start small, and that Jesus is involved in the intimate, the mundane, the little things that lead to the big movement.

I believe that by admitting and tackling my insecurities and fears, by making myself available, by being willing to serve and be served- that barriers can be breached.

Though it may in fact be difficult, God is present. Though it may in fact require much from me, I must be open to the possibility that it may be easier than I anticipate it to be. The rewards are immense and have the potential to ripple through eternity, because in breaking down the barriers that separate us here on earth, we're also crushing the chasm between God and Man as we represent Jesus and shout his love and His reconciliation to all we encounter.

Anna James

Crossing an International Boundary

With my marriage to a West African, I'm more aware of cultural barriers than racial ones. I don't think much about racial issues within my marriage, as Farrell doesn't think much about them in his own life. In West Africa, he is a man, not a black man, as people don't identify people by skin color, but are first separated by tribes, which is a complex issue I don't feel qualified to address. Farrell has told me that marrying me was more acceptable than if he had married someone from a different tribe from his country.

I am reminded of the race issues in this country when we enter a store and the cashier asks if he's with me when Farrell begins putting our bags in our cart. And I imagine I'll be more aware of racial issues when I may have to explain in the future to inquisitors when we, Lord willing, have some little ones, that yes, these are my biological children. And I will definitely have to deal with racial issues they could face while growing up in America as biracial people.

But the bigger boundary-crossing issues I deal with for now are communication styles and family relations with a different culture, and these are the issues I'll touch on in this piece.

Communicating with Farrell is often challenging in small ways and especially in conflicts. Many of these difficulties are a result of our cultural differences. The formal speak Farrell was raised with sometimes doesn't mesh well with the informal and casual tradition I learned. The way I answer him when he calls me is different now from when we first met. Growing up, when my mother would call my name, I would say, "What?" not meaning any thing negative or disrespectful. When I answer Farrell this way, it really throws him, as this is a very informal and disrespectful way to answer someone. The polite and courteous answer to a call is "Yes" - a very simple word that makes a world of difference to him. It wasn't that hard to learn, and I have to admit, it does sound friendlier.

Farrell has actually adapted to a lot of American habits in the past 10 years, and his personality transformed after he arrived in America. He says his friends back home wouldn't recognize his personality. But I've found his style of communicating with Americans isn't one to follow in conversing with others from his culture. If you know Farrell, you know he asks tons of questions when communicating with people.

In America, to get to know someone, we ask questions. It's considered polite to ask questions, rather than to dominate a conversation. Most people enjoy talking about themselves and sharing about their lives, so how else would you show people you want to get to know them, but to ask them questions? What do you do for work? Where did you grow up? Where do you live? How and where is your family? Do you have children? How long have you been coming to Circle of Hope? How did you find out about COH? I've learned that questions should be limited when conversing. "How is work?" is usually safe, as I'm always asked that on every occasion. They sometimes ask me, What part of Italy are you from? Do you speak Italian? I have to laugh and explain I am only 1/4 Italian.

"How long have you been in America?" seems to be okay, but immigration issues are not something to be brought up. I'm very out of my comfort zone at the many gatherings, and I feel like taboos already exist and it's safer to just keep quiet, rather than discover a new one. It's a challenge for me to learn how to converse without peppering someone with questions!

At Farrell's Aunty and Uncle's house in NJ, where we usually go for *huge* dinners on occasions of all kinds, I am blessed with even more non-American cultural encounters, as Farrell's Aunty is from Guyana. Most of the other guests also come from the Caribbean. I'm not sure if it is the commonality of coming from a British-colonized nation, their skin color, or just the fact that they are not Americans, but these two groups of people from entirely different continents relate more than I probably ever will relate with either of them.

One time at one of these parties, I chuckled at something one Caribbean man said on his way to the buffet table set up in the huge living room, (The racks that caterers use for warming food and the little cans for the flame under-

neath are a household staple in many of these homes – a very new concept for this American.) He noticed that I'd laughed and knew I didn't understand the joke. I thought I had understood the joke and that it wasn't all that funny, so I was laughing to be polite. This example just shows me that though English is the common language between all three of these cultures, we still don't always understand each other. Conversations go right over my head, sometimes because they just choose different words, sometimes the words are accent too much, or the Sierra Leoneans start speaking Krio, of which I only understand about half. Then I sometimes have to tune myself out because I feel like I shouldn't fake a reaction to a conversation they know I don't understand. Farrell is willing to translate, but when the conversation turns to a topic like football (soccer), I have a hard time caring to hear a translation! It's hard enough among Americans for me to care about a sports conversation.

Farrell's family is so open to me. At our wedding, one uncle mentioned in a toast how he was glad for a union between Farrell and an individual from the country that has provided many opportunities for them. I feel so blessed that they have accepted me entirely, and I have to remind myself that it's not just about me and my experience with them and my self-consciousness around others who look different from me. It's also about a nephew/son/brother who chose to bring in an outsider to the family for life!

Claire Lawrence

Sometimes It Rains

I never had a close African-American friend until college. Part of that reality was due to choice but most of it to the inability to make a choice: my hometown was, and is, 99% white. When I met my friend at Penn State, she casually asked me why I was talking to her. Taken aback, I asked her what she meant and she said that most white people just didn't strike up conversations with her. That was my introduction to the world of racial reconciliation and I've crossed a lot of boundaries since then. Now on an average day I interact with about fifty African-Americans and five white people. It's nearly reversed

the ratio of my childhood.

What does that mean, though? What does it matter? Even with African-American friends whom I love, African-American leaders at Circle of Hope whom I respect, and African-American co-workers whom I trust, I still feel lost sometimes in this work of racial reconciliation. Over and over again the insidious presence of racism is evident in the things my kindergarteners say: "I don't want that Barbie doll. She's ugly because she's black," and in the lives they lead: five years old, in the third foster home within eight months, and completely unable to trust anyone. It is hard to grapple with the fact that in the face of such overwhelming sadness and evil, God still insists that we are a New Humanity.

The New Humanity (a.k.a. the church) offers hope to those seeking. For me that hope has come often through cell group. Our cell is currently interracial. At some points it has been ~~multi-racial, multi-age, multi-class, and~~

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multi-neighborhood, all at once. As you can imagine, this does lead to moments of awkwardness, but as I said, it also offers hope. For instance, Natalie asked us last fall to pray for rainfall on her father's African farm. Without the rains, there would be no crop. I had never actually considered rain as a life or death issue before, at least not in a personal way. My previous weather prayers came when I wanted to avoid a test or to win a track meet. Now, because of our cell's diversity, I was being asked to pray for the rain in earnest, because it was really needed.

In turn, I began to think about what it means to know God's presence *and* to need the rain. How can both be true? Old Testament Bible stories implanted in my childhood brain the idea that drought was connected in some way to God's presence. When people sinned, God left and so did the rain. When appropriate repentance occurred, God's favor returned, accompanied by the rain. But Jesus is Emmanuel: God with

us, God always with us, even when it does not rain. As Christians, our living water comes not from the skies but from Christ. That had always seemed a nice metaphor for me, but I was realizing that for some people it is not a metaphor. They die - literally die - for lack of water, yet even in the midst of the drought (and the dying) they insist upon the immediate presence of God in their lives. This can only be explained by faith.

This illustration has been helpful for my understanding of the work we do in racial reconciliation. Sometimes it rains. We work together then to plow the field. For instance, we bear with each other, in spite of different races and backgrounds, in cell group. Or the foster mother of the child I mentioned above says to me on the phone, "God bless you, honey," and I know she *means* it; I know she prays for me. Or relationships deepen with my teacher friends at work. There is rain.

But sometimes there is no rain. Sometimes I go to the movie theater and with all the best intentions say something or do something that still seems soaked with racism. Sometimes I struggle with my students and beg God to help them - like some beg God for water - but there is no healing. Over and over I give, and I see others around me give, all we can to this work and the giving is just soaked up, like parched ground soaks up water. Children are still left parentless. Racism still persists. I am left wanting to scream at God, "Why don't you just send rain?! Why can't you fight this evil that is too big for this child, too big for me, too big for all of us?!" The amazing thing is that I *can* scream at God. He is right here. There may not be rain, there may not be healing, but God is here.

Since He is here, I figure that it would be a good idea to obey Him, so my journey of racial reconciliation continues. The Bible does not say that when we encounter evils like racism we should insulate ourselves to hide from them. It does not say that when we encounter evil we should assume that we misunderstood God and that he must be providing "opportunity" on some other path. It does not say that when we encounter evil we should "do the best we can" but save energy to maintain our own happy families and safe lives. It says, instead, that we should overcome it. We should overcome it - not with force, not with domination, not with shame, but with

good. This good can only be found in a faith that insists upon living water even when dying for lack of H₂O, a hope that insists upon the *already* and *yet-to-come* New Humanity in the face of the domination system, and a love that insists upon mercy compelled by God's love for us. I am thankful to be in covenant with people who live by this faith, hope, and love, and to be in a cell group with people who help me learn how to live by it, too.

Aubrey White

Transracial Adoption

When asked to talk about my story of adopting Kofi . . . I initially thought, oh that's easy. I would love to tell that story. But as I've been preparing, I've been having a difficult time especially having to tell this story from the context of my membership on the Damascus Road Team. The Damascus Road Team is a mission team at Circle of Hope that works to engage the church in the work of racial reconciliation. I think that the work I've done along this journey has brought me closer to God and His kingdom, and consequently has been racially reconciling work. We are all moving towards wholeness and healing as we grow closer to God and one of the sins of which we all need to be healed is the sin of racism.

I'm frightened to speak about this part of the journey publicly because the sin of racism is so big. It is 300 years big. While I know my family is involved in God's reconciling work, I also know it's going to take generations for this work to be complete. I worry that people who see my family without getting to know us think that we're trying to heal the sin of racism by adopting a black child. That because we are white we have no understanding of our undeserved privileges and the larger systemic problem. They may think that we, in thinking we have done this great healing act will ignore, or believe we are excused from dealing with the problem of racism. They may think we are actually perpetuating the problem of racism through our liberal, dogooder act. It is very difficult for me to find enough courage in the midst of this assumed judgment to tell this story. It is diffi-

cult because I have been through enough therapy to know that assumed judgment is really a lot more about me than any reality. I'm hesitant to tell my story because of my own self judgment. Who do I think I am to pretend that my process would contribute anything to the larger healing that needs to happen?

When I start spinning in these circles the only way out is to shout, whisper, or cry . . . I have a Savior . . . we have a Savior. Jesus desires racial reconciliation. Jesus is leading us all towards healing. I'm going to share my journey with the hopes that it will help you continue your own journey with Jesus towards racial reconciliation . . . towards healing.

I was asked to share my experience of crossing barriers, because my husband Paul and I crossed this very high, yet invisible, color barrier that exists between many neighborhoods, schools, cafeterias, and churches in this city, when we began the adoption process with Kofi.

Many people, especially so-called white people, don't like to acknowledge that this wall exists. If they realize that they have very few if any friends of color they say this happens because we are very tribal people and feel more comfortable with people who look like us. When someone said this to me recently, I thought hmmm, that's a good explanation. It makes sense. But if you stop with this explanation you fail to see, acknowledge, and accept responsibility for the racist systems in our society. White people fail to see and acknowledge all the privileges they have simply because of the color of their skin. I realized painfully that even considering adopting a child of color is a privilege I have because I am white. The adoption system along with many other systems in this country are racist. Because statistically more adoptive parents prefer white babies, white birth mothers have more choice over what agency they will use and they have more prospective adoptive parents to choose from. Typically agencies placing white babies charge more for their services. Prejudice becomes racism when one group in society uses power to enforce their racial prejudice over other groups in such a way that they receive more benefits and privileges while the other groups receive less benefits and privileges. Our country is full of racist systems. The task of dis-

mantling these systems is huge. The task begins with crossing barriers.

As I was thinking about the story I wanted to tell tonight, I realized that we crossed this highly visible, yet invisible, rarely discussed but acutely felt barrier because we followed Jesus across. It was not, is not, and won't be an easy crossing, and I want to share my struggles and joys with you. It is really important to me for you to know that we didn't cross this barrier because we are really great people. . . . I had some pretty ugly thoughts on the journey. We crossed the barrier because Jesus did first and because we love Him. We love Him because he loved us first in the midst of our sin and ugliness. He created the capacity in us to love. As Jesus prayed for us before His death and resurrection, "I have given them the glory that you gave me that they may be one as we are one. I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." As I read through my journal of the journey I took last year, I realized that it was my desire to love, given me by Jesus, that ultimately got me over the wall initially. In the midst of all my worries and anxieties about adopting a child of color I knew I wanted to love a baby. I had a strong sense of God carving out a space in me for a child. I trust this love will continue to help me throughout our life together as a family.

I have decided to share my story with you, by reading some significant journal entries from the previous year. Reading through my journal as I cared for Kofi, an answer to prayer and a true gift from God, filled me with great joy, thanksgiving and awe. I highly recommend as the new year starts, reading through your own journals and noticing the threads God's been weaving in your life into a beautiful quilt.

January 1, 2003

Father I'm afraid of adopting an African American child. I have all kinds of negative emotions and judgments when I see a white mother with a brown skinned child. I'm worried about the emotional turmoil I will cause this child. I'm worried the child will reject his own appearance or my appearance.

January 2, 2003

Help us to see your plan as it is revealed to us. Racial reconciliation as a life's work seems a worthy work.

January 8, 2003

(Continued on page 7)

Oh Lord I get scared thinking about my child having darker skin than me. I can't picture myself with a dark skinned school aged child. The benefits of adopting transracially: diverse family, more fully engaged in racial reconciliation, the beautiful power of love, learning from each other, generational healing, life and laughter

January 28, 2003

A revelation: I'm laying here waiting for that amazing peace of absolute assurance that I'm in God's will, that adopting a child is what God wants. I'm waiting for feeling to accompany fact.

Facts:

- 1) The body is excited for us and believes this is God's will.
- 2) From all I know of God, He desires this.
- 3) There are children who need homes, and parents

I get anxious waiting for the feeling, but I do feel a big open prairie before me which I have felt and known as God.

I get up in the morning and meet with God frequently without the wonderful warm peace that this is the thing to do. I get up out of obedience and responsibility to my students to create a learning space for them. I want to be a part of building God's kingdom so I get up and do my part. I really don't feel like getting up. What I know for sure. I want a biracial baby or babies from the hospital. What does obedience feel like?

February 19, 2003

Reassure me of your will as I put this home study check in the mail.

February 20, 2003

I woke up truly terrified that I have a fatal disease and will die soon. This is the reason we can't have children. God knows I'm going to die. I'm really scared.

March 15, 2003

I'm scared and excited. Scared we should stop the process, we shouldn't do this, we are not called to do this. I'm panicking. I long to have a baby in my arms, I long to teach my own child, I long to share my life experiences with a child.

March 17, 2003

Today I'm scared to be a mom to any child. "For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives so also through Christ our comfort overflows."

March 20, 2003

Keep things on the burner and allow them to work out. These worries don't need to take over your life. I don't want to be stuck in the tyranny of what feels good.

April 18, 2003

Jesus prayed through his sorrow and asked the question "can't it be done another way? We all need to ask that question in our sorrow in order to get to resurrection.

Through April and May as I worked to complete endless questionnaires that the agency required, I journaled less and talked with my cell and my therapist more about all of my fears. I came

It is very difficult for me to find enough courage in the midst of this assumed judgment to tell this story. It is difficult because I have been through enough therapy to know that assumed judgment is really a lot more about me than any reality. I'm hesitant to tell my story because of my own self judgment. Who do I think I am to pretend that my process would contribute anything to the larger healing that needs to happen?

to realize that we were about to change our lives completely in a really big way. We were going to become parents after 10 years of marriage and we were no longer going to be a white family. We were really happy about this but also really scared. Change is scary. I realized who God is and clearly that He wanted this even though I didn't feel peaceful. Paul and I began praying together every Sunday morning while we decided to continue on in the adoption process. I

got a lot of reassurance from knowing God's love for all tribes and nations and I got a lot of reassurance from hearing Paul tell me what God was telling him, which was the same thing He was telling me. I still remember my panic and terror of last winter and spring. It was real. I think it made a big place in me for the overflowing peace and joy I have now that Kofi is with us.

I know that as far as crossing barriers goes, the infant stage is going to be the easiest. He is so beautiful. People love babies regardless of skin color. We have had a few strange comments. It's easier now because Kofi doesn't know what people are saying. When he gets older it will be very hard when he hears, "but he's not yours," "when are you going to give him back," "are you going to be his baby-sitter," or "what happened

to his mother?" Paul and I have decided we need to start practicing comebacks at home that will protect our family and potentially help people be more sensitive. It has been wonderful to be in relationship with many more people of all different races as we go about our lives. Friends of color on my block, at my school at Paul's work and at Aubrey's school have been particularly warm and supportive. This is a blessing to me.

My relationship with my mother has improved dramatically. She's educating herself about transracial adoption. The other day she was telling me that a coworker of hers wondered aloud if Kofi would play professional basketball. Mom said to me "I didn't know if I should be offended or not!" We are delighted at the beautiful color in our lives and are praying daily for God to make a way for our unusual family and for racial reconciliation for Circle of Hope, our city, and our country.

Tracey Kohl

Privilege

As peaceful as we would like to be, most of us are unable to completely disarm. Everywhere we go we carry weapons other than knives or guns. Perhaps the weapon that is hardest for people to lie down is privilege. Privilege can be a weapon in any form – social, racial, economic, etc. It is a weapon because it alienates others; it means that if you don't have the right degree because you couldn't afford college you are destined to live in the same neighborhood for the rest of your life; it means that if you aren't fortunate enough to have been born with a lighter skin tone, then you will be looked upon by most of the population; it means that even though nobody chooses their economic status or skin color or sex chromosome, society will discriminate based on such factors. It is a weapon because privilege oppresses those who do not have it. Those who do not have privilege have a much harder time achieving certain goals. It is a weapon because privilege never begets equality because privilege is only privilege if there is some form of hierarchy.

I live in a community in West Philadelphia with six other people. We moved

here so that we could live out the justice and equality that we found in the gospel. In our immediate community, not one of us has had to think about whether or not we will have a next meal or if we'll be able to make it to our jobs or schools. We can eat organic food and put warm clothes on in the winter. When I look at the way we live, I see a way of basic minimalism. But when I compare our lifestyle to our neighbors, I see luxury.

Maybe these things don't sound like weapons, but in a neighborhood where the status quo for most people is the opposite, they are weapons because they erect walls between my neighbors and myself. This area is certainly not the poorest neighborhood in Philadelphia. We do not see homeless people, everyone has clothes and some form of constant income and most people on my block have cars. But the schools in this neighborhood are not as good as Central or Masterman; rather most of them have reputations of violence and not a high percentage of high school graduates.

I see families in this neighborhood trying to provide the best for their children. They work hard to put food on the table and their teenage kids most definitely do not own cars. In fact, most of them will probably not go to college. So when I move into this African-American neighborhood (except for my housemates and myself), I cannot help but remember Jesus' words to the rich man: "If you wish to be perfect, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor" (Mt 19:21).

I have only lived here since September, but since then I have seen the effect my presence has in the neighborhood. I used to run a lot in the neighborhood, sometimes early in the morning, sometimes in the afternoon. In the mornings, I would run past a school and see kids outside stare, unsure of what to make of me. I would smile and say hello to older women walking to the store or the bus stop, but most of them would continue walking, heads held high, shoulders back and stare straight past me silently communicating a strong message. In the afternoons, men would comment (sometimes nicely, sometimes not so nicely) as I ran past. One woman would stop me to ask the time even though she wore a wrist-watch.

Two kids in the neighborhood come over about once a week to color, draw

or just say hello. I often think about what their mom thinks of this. If I were their mom, I don't think that I would like that my children wanted to spend so much time at our house- we are white, educated, have good food and represent a different lifestyle – a lifestyle that their mom is not able to give them. My housemate John was walking home from the train station one day and one of the kids asked John if he could come over to our house. After the kid asked his mom and she said yes, he began running and skipping and in a singsong voice said, "You live with Cassie and Rose and Holly and Libby and Angel. And you're John. And you're all white and you're all big too. I wish I was white." He didn't say this with a longing or sorrowful tone, but stated it matter of factly. John patted his head and said, "You'll be big someday."

I think about the stares and comments made during my morning runs and see how those who don't know why we've moved into this neighborhood could think that we want to turn 58th and Vine into a neighborhood of young, white, organic-food-eating, pretentious idealists. But none of these reasons mean that we should not be here; if anything, these reasons are exactly why we should be here.

The weapons of privilege are weapons because they alienate others, but they do so only if they are intentionally or unintentionally used as weapons. In Genesis, Esau sells his birthright to Jacob for some stew and, in doing so, he despised his birthright. We have a birthright too. I didn't choose to be white or economically privileged, but that is my birthright. If I were to cross the barriers of race or socio-economic status by forsaking my education, then I would be despising my birthright. The privileges we have can be weapons, but they can also be tools. In Isaiah, the prophet talks about the when God will judge between the peoples. He says about the people, "They will hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation and never again will they learn war" (Is 2:4). Just as the swords can be turned into ploughshares used to bring food, so too can privilege be turned into advocacy to bring justice. Barriers can be eliminated with a redistribution of wealth more than they can by a renunciation of wealth (which reeks of pretension). The racial divide may cease if we commit to living in a

way counterintuitive to the status quo. If we decide that we want to cross barriers or erase the barriers, then we need to imagine a better way. We need to create some form of the ideal in hopes that some day the rest of society will imitate the creation. We need to not be deterred by barriers but we need to think outside the box and hold on tightly to our dreams no matter what the consequences. When Jesus died on the cross, the disciples saw his death as an obstacle, but then he rose from the dead showing that no obstacle is final because love always triumphs.

Rose McCullough

Readers Respond

Silence and the New Beginnings

Chris Petersen

I have been inspired by all the action that has been taking place in our community for the past 12 months. We are taking intentional and prudent risks rooted in our identity and the resources of people, finances, strategy and spirit. I have entertained thoughts of moving from Philadelphia during the last two years and one of the reasons I always decide to remain are that I am part of a unique church that does not fear new things and decides to live in the tension of an "already – not – yet" kingdom.

However, the birth of the new projects, plans and plants has further inspired me to travel inward to what author Richard Foster has named "The Prayer of Relinquishment." He describes this prayer in his book, [Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home](#): "...we begin to enter into a grace – filled releasing of our will and a flowing into the will of the Father. It is the Prayer of Relinquishment that moves us from the struggling to the releasing." I want to explore this process of releasing our wills in this article in hopes that it will enlarge our conception of the true nature of our activity.

Nearly two years ago during Lent of 2002 I rediscovered a painting that hangs in the Pennsylvania Hospital, off Spruce between 8th and 9th Streets. It was used as one of the "Stations of the Cross" during our

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annual Good Friday Prayer Vigil in Center City. I originally met this painting when my oldest daughter Sadie was born in the hospital, and became reacquainted with it a couple of years later when my younger daughter Ella was born. It is a large oil on canvas in a Victorian style from the nineteenth century. The piece by Benjamin West is called, "Christ Healing the Sick in the Temple." It portrays Christ walking through the crowded Temple with the disciples, religious leaders, sick and their caretakers, and various passers – by pressing in on him. If you stop by the hospital and view the apostle Andrew, you will discover a life that speaks to us in the present chapter of our community's life together.

Andrew is nestled behind Jesus, and is acting as a mediator between Christ and the family of a demon – possessed boy. As the boy's two sisters plead with him to help, he patiently listens and gestures towards Christ, his healer. While the father holds the flailing boy, no one else in the scene – including Jesus and the other disciples – provide any support. Andrew is in perhaps the most dangerous place, alone. It is at the crossroads of this aloneness and crushing human need that the Prayer of Relinquishment can be practiced.

Although space does not permit a complete rendering of this scene, believe me when I make the comparison between Andrew and the present life of Circle of Hope. The painting shows Andrew taking a great risk to help in a potentially explosive situation. I'm sure we feel that in places like Germantown and Kensington/Fishtown. Andrew is also alone as he moves outward. Many of us feel alone as we attempt to be Christ's followers in a world that stresses self – preservation. While need and aloneness are at the surface of all this, Andrew wants the needy to meet Jesus for themselves. Any one of us who know the tender embrace of Jesus want our loved ones to meet him as well, even as their sickness may be an obstacle.

Andrew does a unique thing in the swirl of all the need, emotion and stress: he releases his will. You will not find Andrew forcing or manipulating any of the desperate family members to meet Jesus. He is mediating the way to him, allowing for the movement toward Christ to come from the family. He is also not interrupting Jesus' movement towards another to attend to the demon – possessed boy. He patiently awaits the time when the Spirit of the Healer will connect with the spirit of the sick one. Andrew has learned that the movement of Christ is not concurrent with his willful determinations.

The Prayer of Relinquishment is essentially a release of all you want and need to the heart and intention of God. As we as a church strike out into new things – new cells, new mission teams, new "hives" – we each must release the practical efforts and desires we carry into these things. Attempts at new things bring to the surface our anxieties and expectations. We have plans, schedules and deadlines. We will live and die by these expectations. When we practice the Prayer of Relinquishment, we allow God to move in us first, so we can keep being formed into his instrument of Peace.

That is why the meek Andrew is such a powerful leader in this scene of "Christ Healing the Sick in the Temple," and a potent force for us as 21st Century Christians. He is living from the basic assumption that genuine freedom is in discovering your true self in Christ and opening up to his answer to the question, "Where am I?" In this question we are faced with the place from which we are living. Is it a place of fear, greed and anger in which our interior needs are devices for our work and relationships? Or, is it a place that is empty of our possessions and desire for self-preservation? We must listen to the silent movements of Andrew, those that tell us to give up our self-importance, confess our brokenness and embrace our healer.

When I begin new things my intellect almost immediately shifts to overdrive. I am busy making plans and presuming all the people I know and love will go along with them. How many times have I been crushed when I realized that not only did they not have the same plans as I did, they did not even understand my ideas in the first place! Many times our false self leads us in the pursuit of constructing a life that is beyond our own capacity, or that is intended to keep us safe from the threat of outsiders and strangers. The problem is that this feeds our natural human tendency to control our personal world, and those connected to it.

Andrew, without many words and with compelling actions, reveals an alternative. He shows that indeed by coming alongside the stranger, the needy and the enemy, we can promote healing, deliverance, and liberation. He is not afraid of emptying himself of all weapons and threats – physical or otherwise – and making himself available in what appears to be a dangerous situation. As he gestures in silence for the frantic sisters to take their brother to Jesus, he must realize the chances for deliverance of the boy are not 100% and it is possible that chaos may ensue through an outbreak of the demon.

The painting shows Andrew to be silent and composed. He is not the flip

side of the demon-possessed boy, flailing around for help and screaming for Jesus to do something. In gentleness he approaches the sisters and shows them Jesus. Just as he has made the choice to be near and open to them, he offers them the dignity of choosing how they will handle their need.

I am challenged by Andrew's silence at this moment. I never realized how controversial silence was until I began to practice it. If you are a Monastic, silence is part of your rule. If you are an anti-war activist, silence is acquiescence to the power structure. Benjamin West seems to paint Andrew in neither of these categories.

Andrew's is a patient silence; one that is waiting for the appropriate time to speak, and with words that will serve the family of the sick boy. He is silent at this moment in the painting because he is listening to the sisters. They have much to say: one pleads with him while the other explains their predicament. Perhaps it was natural for Andrew to listen; he must have spent most of his life up to this point listening to his brother, Peter. This place he took in relationships provided him with the discerning gift of empathy. When needy people spoke Andrew was adept at hearing them diagnose their problem, and in understanding the deeper places from which their need arose. His skill as a mediator was that he heard the external problem and the internal need. From there he was able to open others to opportunities for healing by introducing them to Jesus. I suspect much of this was done in silence.

In this, Andrew was a genuine anarchist. With the power structure of the religious leaders standing only a few feet away scheming how they might execute Jesus, Andrew waits in silence for the moment of divine healing. He could have organized a grassroots movement on the spot, and held an alarming demonstration in the middle of the religious leader's territory. He had his poor, peasant constituency, his organizers (the disciples) and his rally speaker (Jesus) readily available. He had the chance to birth his own messianic movement right there in the Temple. However, he chose as his tools for transformation, silence and compassion.

Andrew's life is a deliberate and chosen one. We must learn to choose silence and release ourselves if we are to be genuine mediators of Christ's love. Perhaps now more than ever are mediators needed who will practice Andrew's way. The fear of loss is pandemic in our city: loss of place, possessions and life. In our new beginnings we must move out of our internal and external comforts, get next to others and listen. As we expand our community – the Body of Christ – we must go together with others into the loving embrace of the father. From there, healing can multiply to the next neighbor, whether friend or enemy.

Goal Check *January 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.

We haven't had much time to work on these, but let's note some of the progress already!

Network

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

2. Redefine our Leadership Team responsibilities

The Cell Leader Coordinators have been designated as our Leadership Team (and "the board" for legal purposes).

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

The Damascus Road training in February will equip more people to do this.

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.

6. Hold a network-wide retreat

Center City

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

Our new second Sunday PM and our Wednesday lunches are evidence of this.

2. Expand our capacity for public meetings and counseling.

3. Expand our capacity to relate to children and parents

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

5. Encourage more diverse PMs

6. Lead the church in addressing debt slavery

Northwest

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

Brian is hard at work!

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

3. Double the number of NW covenant members.

4. Double our the number of regular attendees in the Public Meeting.

5. Become financially self sufficient

6. Expand Brotherly love's Church Inclusion Process

7. Create two worship teams

There are already THREE organized.

8. Coordinate, manage and finance our on publications

9. Paint and repair building walls/ceilings.

10. Refurbish ballroom and dining hall floors.

East

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

One multiplication happened this week.

2. Create an effective PM

The first meeting has been held!

3. Devote ourselves to Peace in a time of war

4. Educate people about systematic racism

5. Be financially self-sustaining by 2005

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

Circle Venture

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.

2. Help Circle of Hope develop its prophetic voice.

Note the insert on gambling with the program.

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

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.

5. Fertilize the effectiveness of Circle Venture.

6. Raise \$60,000.

Grant writers are at work