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# Dialogue

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Volume 3 Issue 3

*Strength for the church's journey into wholeness in Christ*

July 2001

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## The subject: Money

*People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge [people] into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, [follower] of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. 1 Timothy 6:9-11.*

The verses above are full of radical stuff when they are read in the good old U.S. of A. Christians argue themselves out of taking them seriously all the time. You'd think we'd all had a class on "How to Be American and Still Convince Yourself You Listen to the Bible on the Subject of Money, Ever."

This issue of the *Dialogue* tries to help us listen, if we dare.

As we listen, some of us will be learning the spiritual disciplines of money. They aren't all about doing without, living in community, or creatively sharing with the poor and developing opportunity with them. They are also about balancing a checkbook and being conscious of how we spend. They are also about seeing ourselves as trustees for resources God has given us and learning an investment-in-the-kingdom-of-God strategy. They are also about having a job that considers someone else's needs as well as our own and making purchases and contracts that don't use every scrap of what we've got on what we, alone, want.

As we listen, some of us will be learning the math of funding our

church's mission. For instance, here is a word problem for you. If 170 Circle of Hopers all gave a tithe (10%) of their income to the Common Fund they use to fuel their ministry, take care of the needy among them and generate compassion and truth-telling all over the world, how much would that fund receive in a year? Say each person makes only \$20,000 a year. Say a good third of them are unable to give anything at all. What would be our income?  $114 \times 2000 = \$228,000$ . That's way over double what we expect to receive this year. It is amazing how much opportunity we would have if we got together and shared a portion of our



money, isn't it?

If there is any one thing that an American Christian (one of the richest people the world has ever known) should know about, it is money. If we can learn the disciplines, do the math, and SHARE, just imagine what will become of us!

*Ed.— Rod White*

## Simplicity—To Will One Thing

**K**ierkegaard wrote the following parable:

When the prosperous man on a dark but star-lit night drives com-

fortably in his carriage and has the lanterns lighted, aye, then he is safe, he fears no difficulty, he carries his light with him, and it is not dark close around him; but precisely because he has the lanterns lighted, and has a strong light close to him, precisely for this reason he cannot see the stars, for his lights obscure the stars, which the poor peasant driving without lights can see gloriously in the dark but starry night. So those deceived ones live in temporal existence: either, occupied with the necessities of life, they are too busy to avail themselves of the view, or in their prosperity and good days they have, as it were, lanterns lighted, and close about them everything is so satisfactory, so pleasant, so comfortable - but the view is lacking, the prospect, the view of the stars.

One of the dangers in considering the topic of simplicity is that we can err in two directions. We can romanticize poverty and assume that if we had little we would have a simple life. As the parable points out, we humans find much to distract us from a view of life that is full and rich and being occupied with getting what we need as poverty often demands is not the guarantee of simple, contented living. But for many of us who read the *Dialogue*, the greater threat is from having more not less. We have lanterns to light and much more. In fact we have so much more that we do not even know that what might heal us is a simple view of the stars.

As we discussed this the other night at one of the Circle classes

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on our assets, the group was quick to point out that we tend to fill our lives up with things and people in the hope that it will feel full. It often leaves us feeling empty instead. It's not that we don't know how to be entertained. There's media everywhere that promises to occupy us, but there's a component of purpose and pleasure that remains illusive for too many of us. My take on this is that we suffer from feeling out of touch in some authentic way with ourselves. We settle for being busy or entertained and respond to the flood of promises that we will be fulfilled *if only* we have or do this or that. In essence we shift the focus of our searching away from meaning and turn it to something more tangible. In the frenzy of our search, we are distanced from our true selves

***In the frenzy of our search, we are distanced from our true selves and we lack the kinds of experiences that open us up to seeing beyond the little ring of light we can keep lit around us.***

and we lack the kinds of experiences that open us up to seeing beyond the little ring of light we can keep lit around us.

So how might we reconnect with ourselves? Each individual has her own unique story that explains how she has disconnected, but it seemed helpful the other night in our discussion to consider a few general points for the sake of discussion. When each of us was born, we were completely dependent creatures. The human infant remains dependent on his caregivers longer than any other species on the planet. As we matured through the care of those around us, we became more able to supply various things for ourselves. Forgive me for pointing out the negative here, but human beings seem to focus on negative aspects of their experience. People generally report that they remember criticism far more easily than praise. Couples therapy researchers tell us that negative comments that couples make to each other carry far more weight in terms of the relational

dynamics than do positive comments. We take in the negative. I suggest to you, that because of this, we have taken in the negative about our earliest care, as well, and we have formed ourselves around a desperate search to fill up what we experienced as missing. We have deeply rooted images of ourselves and others that are so difficult to bear that we store them away outside of our conscious awareness. We represent ourselves, even to ourselves, as something other than what we actually believe we are. Psychologically we can't bear the pain of the deeper reality so we create new images of ourselves that continue the desperate search to fill in what is missing.

But this search seems to our quick (sometimes shallow) thinking to be nothing desperate at all. So we are set up for all the advertisers who aim their ads at creating desire and need in us and get us thinking and feeling and (they hope) behaving in line with what they tell us *we must* have or do. We crowd our lives with this sort of seeking to have and do and we lose sight of the stars.

Jesus understood this problem and process. He communicated the heart of this to Martha one day when she was frantic in her attempts to produce a suitable meal for Him and His friends. Martha's sister Mary was sitting listening to Jesus talk about life. Mary was neglecting her "duty" to produce a meal and instead obeying a higher duty to take in the meaning of life when the opportunity presented itself to her in the Person of Jesus. Martha sticks to her plan and her custom of preparing the food. With each task she feels more over-

whelmed and more disconnected from what she wants to have happen in her life. She finally says something to Jesus and to Mary. She gets mad and blows up because her plan wasn't working. Jesus speaks directly to the sort of living we all do when He spoke to Martha even though our pursuits may not look exactly like Martha doing her "duty." We have other strategies to get what we think we must have but we feel a similar desperation. Jesus says to Martha, "only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better." (Luke 10). In some older translations of the Bible He says Mary "wills one thing" and Jesus affirms that. Mary pays attention not to the media of her time telling her what experiences she *must* have (being praised by men for cooking well or being hard-working, etc.), but to the opportunity to connect with the One who is Life-giving. Mary resists the pressure to buoy up her self-esteem by winning approval from others around her by showing off all the great stuff she has in her house or by demonstrating her skill as cook, housecleaner, etc. Instead she focuses on one thing: she simply listens to the source of her life. Will she

## 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.

ever work again? We know she does. Will she lose track of this simplicity of willing one thing and be distracted and take up the frantic search to fill herself? We know she does that, too. But here is this glorious moment when she gets it. She sees the stars. Jesus is beckoning Martha to join Mary outside the circle of her own attempts at making life happen. It's a rather abrupt message. Stop it, Martha! You are doing things, thinking things and feeling things that are not necessary. Simplicity has something to do with understanding our confusion about who we are and what we can do. It is giving up the exhausting pursuit to get more in the subtle ways we have arranged for that. It is waiting instead of getting. It is doing without some of what our plan says we must get in order to hear from within about what is truly valuable, helpful, holy. It is not deprivation, but development. It is cleaning house in order to live in a beautiful space rather than staying cramped in a congested room.

Gwen White

## Let's Be More Like Barnabas

**W**e are a body that is defined by community. We worship in community on Sunday evenings. We gather in community in our cell groups. Many of us live in community. Notice all of the verbs: worship, gather, live. These are all active verbs. Community cannot exist without action. Action, however is not just physical, rather it is spiritual, emotional, and also financial. It is the action of opening ourselves up so that the line between our individuality blurs with the collective conscience that is created by our community. We have done a good job in sharing our physical, spiritual and emotional lives with each other. Cell groups, friendships,

living arrangements, and the public meeting facilitate this sharing. However, too often the community that we have created in these areas does not extend to our wallets or our checkbooks. Too many of us view this aspect of our lives as personal and private, rather than corporate. We tend to shudder at the question, "So how much do you earn?" There is no doubt that much of this privacy stems from the culture of individualism that is so pervasive in our culture. Much of it comes from the models that were provided to us by our parents.

However, whatever its origin, a view that "my money is my money" is destructive to the very community that many of us hold dear.

As Christians we are called to share our lives together, all of our lives. We are called to pool our resources for the good and the benefit of the community. We do it, not because we feel like we have to, but rather because as a part of the community of Circle of Hope we are committed to a vision that is larger than ourselves. We are committed to being a new creation in Jesus Christ that is not bound by the traditions of this world. Too many of us have been shackled by the values of capitalism that tell us to accumulate and consume. Culture tells us that we are valuable if we earn a lot of money, drive SUVs, live in large houses in the suburbs, and rack up high credit card debt. Many of my law school colleagues will be earning over \$100,000 next year. This is common knowledge throughout much of the law school, however the topic of salaries and perks is not discussed. I am frequently chastised by my colleagues for pointing

out the obscenity of these salaries. I am chastised, in part because they know I am right, but also because there is myth that this information should remain private. We are addicted to privacy.

However, as a church we cannot be addicted to notions of privacy.

***I know that money is powerful. For many of us it evokes images of guilt, shame, pride, or a whole host of other destructive behaviors. However, merely because it can be powerful, does not mean that we should not deal with it.***

We cannot continue to believe in the myth that "the way I spend my money is personal, it is private." To do so gives the impression that it only affects you as an individual. However, as many of us saw just a few months ago, the way that we spend our

money affects us all; it affects our community. Many of you know about the financial problems that Circle was having at the beginning of this year. For the time being we have averted the crisis, however, we will be back there shortly if we corporately don't change our giving habits. I know that money is powerful. For many of us it evokes images of guilt, shame, pride, or a whole host of other destructive behaviors. However, merely because it can be powerful, does not mean that we should not deal with it.

You may be asking where is he going with this? Quite frankly, I am not sure, but I think that that the Bible has some good lessons about wealth. The Book of Acts talks openly about the believers "having everything in common," and "distributing to each as anyone had need." (See, Acts 4:32, 35). Was this communism? I doubt very much that the early church was setting up an economic system. However, they surely were responding to the needs of their community. They were responding to each other in Christlike compassion. Acts 4:37-5:11, also teaches us about

Barnabas, Ananias and Sapphira. The core lesson (at least in my opinion) to be learned from these stories is that how we hold assets, be it houses, money, prestige, speaks volumes about our values. Barnabas converted his land that he owned into a cash gift for the needy believers (4:36-37). He let go of his money, laying it at the apostle's feet to be administered by them. By contrast, Ananias and Sapphira practiced a similar transaction for the same need, but lied about it (5:1-2). Apparently they wanted to look good among the believers but also wanted to personally hold onto some of their possessions. What can we learn from this? I think that God calls us as believers to hold our resources lightly. After all everything that we have comes from Him. He gives it to us as a trust to be managed for His benefit, not as a treasure to be hoarded for ours.

So what am I saying? I am saying that as a community we need to be more like Barnabas. We need to let go of the notion that the way we manage our money is a private affair. We are a community. As a community we have been entrusted with a large number of resources. These resources are not ours as individuals, in fact they are not even ours as a community. Rather, they are God's resources that He has entrusted to us to manage and to share. I could go on for pages and pages about this topic. It is something that I am passionate about, but quite frankly I am also frightened about. However, the bottom line is that I trust God, and I trust this community. Acts 4:32-33 says, "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul, neither did anyone say that any of the things that he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." In a world that values possession of wealth as the supreme goal, we as a Body should constantly be striving to be more like Baranabas, and in so doing we will continue to be a great

witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

*Patrick Cicero*

## **Starving Mammon**

### ***Reflections from Our Study of Money and Community***

I don't like jumping into debates about political ideology. They polarize us. They keep us in the world of concepts. So rather than giving a case against capitalism (there are plenty of good ones out there already), I want us to be drawn more deeply into the magnetic and dangerous love of the Gospels.

As we read those narratives, it is important to note that Jesus gives money a name: MAMMON. Money is not simply bartering currency. Money is a personified power, a very alive and seductive "being" that absorbs and enslaves the Children of God.

Because of the dangers of that bondage, I want us to try to figure out what it means to be reborn into a new Family. It is a citywide and worldwide family in which some of our sisters and brothers are literally starving while others of us have money in a bank.

That fact demands a response. But as we talk about what our response should be, it is also my desire to allow for "multidimensional discipleship." I want us to recognize that we do not all respond to the call of Jesus in the same way (but we must respond). Rich Mullins said it like this,

A lot of people are all into this 'born again' thing and say that

to inherit eternal life you have to be born again. Yes, Jesus says that to one guy, Nicodemus. But if you tell me I have to be born again, I can tell you that you have to sell all you have and give it to the poor. Jesus says that to one guy too.

So each of us must discern the nudging of the Spirit in our midst, personally, perhaps as a biological family, and of course as the Family of God.

The idea of family is central to a biblical understanding of money. That is especially clear when we look at the first Christians. In the early Church, for one person to have more than they needed while someone else was without was THEFT. For one person to have the capacity to feed the starving and not do so was MURDER. Imagine in our own biological families -- if one family member, say the father, was grubbing it up and had food in his pantry, and yet his daughter was starving... is this not murder? How much more should this be true in the Family of the Reborn? When

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we Christians care for each other, we are caring for our own flesh and blood, our own Body, the Body of Christ. When we starve one another (intentionally or unintentionally -- "when did we see you...?" Mt. 25), we starve our own family, and the Body of Jesus,

and so our sisters and brothers groan. In fact, it is recorded about the early Church, that if someone came to a household in need of food and they did not have enough (which was often the case), then the entire community would fast until there was enough for everyone to eat. What a testimony to the contemporary Church family!

While the Gospel call is obviously an daunting call to suffer with others, it is also a vision of hope for a new way of life. This hope is not simply a hope of some future Kingdom when we die. I am convinced that Jesus came not so much to prepare us to die, but to teach us to live, to truly live the Kingdom of God into reality on earth as it is in heaven. In that light, verses like this one from Mark take new meaning:

“No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much IN THIS PRESENT AGE (homes, brothers... fields and with them persecutions) and in the age to come eternal life” (Mark 10:29-30).

I believe this is very literal. As we discover this new way of life and discover how to share all things in common, a wild multiplication of resources ensues. When I, along with ten others, give up “my” house, I suddenly have nine new homes. Now ten people have ten houses. It is an exponential multiplication. As I leave my biological family, I now have hundreds of mothers and brothers. It is a new way that stands in offensive opposition to everything that is temporal and of this world.

This multiplication also happens in regards to time. For instance, when our household (we call it “the simple way”) gets a vanful of donations, we can unload it ten times faster as a community than I could alone. And the only way that we could, practically and spiritually, do all the things we do (feeding people, spending time with kids, rehabbing houses, gardening...) is by having a community of folks surrounding a common vision and way of life (more than just a sum of our parts).

I am not trying to idealize the way we live in community. It is hard and painful. There are times when it seems like it would be easier to do life alone (I like the old quote: “I know you are strong enough to do it alone, but are you strong enough to do it to-

gether?”). But community is what we have been created for. The Bible is a story of community -- from when it is not good for the first human to be alone (needed a helper), to the new community created amongst the refugees and slaves in Israel, to the apostles (never sent out alone), and, of course, clear up to the early Church in Acts. We are created in the image of God, a Trinity, a plurality of oneness.

Here at Circle, this crazy journey into community continues to express itself in a wild continuum of ways, from the deep to the mundane: cells, intentional communities, joint childcare, shared rents, life partnerships, community gardens, carpools. And yet there is so much more out there for us. Sometimes what we are doing seems wild and extraordinary -- but this is more revealing of the ubiquitous apathy of western Christianity than it is of the true radical nature of our discipleship. We have so much to learn from other communities such as the base communities in Latin America, the Catholic workers, and particularly from the Poor among us -- since poverty demands community to survive. Poor people do not have to “intentionally” choose community; their survival demands interdependence, creative resistance, and alternative structures (this is why they are blessed “for theirs is the Kingdom of God”).

It is past time for us to think of deeper ways of experiencing community, of bartering and trading skills and creations, of making our own products and food, of using the trash and wreckage of the consumptive world to create things that bring life and beauty. We must keep dreaming of alternative structures, such as new ways of sharing medical expenses and accident costs so that those things which are at least inconsistent and at most heretical to the Gospel (such as insurance and savings ac-

counts) become superfluous and fade into nonexistence as we usher in the reign of God.

*Shane Claiborne*

*We are always involved in a dia-*

## ***Some of our “proverbs” that re- late to our money***

*logue as we build a system of trusting relationships in which we can live a life of safety and daring. What follows are a few of the proverbs we have decided to collect over the years that say something about how we handle our money. Do you still think that are worth keeping as statements to guide our common life? If not, let's delete them, or tell the truth better as we reposition ourselves this fall and draw a new map to where God is leading.*

- **We share our resources of time, money and love person to person, with the leaders, between congregations.**
- **All our money belongs to God; the percentage we share in our Common Fund reflects our mutual commitment to be an authentic church.**
- **As part of our obligation to mutually share resources with the poor and lost, we invest at least 20% of our Common Fund income in causes beyond the basic operation of our church.**
- **In an individualistic age, being the church is a counter-cultural statement.**
- **We express justice by sharing what God has given us with the poor and oppressed.**
- **We are obliged to speak out against unjust laws and practices that oppress people and ruin creation.**
- **We do not generally hand out resources; we extend a resourceful hand.**

## Goal Check 2000-2001 *3rd Quarter, March-June*

**T**his is a regular feature of this letter. It's hard to dialogue without the facts! We adopted these goals in September of 2000. Every quarter we pray that you are interested enough to consider how we are doing (A copy of our 2000-2001 Strategy is available).

### Network Goals

- Make this ministry year the year of evangelism, in which we discover, develop and use our mission gifts as a people so that at the end of the year we can look back and see that over a dozen people have come to faith in Jesus through our ministry.

*Great growth in the character of people, great attempts to reach out. We aren't really meeting this goal, however.*

- Multiply all cells at least once.  
*We ended September with 11 cells. We have added and subtracted, but we still have 17.*

- Plant Circle of Hope Northeast.  
*It is going. It has expanded from its humble beginnings and found some new vision.*

- Focus Circle Venture on doable projects, especially the founding of our Computer Training Center, the farming of our Resource List, and the development of our Compassion Fund distribution.

*Chris Petersen has been leading us in the first of these elements, especially. His term with MCC will be up in October and changes need to be made for him to continue.*

- Create and use an "equipping track" through which we unleash our gifted teachers and supplement the discipling efforts of our cells.

*Center City has been leading the network in this with their experiments with post-PM teaching times.*

- Hire a part-time Partner for Development who will work with the pastors to perfect our communications and organization as a network.

*We are delighted with Rebekah Edwardson's work as Network Assistant. Devin Greenwood has been serving as Network Public Meeting Facilitator.*

- Communicate who we are and how live with greater clarity through our publications, web page and meetings.

*Our website continues to improve. Our publications are much improved and organized.*

### Congregational Goals

#### Center City

- Strategically map out how we will reach out to Center City and work our plan.

*We did some productive praying through the streets last quarter.*

- Develop our expression of art, especially working to unleash a mission team devoted to concert artists and an arts cooperative devoted to visual artists.

*We made plans for a summer art/music series and won a \$1000 grant for it.*

- Grow to 200 in public meeting attendance.

*Our numbers came up a little when we returned to 239.*

- Expand our expression of prayer.  
*No further notable progress after a great first half.*

- Solve our need to move into a larger location.

*We especially worked on 11th and Ludlow. We had a great victory after Paul's sound wall worked so we could enjoy 239.*

- Discover how we can best serve our new neighborhood, preserving our both/and nature as a regional church also devoted to ministry in our neighborhood.

*No particular efforts have been made.*

- Receive at least \$110,000 for our Common Fund.

*From April to June we had 78 givers of record — the most ever. We received \$22,275, which is \$5000 under our budget. The \$10,024 given, so far, for the 20K campaign helps make up for that.*

#### Northwest

- Execute the re-launching plan of the Northwest congregation culminating with a Fall Grand Opening

*The marriage between New Dimensions and Circle Northwest accomplishes this goal.*

- Explore various venues of prayer incorporation to body life.

*There was one prayer service held in Vernon Park in June. In addition New Dimensions and Circle gathered for prayer once at Mike Major's house and a second time at the NW building to pray about key characteristics and attributes that will be needed to make the marriage a success.*

- Attain 30 covenant members or more (around 17 new members)

*One covenant member associated with the Northwest was added this quarter.*

- Develop a multi-ethnic worship team

that creates culturally relevant worship set for the people of the Next Generation of Northwest Philadelphia.

*Brenda Robinson (African-American) and Jerry Macolino (Anglo-American) are both active participants in the leading of worship.*

- Cultivate relationships with youth and college aged individuals through cell groups and various outreach activities.

*The relationship with Brotherly Love continues as the sole effort in this area.*

- Increase visibility within the Northwest region.

*The Circle Venture benefit, prayer in the park, concert series plans all helped with this.*

- Continue renovation and maintenance of Northwest building.

*Chris Petersen was a big help in organizing painting projects and improving the computer center.*

- Receive at least \$30,000 for our Common Fund.

*From October to March we received \$10,500 in contributions and rent. At that rate we would miss the goal by \$9000.*

#### Northeast

- Maintain an intercessory prayer team for our church planting efforts.

*This has been done, by email.*

- Recruit and train a formation team.

*This is reforming.*

- Offer partnership to people in the Northeast region by building new relationships and by networking with established relationships.

*Tim has painstakingly worked on this.*

- Build at least four cells.

*One has been formed.*

- Rent an affordable place for public meeting and office space.

*The first public meeting was held at Emmanuel Episcopal Church.*

- Purchase sound and visual equipment, plus other meeting space needs.

*This was accomplished.*

- Plan and hold first public meeting in February of 2001.

*The first meeting was held on March 18.*

- Gather 50 plus regular attenders.

*This has not been met.*

- Develop a high quality worship team.

*Volunteers have helped week by week.*

- Locate a person to do multimedia work for public meetings.

*Ed Jeffcoat has done what has been done.*

- Continue to build a business to supplement startup costs

*Thoughts are at work.*

- Receive at least \$15,000 for our Common Fund.

*\$4635 was received from October to March. That would leave us \$5370 short of our goal.*