
Dialogue

Volume 3 Issue 4 *Strength for the church's journey into wholeness in Christ* October 2001

The subject: *Living in the U.S.A. as a Christian.*

This issue expands on a few of our Circle of Hope "proverbs." Why don't you read through them and see if you think we are on to something:

- The skepticism of others is warranted if our message does not originate from a community that demonstrates the love of Christ.
- In an individualistic age, being the church is a counter-cultural statement.
- The church exists for those yet to join.
- "Friendship evangelism" is one way to describe our deliberate attempts to make disciples. Our main method is "incarnational," so we accept that what we do will never be instant.
- Life in Christ is one whole cloth. As we participate in and love "the world," we bring redemption from the Kingdom of God to our society. Jesus is Lord of all, so we have repented of separating "sacred" and "secular."
- Any believer who is not doing their part in the "family business" of redeeming the world, is missing the point of their ongoing existence.
- We are "world Christians," members of the transnational body of Christ, concerned with every person we can touch with truth and love.
- Those among us from "traditional" Christian backgrounds are dying to our precious memories of "church" in order to bring the gospel into the present with great flexibility.
- We intend to keep all the great things God has given through the church of the past and be totally at home in our own time, ready and able to relate to the people of our day.
- We stretch ourselves to worship with diverse styles. God is transnational, transcultural, even transhistorical.

As a church, we have a lively interest in relating to EVERYONE with love, truth and respect. Sometimes that probably seems a little grandiose to people who are getting to know us (and getting to know how incomplete we

are!). We look quixotic as well as our usual chaotic.

So, predictably, this issue has a lot of tilting at windmills in it as we take on the big issues of *how Christians relate to this passing-away world as people rescued from it and sent back with a message of reconciliation.*

Tim helps us consider how to throw a wrench in the culture's consumerism machine. Anna humorously muses about what it is like to enter the *Philly culture* (most of us reading this are probably not native born, ourselves!). Sheldon cautions us about mindlessly giving into techno-culture. Clinton gives food for thought on how to help people think with us about Jesus when the culture has given up on truth. Ryan encourages us think again about how to stay out of a subculture and influence the world around us — the catchword is SOWING.

We could be talking about the heady subject of "*Christ and culture.*" That's been done well, a lot. As fits us better, we are talking about "**What are WE going to do to love people we know around here and tell them the truth? Do we understand ANYTHING? ARE OUR HEADS ON STRAIGHT?**"

Ed. — Rod White

AntiCulture

Have you ever listened to a song (or read a book or watched a movie) that had such a major impact on you that you knew your life would never be the same? I had that kind of experience during the summer. It came as I read a book called Culture Jam by Kalle Lasn. "In the book, Kalle Lasn, editor of *Adbusters* magazine, argues that America is no longer a country, but a multitrillion-dollar brand. America™ no different from McDonald's, Marlboro or General Motors. It's an image "sold" not only to the citizens of the U.S.A., but to consumers worldwide." Lasn's magazine, his website (www.adbusters.org) and the groups they spawn are trying to



throw a monkey wrench into the corporate system with the hope of returning to a simpler way of life. All of this got me thinking about our roles as Christ followers in relationship to the culture around us. Kalle has awakened in me a revolutionary spirit!

As Church Planter I have struggled to create a church in the Northeast region of the city. I can identify many reasons for this struggle, but the one I want to discuss relates to the themes of Christ and Culture. Circle of Hope Northeast struggles because we are offering something that goes against the grain of what people know as church. Christians in the Northeast are knee-deep in a consumer mentality. They come with the mentality: "What can I get from this church with the least amount of commitment?" I hold a similar thesis as Kalle, but in relationship to the church. I believe that the church in America is no longer the church, but some kind of trademark or brand. At times I have a hard time even calling it the church.

Now I hope you find yourself somewhat troubled by Kalle's argument: that maybe America is no longer a country at all. I hope you take it seriously enough to dialogue about it. Be disturbed by it! Wrestle with it! But that should pale in comparison to the idea that I mention today. You should be appalled with the fact that maybe, just maybe, the church is no longer the church in America. If there are great numbers of people in our city who come with a consumer mentality to church that should cause your heart to melt with a Jesus-like sadness, similar

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to the moment he wept over Jerusalem. It is not the way the church is meant to be.

But wait it gets worse. Even the people who are not Christ followers are educated by this way of thinking. When I tell unbelievers that I am not a religious man, but a Christ follower, I usually see an initial twinkle in their eye. It is almost as if I can see them thinking, "maybe there is something to this Jesus guy after all." I see the wall go down for just a moment. Then as quickly as it went down, it goes back up. In my discussions with unbelievers, I get the impression that they think this language is just another sales pitch to get them involved in yet another traditional church. You see? They have been educated by the church on how to think about church. There is, however, some hope here. They're not buying it! They refuse to come to the church as a consumer. In a weird irony, they may end up being better believers than those who call themselves Christians.

With all of that said, there remains the question of what we should do as Christians in our consumer oriented culture and churches. I think we should do something very similar to what Kalle and Adbusters are doing – we need to jam the culture, especially the American Christian Culture. We need to throw a monkey wrench into the whole system. I have a friend who is an expert on systems and he is always quick to observe that you can pull out any element of a system, point to the problem it has, and know without a shadow of a doubt that the whole system has the same problem. In simple terms, a system is made up of single components or, for the purposes of our dialogue, a church is made up of individuals. You can throw a monkey wrench into the whole system by first throwing the wrench into your own life.

In what ways do you come to Circle of Hope with the mentality that the church exists for your consumption? In what small ways can you begin to reverse that type of thinking? In what areas can you become more servant-like, Christ-like? Remember these things begin one step at a time, not by getting depressed as you think about the whole journey ahead of you. Remember to be as gracious to

yourself as Christ is. He understands that you live in a society that bombards you with consumption.

Kalle talks much about the dangers of TV in his book. After reading the book, I determined that I would turn off my TV forever. Now if you were to come into my house today you would notice that I watch as much TV as I used to. The revolution didn't succeed in my own life. I am a revolutionary failure. At this point, I want to comment briefly on the revolutionary spirit. This is where I verge from Kalle's thinking and find myself aligning more with Naomi Klein who wrote a book called No Logo ([http://](http://www.fastcompany.com/online/38/nklein.html)

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www.fastcompany.com/online/38/nklein.html). Her book is very similar to Kalle's as it denounces the effects of consumerism on our culture. But she does it with a humble twist. She challenges the system by acknowledging that she struggles with consumerism as much as anyone else. "I have a weakness for all things pop culture," Klein admits. "I still watch way too much junk TV. My favorite show is *The Daily Show*, and I'm a little obsessed with *The West Wing*. I love action movies." In the end, I think Naomi will succeed more than Kalle because she shares the same weakness as those she critiques. The problem with the revolutionary spirit is that it just doesn't produce lasting change. Revolutionaries often sit above the people they are critiquing with a sense of judgment and pride. Jesus, however, came not to condemn, but to save. His salvation came through incarnation.

And so it seems the best way for us to do AntiCulture is by investing ourselves in the very culture we critique and by committing ourselves to an American Church plagued with con-

sumerism. I am not exactly sure what that looks like, but I know it is worthy of our dialogue. I look forward to discovering the answer together. Allow me to end with a comment to the revolutionaries and activists in our midst. We need you! You serve a purpose similar to Kalle – you are radical enough to open our eyes to new realities. Sometimes you have to do that by hitting us over the head with a 2 X 4, metaphorically speaking. But after that is done, I really would like to invite you to join us in the struggle. If you look hard at Jesus' ministry, then you will realize that he almost completely ignores the revolutionaries in his midst. He just won't be deterred from his mission of suffering in the midst of hu-

A Newbie In Philly

man frailties, sin, and weakness. And neither should we.

Tim Bathurst

¹No Brands Land in Fast Company Magazine, September 2000.

As a Southern California native, deciding to move to Philadelphia in 1999 was a huge leap geographically and a drastic change in my day-to-day existence. San Diego and Philadelphia

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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.

couldn't be two more opposite cities. They are foreign to each other in every way. In the initial weeks of living on the East Coast, I felt like a guinea pig in a science experiment where a scientist would determine whether or not the two locales could collide and be embodied in the life of Anna. Wasn't there a Philly 101 class that I could enroll in to make sense of this new culture that surrounded me? Not only was this move radical for me, but it also came as a shock to many that I met — "Why in the world would you leave San Diego, California, the most temperate, sought-after place to live, with sunny skies, beautiful beaches, fish tacos, Bay-watch, etc., and move to dirty old Philly?" — was the most common question I received when I first got into town. As I first got my bearings in the City of Brotherly Love, I felt like Dorothy in Oz, knowing that I definitely wasn't in Kansas anymore. Revelation set in...

I will frequent a store called WaWa.

Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that I would shop at a store with such a silly name and continually use this store without chuckling to myself by the pronunciation of the establishment.

Old stuff. Doing a menial task, like buying Q-tips, takes twice as long to do in Philadelphia as it does in California. Reason being: in California everything is new (which equates with boring) and in Philadelphia everything is old (which equates to fascinating, that is, if you are a wannabe historian like I am). So, of course, I have to read every one of those blue historical signs that I pass on the way to my local CVS. I confess, I am one of those slow, annoying people on the sidewalk that amble aimlessly, staring at the architecture in awe, bumping into people who are in a hurry, who demonstrate no appreciation for their surroundings (and should be arrested for sidewalk speeding, if you ask me). Thus, running errands takes a long time due to Philadelphia's vast history, or perhaps due to an over zealous sign guy who has to mark every last thing that happened here.

Just say no to flip-flops and say yes to bulky, oversized, fleece laden, preferably wool clothing.

Sadly, I can no longer wear flip-flops 365 days out of the year anymore. And, I realized that winter coats were not designed to be a fashion statement. They were designed out of "necessity." Both of these facts are problematic when one looks into her closet and sees 15 pairs of sandals and not a single warm coat, nor gloves, nor scarf, nor winter hat. Obviously, my sum-

mer to winter clothing ratio is slightly more balanced now.

Mexican food, you call this Mexican food? 24 hour a day, 7 day a week, honest to goodness Mexican restaurants that will allow me to get my late night burrito or quesadilla fix do not exist here. And don't tell me to just go to Taco Bell — because that is not Mexican food nor could it ever be compared to the ranks of Albertos, Don Pablo's, Rigabertos, Manuel's, El Pollo Loco, etc. that are on every street corner in Southern California stretching from the Tijuana border to East Los Angeles. Sometimes I dream that Circle of Hope will open a Mexican food restaurant in our new space someday. Heck,

we have Juanita and Gwen among our ranks, who can make incredible salsa and enchiladas respectively. I'm all for bringing people to Christ through Mexican food — the people of Philadelphia have been deprived long enough.

I will appreciate grease. That's essentially what a cheese steak is right? Cheese steaks, hoagies, along with droopy pizza that you must fold in half to eat will all be new experiences for me. And, buying these items from a man in a little truck on a street corner is also novelty unto itself — how does one little truck produce so many savory and varied entrees? Honestly, I do love how truly anti-non-fat Philadelphia is as opposed to Southern California. Tasty Kakes truly take the cake over barley shakes, foie grass and the many forms of tofu that seem to be popping up on every menu in San Diego.

I will learn how to walk. Being permanently glued to my car seat while in Southern California, and not having a car here in Philadelphia has been one of the welcomed differences. It is a pleasure to know that I will not be stuck traffic half my life anymore. Instead it will just be spent waiting for SEPTA or walking of course.

Euro skin — sun = gray skin. I will no longer wear a summer tan in the winter months of November, December, January, and February. Instead I

will realize that human skin has a multitude of colors and shades that I was never aware of. My favorite is the pasty grayish white that hits around January 27th.

West Side vs. East Side. Proudly, I break down the West Coast stereotype that "All east coasters are impatient, blunt and rude." I just refer to it as

But, we all are able to see eye to eye in this place through Jesus Christ — thanks to his boundless grace and overarching love that transcends culture or geography. God is present in this city. He's bigger than our differences. In fact, he delights in them.

"honesty." Actually, I have come to love the grit of this city, it's people, its neighborhoods and it's very unique "Philly" attitude. Sometime we butt heads, but for the most part I just grin and go with the flow, after all I am from San Diego.

Understanding this city and all it's anomalies has been interesting to say the least. But

clothing preferences, food, horn honking, and accents aside, Philadelphia came to be home for me because I discovered the body of Christ in this place. I was blessed to find a Christian community that is passionate about living an honest urban faith life, who seek to know Christ in the deepest way imaginable, who choose to be enriched in God's love, and are excited to be His children right here and right now. We each have our own individual stories, our place of origin, and cultures that we cherish. But, we all are able to see eye to eye in this place through Jesus Christ — thanks to his boundless grace and overarching love that transcends culture or geography. God is present in this city. He's bigger than our differences. In fact, he delights in them. He celebrates our roots, our various styles, and the many places from which they come — east or west, north or south. I feel His Holy Spirit. And, I feel compelled to say that I feel it largely because of this city in particular. The bleakness of Philadelphia, or "complexity" as I prefer to look at it, avails itself to these ends. In California you're too worried about your tan.

Anna Mulgrew

Questioning Technology

Recently, I saw in Newsweek that they've come out with "disposable cell phones". So now we can all learn to discard our phone as unthinkingly as we have our used-up phone cards. We should all buy these now, not because we really need them, but because they are possible. It's moments like this when the absurdity of modern life really hits me. But don't worry, we'll get used to this latest technology, just like we have for all the others.

In the past few years, I've begun asking myself questions concerning my use of *technology* that don't have easy answers. Please keep in mind that by my use of the word "technology" in this article, I confess I'm mainly referring to that particularly obnoxious kind, constantly advertised on TV and billboards, promising a better, easier, more comfortable life if only you will purchase the newest, silvery, techno-gadgetry available on the market. We've all seen them. They're unavoidable, urging us to "Get connected", with the implication that if you aren't as "connected" as the latest technology makes possible, then you are doomed to be irrelevant, forgotten, virtually non-existent in our society. We, as Americans, are particularly susceptible to this "cult of the new", and I am not the least lured. But I'm reaching my limit. I'm not alone, am I? Haven't most of us, at one time or another, had the feeling that our life is being overrun by a constant deluge of pointless technological devices and services, that too much technology is infringing and cluttering up our life, our time, our relationships, and our peace of

mind?

Now, if I'm not careful, I could easily launch into any number of weary rants about the dangers and costs of increasing technology in our lives. But I can't. I don't have the space. Suffice it to say for now that the case can certainly be made on many fronts: cultural, environmental, and economic, among others.

This issue is obviously too huge to be dealt with in any depth at all in a short article like this. It's also too huge, I think, to not start addressing it more effectively as a church community in group discussions and teaching. The negative effects of technology in our culture are unavoidable and do have a major and lasting impact on our culture, our environment, and our economy. In addition to common sense alone telling us that we should be concerned for these

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things, I also believe scripture makes it clear that these are things God is concerned with. I submit that if the church is going to serve a prophetic purpose in society and not just blindly follow where the market leads, and if God wants us to love justice, to consider the plight of the poor, and to value and care for His creation, then we should be looking more closely at the effects of increasing technology in our lives and asking ourselves some tough questions as to how and if we should be participating in it. If you don't know where to start in asking the questions, or if even questioning technology seems absurd or a bit off the deep end (after all, it does a lot of good in the world, too!), then let's talk. And also, let's read. The books listed at the end of this article may be a good place to start. They may challenge your thinking like they did mine. Of course, I'm missing some good ones, but these are just a few of which I'm aware.

It is a complicated thing to recon-

cile our participation in modern culture with our life in Christ. And sometimes there may be no way to reconcile the two. It takes wisdom to work through these questions, wisdom that I don't think any of us has alone, which is one reason I need to be asking them in the context of a trusted community.

Recommended Books:

"The Technological Society" by

The Truth Question

Jaques Ellul,

"Technopoly" by Neil Postman,

"What Are People For?" by Wendell Berry.

Sheldon Esch

Perhaps the most important thing about truth, ironically, is how people feel about it. Jesus promised that the truth would set us free (Jn. 8:32), but most of our culture is running in exactly the opposite direction. If one thing is true, it is that people tend to recognize that if absolute truth exists, they are somehow accountable to it. Therefore, many are drawn to alternative theories of truth in the hope that absolute truth does not exist.

Not long ago a friend and I engaged a religious leader who argued that even Adolf Hitler had done some good things for Germany during his violent dictatorship. Later, the same friend had a conversation with a "feminist" who argued vehemently in support of the right of a culture to practice any form of behavior its people choose, even if this includes rape. Both were arguing for relative truth. The religious leader had wanted to evade Christ's exclusive claim as "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." The feminist wanted to avoid the possibility of any inflexible standard against which abortion might be judged.

Rather than simply rejecting the content of Christ's message, our culture has made it appear sophisticated to avoid even having to ask whether that message is true — "Only the narrow-minded believe their truth is absolute." In reality, if truth is relative, then one has saved the difficulty of weighing facts or thinking hard about sensitive issues and contrary points of view. So before followers of Christ can even discuss the facts of Christ's life and teaching with people, we often need to tackle the problem of

truth. This is not such a bad thing. Many people are much happier to discuss intellectual issues than religion. Few fail to recognize that if truth really is absolute, then it has significant implications for spiritual matters. Fail to do this, and you may experience a non-Christian friend or acquaintance willingly agree that the evidence for following Christ is persuasive, but simply doesn't apply to them—since truth is relative.

In the field of philosophy, there are three theories of truth: the pragmatic theory, the coherence theory, and the correspondence theory. The first two are non-absolute theories of truth. They are also self-refuting. The pragmatic theory is very recent and is attributed to the contemporary American philosopher Richard Rorty. It's usefulness has applied mainly to scientific theories. If a theory worked, this would be enough to merit saying it was true, even if scientists believed it might be overturned at some point in the future. So, one could say that Newton's theory of the universe was true until Albert Einstein introduced Relativity. However, most people would recognize that the problem with Newtonian mechanics was that, in fact, it wasn't entirely true. Rather, it was a good approximation.

The problem gets worse when one tries to apply the pragmatic theory outside of science—say, to history. For example, propaganda like that produced by the holocaust deniers might some day work to convince people that such atrocities never occurred. It might even serve humanity by making us feel better about ourselves, whether Gentile or Jew. However, something that we know to be false does not become "true" simply through utility. For these and similar reasons the pragmatic theory has little standing among philosophers studying truth.

The two major contenders preeminence in the theory of truth are the coherence and correspondence theories. The coherence theory is also historically recent. It arose after David Hume and Immanuel Kant produced skepticism in the late eighteenth century about the ability of human beings to accurately know reality. The result was a view of truth where a statement is considered true if it does not contradict any other component within a person's web of belief. For example, the statement that God does not exist is true for the atheist, since it forms a coherent part of the atheist's belief system. However, the same statement is false for the theist, since the person who believes in God has a belief system whereby God's

existence fits coherently. This is often referred to as the "both and" theory. By it both a thing and it's opposite can be true at the same time (although not true at the same time in the mind of the same individual). The coherence theory is the theory of relative truth: a statement is true relative to one's web of belief. We will look at problems with this theory in a moment.

The correspondence theory is the oldest. Its first articulation is attributed to the Greek philosopher Plato, who lived between 428 and 348 BC. Here, a statement is true only if it corresponds to reality. The theory was elaborated by Plato's student, Aristotle (384-322 BC). Aristotle added what is known as the "law of non-contradiction." In other words, a statement and its contradiction cannot both be true. For example, it cannot be true that you are both here reading this essay at this moment at time and not here, not reading this essay at this moment in time. God either exists or does not. Both cannot be true at the same time. The Harvard philosopher Josiah Royce once summed it up with the statement, "There is error." No possible refutation can be made of this simple three-word sentence. In the correspondence

theory, a statement is false if it contradicts any fact of reality, known or still to be discovered. The theory is often known as the "either/or" theory. It is the opposite of the "both and" theory.

Objections to the theory of absolute truth are often made in favor of relative and pragmatic truth. They tend to consist of misrepresentations, and it is good to be familiar with them in advance. Occasionally a person will point out statements that could be true or false. For example, "George Bush is President." If one means George, Sr., at the present time, then this is false. If one means George "W," then this is true. If one was making the statement in 1996, then it is false again. The issue here is that statements are always true or false relative to context. Meaning, however, is not. Presumably the speaker would have intended the

meaning to be understood within the context of "George W., post-inauguration, 2001."

Another mistake is to characterize absolute truth as comprehensive truth. A friend recently suggested to me that a statement regarding a conversation we had had was not "absolutely true" because in it I failed to mention the presence of some flies that might have been buzzing around the porch of a nearby Victorian mansion. This is a common type of objection. If one defines the word *absolute* in this manner, then my friend is right. However, this is not what philosophers are arguing about when they debate truth theories. By my friend's criteria only a statement that included all the knowledge in the universe would be considered absolutely true. The question is whether finite statements employed by human beings can be true for all times and places.

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The relative merits of the coherence and correspondence theories have been illustrated in a story told by the author and lecturer Ravi Zacharias. After a talk, Zacharias was approached by a philosophy professor who challenged his rejection of the "both/and" theory, since it was closer to his

Eastern roots and to Hinduism. The two agreed to have lunch, during which the professor put together a detailed argument for the coherence theory. When he finished, Zacharias replied, "So what you are saying is that either I accept the 'both and' or the 'either/or,' but not both?" The professor replied, "The 'either/or' does seem to emerge, doesn't it." Zacharias then added, "Even in India we look both ways before we cross the street, because it is either you *or* the bus, not both and."

The law of non-contradiction is a *necessary* truth: any truth claim implicitly relies on it; even the coherence and pragmatic theories do. All human knowledge relies on the law of non-contradiction, and even God employs

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it implicitly in His self-revelation. The foremost example would be around the year 1445 BC, well in advance of Plato, when God speaks to Moses saying, “I AM”—as opposed to, “I AM NOT” (Exodus 3:14).

By laying the groundwork of what truth is we can avoid a paradox of our postmodern culture I once encountered with a friend. He seemed very open to hearing about my experiences as a Christian and some of the evidence for following Christ, but as it turned out he failed to see the application to his own life—since truth was relative. Tackling the truth question can be a first step in helping friends and acquaint-

Book Review on Finding Com- mon Ground

ances open a door to salvation through repentance and an authentic relationship with Christ.

Clinton Ohlers

Possibly one of the most insightful prophets of our day, Tim Downs, assesses the need to rethink our role as spiritual gardeners in our culture, and the necessity to develop our “art” in gardening. His book, “Finding Common Ground,” falls in second place to the Bible when it comes to discovering the hope and urgency in communicating with the non-Christian world.

“Many of our modern church and evangelistic movements were founded during a time when the American fields were abundantly white for harvest. Over the last forty (some argue twenty) years, many parachurch organizations and churches have struggled with a thinning harvest in America.” It’s obvious Christianity no longer holds the “most favored religion” status in America. Sowers need to slowly and thoroughly undo the “structural unbelief” embedded in our culture.

Tim Downs also recommends that we recognize the distinction between a grain harvest (where we sweep through the field and scoop up everything in order to winnow out the grain) and a fruit harvest, where we carefully pick the fruit and leave the vines or trees intact for future years. He points out that not enough Christians are enrolling in film schools, graduate schools, law school, educational careers or specific training to sow for the long term impact in our world. We all must learn to

effectively communicate on a thousand topics of interest to unbelievers with our faith “hidden,” in the art. Tim Down defines this as intentional “indirect communication” (the same technique the media uses to make us better consumers).

We need to be honest with ourselves and find out what barriers there are between us and sharing our faith. Personally, I’m so caught up in the fast pace of life that I make little time to go below the surface in my friendships. As a believer, I seriously need to check my transient lifestyle of moving around and bouncing from relationship to relationship. I’m slowly learning that the quality of our friendships reflects on the quality of God’s kingdom we’re building into them. That also means committing to living in the same place geographically, so people can reach you when they need you (and friends really do need each other!) Even the basic motivation to share my faith really needs to be checked. Sometimes it’s by guilt, sometimes it’s just because I think God commands it and I don’t want to disappoint him (or look like a unproductive Christian to others). How can we challenge each other to go beyond that level? In a sense, we need to be comfortable with ourselves before we can comfortably sow in the lives of others. Someone once pointed out we need to ask ourselves, “who is sowing in me?”

Also, most folk are very likely to get in a conversation and just argue someone’s belief system till they’ve got all their theological and intellectual ducks in a row. I’m not busting on apologetics, but at the same time, I think Jesus showed us that what people claim to believe doesn’t usually equate with who they really are. That’s the place where we need to take our friendships...beyond the bubblegum to the real meat (with out giving the false appearance that we’re “deep”). Tim Downs is into really good questions, both to start conversation and get at the heart of where our hearts are. In developing our own stock of good questions, it would be really cool to brainstorm with someone else.

One question I’ve been wrestling with is this question: As a local, city-wide, and global church, are we unified with our different roles as sowers and harvesters, summoned to working side by side on God’s field? Can evangelicals, mega churches, house churches, campus organizations, cell groups, social action groups and music ministries be more effective in farming and cultivating this land? One of my spiritual fathers once told me that though it’s nearly impossible to network with other groups on “outreach” events, there always seems to be an open door for networking with other churches or groups in ministry training and equipping. Are our churches ready (and willing) to train alongside other churches with personalities and agendas that don’t exactly look like are own?

For Reflection:

Sowers need to also learn how to harvest, too. We need to push our interactions with people in our jobs and lives to a deeper level. As the body of Christ, how good are we at keeping one another accountable on the quality of our interpersonal relationships? Is that a major focus of our church, and do we all have someone in our lives that challenges us in that area

It’s obvious Christianity no longer holds the “most favored religion” status in America. Sowers need to slowly and thoroughly undo the “structural unbelief” embedded in our culture.

(and someone we are challenging)?

What if one of our cells made a joint effort to work with a small non-Christian organization (or college organization) on a small service project or activity to create dialogue?

What newsletters, films, and books

are our churches producing that we’d feel comfortable giving to our non-Christian friends?

Do our churches have a library or list of movies and sowing books that we could use in movie nights or cell groups to initiate discussion? (my new favorites are “The Big Kahuna” and “Pay it Forward”).

Are our churches and organizations continuing their education on Islam, new Age philosophies, postmodern thought and newly emerging competing world-views?

Ryan Bowers

Responses to the Last Dialogue

Anger, Greed, Prayer

Chris Petersen

Many of us have been thinking about the causes of war for the past month or so. It's nothing new to Christians that the causes lie in none other than the human heart. From Osama bin Laden in the secluded hills of Afghanistan to George Bush in the White House, human hearts are filled with greed and anger; love and forgiveness. We pray for the latter two to take hold in these tenuous times.

My friends Liz and Pam recently gave me and a few others the "Vow of Nonviolence" during their teaching on politics and the Bible after the Sunday PM in Center City. One of the several commitments I am trying to make for one year is:

Before God the Creator and the Sanctifying Spirit, I vow to carry out in my life the love and example of Jesus....by actively resisting evil and working nonviolently to abolish war and the causes of war from my own heart and from the face of the earth.

I have never been much of a political activist, yet I am beginning to face the causes of war in my own heart. This very personal and interior journey is conceiving in me a desire to be more of an activist in the tradition of the mystics. Here is a bit of my story.

My hero in the peace movement dates to the 13th Century. Francis of Assisi used to call upon his Brother Leo to remind him of the worm he was. He would demand that Leo trample upon his pride—and sometimes his body—by telling him that he was the worst of sinners. Leo would try to do this and then refuse, but much to his chagrin Francis would persuade him to go ahead. I'm not sure how our psychoanalyst friends would handle this. For Francis however, this was simply another reminder of God's goodness and the depth of his love. Francis is always reminding me of the evil that can dwell in our hearts—and the extent to which that evil can be taken. We not only saw evidence of that on September 11th. We have seen it in our own nation's foreign policy towards Iraq, Columbia and Afghanistan as

we arm and train military leaders and groups, and bomb civilians. We have found our new enemy in bin Laden, yet failed to see ourselves as the enemy of others and even ourselves.

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. (I Corinthians 13.11) What a revelation this has been for me in the past year. I love my two children. They are not grown up, though. They still want their own way, act out of fear and are insecure about what I see as insignificant things. I have found I carry much of the same in my own heart.

Thomas Keating writes about our early years being filled with a constant striving to get our needs met: security and survival, affection and esteem, power and control. He describes the process of growing up, not getting these needs met, and not learning how to trust God with them. The result is an adult who is constantly seeking those things for him or herself. I'm 35 and glimpses into my unconscious tell me that I spend a great deal of time maneuvering my way through life trying to get these needs met. It has meant quite a bit of disaster for me.

I mentioned earlier anger and greed as the great enemies of the spiritual life. That's from one of my spiritual directors in absentia, Henri Nouwen. He speaks of war being the result of impure hearts that have simply not spent enough time in solitude. Solitude is a frightening thing. Remember the film *Cast Away*? Tom Hanks is stranded on a desert island and soon all his fears—conscious and unconscious—surround him. He has nowhere to go and no one to call upon. The camera closes in on his face. He is terrified. We know there is nothing to be afraid of on the island—no carnivorous animals or people, no monsters. However, his own monsters overcome him and it leave him paralyzed in fear. Have you ever felt like that? I did just the other day. My fears often get the best of me; and when I act out of them, anger, greed, manipulation and control are the results. I wonder if our political leaders undergo the same trials?

Faith can lead us in a new direction, though. By faith we can go off to the lonely place and listen. When we find the lonely place away from others and the dire pressures of our lives, we can start to hear the comforting, healing, in-

spiring words of God. Plus, we can start to develop the practice of finding the place in our hearts where Christ himself dwells. Prayer without ceasing then becomes possible.

This is certainly an abbreviation of the process through the wilderness of loneliness to the garden of solitude. When I went on retreat several months ago with John Michael Talbot and he taught the group a method of breath prayer, he said that daily practice for 20 minutes over a three month period would result in us beginning to hear the voice of Christ. I wondered if I had three months in me. I am beginning to see that I do have the strength to keep in the discipline.

This twenty minutes a day twice a day has been a great place for me to start. I listen to God's workings in me and listen to his word in the Bible. I try to let him direct my prayers. You might want to check out websites for the *Center for Action and Contemplation* and *Contemplative Outreach* for some more specific guidelines; or talk to me and I'll copy materials I have.

I am certain that the peace movement begins in our hearts. As we organize and mobilize for peace, let us commit to nonviolence in our quest for justice. Let us learn to always act in kindness and joy even when our demands are not met and our rights are trampled. As we die in this way, may we rejoice that death is our sister, consoling us until we are born into new life eternal.

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meeting in the Fall. We started this new Public Meeting on October 14, 2001.

- Gather 50 plus regular attenders.

This has not been met.

- Develop a high quality worship team.

A worship team is beginning to develop among our new core team.

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

Tim Anderson is willing to help in this capacity.

- Continue to build a business to supplement startup costs

Tim has established a Consulting Business, which helps non-profits develop funding. He is presently serving clients in the Frankford area.

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

From October 2001 through September 2001 Northeast received \$12,116.25.

Final Goal Check 2000-2001

This is a regular feature of this letter. We want everyone to have some facts so we can have authentic dialogue! We adopted these goals in September of 2000. Every quarter we have evaluated our progress toward meeting them. Now it is time to celebrate our successes, admit our failures and move on. (2001-2002 Congregation Goals are on the runway, taking off right now).

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. But we didn't meet this goal.*
- Multiply all cells at least once. *We ended September 2000 with 11 cells. We added and subtracted, and began October 2001 with 19 cells plus three on the way. So we came very close to an ambitious goal!*
- Plant Circle of Hope Northeast. *It has begun and recently found new vision and funding.*
- 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. *Circle Venture, under the direction of Chris Petersen, accomplished the first assignment and made great headway on the latter two.*
- Create and use an "equipping track" through which we unleash our gifted teachers and supplement the discipling efforts of our cells. *Center City lead the network in this with experiments with post-PM teaching times, day retreats and our second network retreat. Cell Leader training also developed. But we did not establish an official "equipping track."*
- Hire a part-time Partner for Development who will work with the pastors to perfect our communications and organization as a network. *Ed Jeffcoat paved the way, as we experimented with a "Partner for Development." We evolved the position into "Network Assis-*

tant" (Rebekah Edwardson) and "Network Public Meeting Facilitator" (Devin Greenwood).

- Communicate who we are and how live with greater clarity through our publications, web page and meetings. *Our website was dramatically improved. Our publications were improved and much better organized.*

Congregational Goals

Center City

- Strategically map out how we will reach out to Center City and work our plan. *We did not accomplish this after some preliminary work.*
- Develop our expression of art, especially working to unleash a mission team devoted to concert artists and an arts cooperative devoted to visual artists. *Temporary teams developed art shows and our first summer concert series.*
- Grow to 200 in public meeting attendance. *We did not accomplish this goal.*
- Expand our expression of prayer. *We definitely did this.*
- Solve our need to move into a larger location. *Although we worked hard on this, we did not accomplish our goal. We explored buying 19th and Montrose and had a few months stay at BFHS. The sound wall helped provide more time after we were served an injunction.*
- 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. *We did not accomplish this goal.*
- Receive at least \$110,000 for our Common Fund. *From October 2000 through September 2001 we had 106 givers of record — the most ever. Without including the last \$2700 of subsidy from the BIC for Center City in 2000, we received \$92,613.71.*

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 200 through September 2001 Northwest received \$29,749.36 in contributions and rents.*

Northeast

- Maintain an intercessory prayer team for our church planting efforts. *This has been done, by email. Circle of Hope Northeast has an intercessory team of approximately 160 people who pray for our ministry on a regular basis.*
- Recruit and train a formation team. *We have a new team up and running since May 2001.*
- Offer partnership to people in the Northeast region by building new relationships and by networking with established relationships. *Tim continues to work on this.*
- Build at least four cells. *We presently have three cells in place with the possibility of one beginning shortly.*
- Rent an affordable place for public meeting and office space. *We are renting space from FrankfordStyle as well as searching for a more permanent location in Frankford.*
- 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. We were unable to obtain a critical mass in our old location in Holmesburg. After retooling our strategy, we set a goal of having a new public*

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