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# Dialogue

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Volume 9 Issue 2

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

July 2008

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## **The subject:** *Organization*

I am constantly surprised when people realize that our network, despite its aesthetic, is organized quite well. Between the cell multiplication plan, the PM plan, budgets, and the blessed Dialogue listserv, as a network, we have a lot of techniques and strategies used to organize data. This issue of the Dialogue asked six writers, How do we want to organize? We learned quickly that that we need to model our organization around Jesus. Nathan took on a challenging prompt: "How might Jesus organize?" His article sets our tone.

Some of us may think of organization as a "necessary evil," a technique only used as a means to an end, for others, organization, in and of itself, is the end. This issue of the Dialogue focuses both of these perspectives.

On one hand, as pioneers for the Kingdom, we have goals to reach. Often to meet these goals we need to be organized. Three writers this issue explain how organization is a means to an end for them. Nate writes about the upcoming NJ plant, Kristen writes about how behind-the-scenes organization helps keep the network going, and Amanda, our resident farmer, tells us how organization maximizes the chance for a fruitful harvest.

In many others cases, the goal of our adventure is organization. Walter teaches us some financial management tips. Chris, explains the details of time management from a parents perspective.

It is challenging to live in this fast-paced city, in this information-obsessed country, and this entire post-modern world without getting exhausted. Perhaps learning how to organize, and learning how to achieve certain goals through this organization is the way we're liberated from the busyness of the contemporary. Perhaps, it is through organization, that we serve God and each other better. Let's find out. —ED.

## **How might Jesus organize?**

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus advises us not to store up treasures on earth, which are temporary and do not last, adding that we cannot serve both God and money. After this he goes into his spiel about not worrying; do not worry about what you will eat or drink, do not worry about what you will wear, do not worry about tomorrow. If we look at any of the gospels this seems to be the underlying mantra of Jesus' teachings and actions: Do not worry, trust in God.

Jesus lives in the moment. He spontaneously heals people who lived



with suffering disabilities for years without the hope of anything different. He forgives their sins, without keeping a record. He goes out into remote places with five thousand men and their families, no way of feeding them, but then demonstrates how God will provide. He pays the temple tax with a coin found in a fish's mouth.

Jesus speaks woe to those who do not trust, relying on their own understanding. He is willing to perform a miracle to show the trustworthiness of God, but he rebukes the Pharisees who ask for a miracle as a sign. Faith leads to miracles and not the other way around. When the disciples argue with each other about whom

among them will be greatest, Jesus cuts them down, saying the least of you is the greatest. When the micro-managing rich young man who thinks he has it all together tries to test his methods against Jesus' teachings, he is told to let go of his control and live a life of greater faith (a paraphrase).

Jesus seems to be telling us to resist planning and organization, that to do so could cost us our souls, the trueness of ourselves. And yet common sense tells us that without organization we will fail in life. As a student of library science I have learned that information is entropic. Libraries exist to organize information using catalogs, indexes, databases, classification systems and controlled vocabularies. Without adhering to these organizational tools, information chaos would ensue and nobody could find the books they wanted.

The same could be said about life. Reality is entropic. If I don't clean my room on a regular basis, piles of clothing, books, CDs, and paperwork develop and soon blend into each other. If I don't balance my checkbook, I won't remember how much money I have and at some point I'll start to write bad checks. If I had kids but I didn't maintain a steady job, then they might go hungry. Or if I couldn't maintain a steady job, but didn't fully utilize the food banks and public assistance available to me, then they still might go hungry.

Organization is a vital part of survival, and even more so in an age of bureaucracy, paperwork, and the Internet that connects us to the world at light speed. Many of us are organizers without even thinking about it. We check our email on a regular basis. We go to college and graduate school and plan for our fu-

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ture. We create Circle Venture Teams to get stuff done that generates compassionate service. All good things, right? So how does all of this organization we do fit into Jesus' teachings about planning? How do we worry not, and trust in the Lord?

Some would argue that when we give into this natural need to organize, we are giving into our sinful human nature, and relying too much on ourselves. And that if we were really living as God intended us to, then we would follow Jesus more literally. Our lives would look more like a content homeless person's, living day to day, unsure of where our next meal is coming from, but free of the meaningless ways of the world, which so many others allow to become the center of their existence. There is something to be said for this philoso-

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phy, and history has demonstrated that some members of God's kingdom play the role of a holy hermit. But it should also be noted that the way Jesus showed us is not completely lacking organization.

It is obvious when looking at Jesus' life that his actions were in fact part of a plan. Prior to his ministry he prepares himself by fasting in the desert, facing his temptations and overcoming them. At the beginning of his ministry, he stands in the synagogue reading, announcing the purpose of his life, to fulfill the prophecies that a savior would come. He organizes a community of disciples around him, each with different backgrounds and abilities to offer to his cause. He even chooses his own betrayer. Long before his death and resurrection he predicts them and explains why they must occur. Before he leaves his followers on earth, he commissions them to continue the work he has begun.

Yes, these and other actions of Jesus

point to a plan, one that goes far beyond his three years of ministry or the thirty three years that his body resided on earth. It is a plan that was revealed thousands of years in advance and continues to be implemented today, thousands of years later. Jesus understands that he is part of a plan that is bigger than his human life. His teaching to us, "Do not worry, trust in God," is meant to point us to that larger plan.

There are also a few parables in which Jesus condones planning. Two such parables are in Matthew 25. In the first ten virgins wait for the bridegroom with lamps to be lit when he arrives, but only half of them have the foresight to bring oil for their lamps. In the second parable, three servants are entrusted with a sum of money, but only the ones who invest the money are looked upon favorably. The meanings of these parables are clear in the context of Jesus' other teachings. God has given us the opportunity to use our gifts and abilities in the kingdom of Heaven. We need to take the opportunity.

We have been created as organizational creatures. As I stated before, it is in our nature to organize in order to survive. However, this aspect of our nature should not be shunned as sinful, but viewed as a gift. As with any gift that God gives us, we can horde it for ourselves, seeking to be the masters of our own destiny, or we can submit it to the Master to further a greater cause. When we do the latter, it is an act of faith, and miracles begin to happen. We no longer need to worry about the outcome of our plans for they are part of something bigger.

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that those who hear his words and put them into practice are like someone who builds a house upon a rock, wisely planning for the storms that are bound to come. When we align our plans with God's we give them a firm foundation that we can be sure of. We can live in the hope that God's plan will work out.

—NATHAN LEONARD

## Confessions from the Pastor's Assistant: How organization is vital to the mission

I have been Rod's assistant for a little over a year now, a covenant member with Circle of Hope for almost 2 years, and a regular attendee for about six and a half years. Prior to becoming the BW pastor's assistant, my work experience was in the fields of children and graphic design, and I never aspired to have an administrative position in an office. But shortly before even knowing the job would be becoming available, I felt confident that I wanted to serve my community in this way and that I could do this job well, and so did a fellow covenant member, mentor, and friend of mine. So when it did become available, I knew that this role was where I would be using my gifts for the next year and a half. This job utilizes my connections to the Circle of Hope community, attention to detail, thorough-

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# Dialogue

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**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 — but we reserve the right to do so.**

ness, ability to multi-task, willingness to be flexible yet at the same time being able to set limits, and openness to serving Jesus through serving the BW pastor, congregation, and the network. In order to really do this job well and do a wide-range of tasks from answering the phone and intercom (sometimes not as simple as it sounds!), to keeping up the database and basic info on the website, to rallying volunteers to help with mailings, I need to have some systems in place. When I began this job, I had literally two hours of training, and few instructions left for me about how to carry out what was expected of me. I generally figured things out, sometimes on my own, and many times with phone calls to past pastor's assistants, and of course, Trevor (our Network Treasurer) as my experience with finances, budgets, and banks had been minimal before, and now I was to have some involvement in the financial matters of both Circle of Hope and Circle Venture.

My existing relationships with many members of Circle of Hope greatly helped me transition into this role, and these relationships helped to compensate for lacking directions. I have learned the systems that were in place before, but mostly I have developed my own systems and ways of carrying out the various tasks I do. Many people see me as a very organized person, and this is true in some regards, but as I look at myself and try to explain my organization, I find that perhaps it only makes complete sense to me. I think I appear organized because of the end results. When someone in our community emails me, I email back and aim to do this in a timely manner; when Rod asks me to generate statistics for him, I figure out how to run the right reports; when someone wants to schedule an event or meeting in our space, I never double book. But when I think about the details of how I am carrying out all

of these tasks, I realize that so much of what I do in this position is drawing from information in my mind and using discernment. I doubt that an

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observer would see organization as I jump back and forth and multi-task making copies, answering phone calls, sending emails, running statistical reports, ordering supplies, posting a blog, updating the Google calendar, making sure the info table is intact, and G-talking with Joshua about a problem with the website, often only with a mental to-do list running. My methods for doing all of these things that keep the church organized don't seem very organized as I take a step back and evaluate them. They work for me, but I think about what would happen if someone had to take over my job without training, and I feel that it would be difficult.

Part of that is something I intend to work on from now through the end of my term, which will be over July 31. The way I would like to do this is to leave a written record of what I do and how I do it when it comes to the purely objective tasks. This sounds very obvious, but so far a comprehensive written guide for this role does not exist. Also, I think a huge part of why I adapted well with little training in this position was because I feel I've had general training in learning and experiencing who we are and what we are trying to be at Circle of Hope due to my years attending PM and cell. The pastor's assistant role brings with it opportunities for decision-making and discernment. These nuances cannot be written down in a manual but can be observed in apprenticeship. So just as cell leaders have apprentices, the other way I will guide our new pastor's assistant, Amanda Clossen,

into this important role is through a three-week apprenticeship, which has started (and may be over by the time you read this)! By the way, under the direction of Liz and me, Amanda has already begun a large organizational project in her first week- reorganizing all of the BW computer files from our individual computers onto a shared drive that we can all access. I am excited about what she is bringing to this position.

As my job has progressed, it has evolved and morphed into something different than when it started, in the same way that our congregation and network have grown and changed. The manual that I put together won't be relevant forever, as our church continues to grow and live, but it will be something to edit and expand upon. The apprenticeship most likely won't fully prepare Amanda for any situation that might come her way, but it will lay a good foundation. I feel really good about these developments and am excited about the opportunity to try to fine-tune the ways this role helps to keep the church organized. The way things are right now, with most of the knowledge in my head and scattered about in the minds of a few others, is currently working, but I think that creating a written guide of the responsibilities, along with some in-person training for the next person is key for us to move into the next phase of existence. Only if we are continually ready to prepare and train the next person to step into our roles and take over where we've left off, do I feel that we are really organized as a church.

—KRISTEN SERAFIN

**Readers,  
please respond!**

Your responses may just be printed in the next Dialogue! We love hearing what you are thinking.

**E-mail to [iJonny@gmail.com](mailto:iJonny@gmail.com)**

## On the paradox of farming

When I was first given the topic to discuss here: 'The paradox of farming; how organizing helps prepare us for the unexpected,' I was totally frazzled. I remain frazzled even now. My first thought was, "How can you prepare for the unexpected? That's a paradox!" My second thought was, "O.K., there is paradox inherent in agriculture, but how can I make that interesting and not obnoxious to non-farmers or people who are sick of hearing about how destructive our

food system is?" And it occurred to me this paradox is inherent in all of life—it is the tension between responsibility and

faith: "For a person may do his work with wisdom, knowledge, and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it," so says the author of Ecclesiastes. So this idea that the outcome of all of our organizing and planning and care is ultimately out of our hands is not new, nor is it unique to farming. Great. So not only did someone else say it better than I ever could, but there isn't really even an answer, and it isn't even about farming. Still, agriculture does lend itself to stories with a universal theme, and to this theme in particular, because its example is so literal. There's not really any other field, so to speak, where we see so clearly the dependence of the fruit of our labor on conditions beyond our control, and yet without our labor there would be very little fruit as we know it.

Any good farmer has a map of her land, has numbered or otherwise labeled her fields, and if she's really organized, she has a five-year-plan for each and every one. She files her seeds according to their season, and she knows which plants belong to which families. She makes sure to rotate her crops accordingly, so that the

cabbage loopers—the pretty little moths that munch on kale, collards, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, and bok choy—don't have a chance to get settled in any one field over the years. She plans for a field to go fallow while another produces, allowing it to replenish its nutrients before being worked again. She knows the number of weeks to maturity of all of her crops and she harvests each one at its peak freshness. She routinely walks the fields looking for any changes, so she can be ready for disease when it first strikes. She tills the soil before planting her crop, giving the weed seeds time to germinate. Then she comes back through and kills them. She plants trees so

**Any good farmer has a map of her land... still, she goes to bed with her fingers crossed.**

birds will come and feast on pests, flowers to keep the pollinators interested. She reads the weather report and learns the patterns of the clouds, and irrigates when there is no promise of rain. She is up early in the morning to open the greenhouse, and out again after dinner to close it. Still, she goes to bed with her fingers crossed.

Without a map of her land, a farmer has no plan. She would go out in the field and randomly plant seeds, creating chaos at harvest time as she hunts around for the lettuce among the mess of peas and cauliflower. She wouldn't know where the broccoli grew last year, so she might plant it in the same spot, taking more nutrients out of the soil and creating a haven for cabbage pests that will be impossible to kill without chemicals. Without studying she's bound to let a disease get out of control, killing her whole crop and infesting the soil for years to come. Without soil preparation or timely mulching the weeds will come up with the crop, and the two will battle it out all season for sun, water, and food. If she harvests the peas too early they won't be as sweet, and if she harvests them too late, the plant will get tired and die. If she forgets to open the greenhouse on a hot sum-

mer morning, the tomatoes will cook. If she forgets to close it on a cold autumn evening, they'll freeze. And even after all that, there's still the unpredictable hailstorm that rains down for ten minutes on her five acres alone and rips golf ball sized holes through the lettuce.

We all tend to work for and otherwise organize ourselves around things we feel a sense of belonging with. For the farmer, it's the land she belongs to, and she works hard to tame the wild tendencies of nature and yet maintain the natural diversity that all life depends on. For the rest of us, if it's heaven which is our home, then we seek to bring the kingdom to earth. If it's the neighborhood we live in—the people, buildings and spaces with which we connect—then we work to build relationships with them, all with no guarantee of return. We make healthy meals for our families even though they might get sick. We meet together to worship even though we might lose faith. We protest an ongoing war even though another looms just around the corner. We plant gardens in vacant spaces even though there might be condos there tomorrow. We plant seeds to nurture our bodies, even though a flood might drown them out. Not only are we called to love without expecting repayment, we are guaranteed the possibility of no return for our work. It's enough to make a person say "all is meaningless." And yet, it can still be said, I think, that our work matters. Not even in a mysterious, eternal, God-only-knows sort of way, but in a tangible, if haphazard, keep-your-fingers-crossed-but-still-do-your-best-because-it-seems-to-make-a-difference sort of way.

The idea of making plans and organizing is not so much a question of the level of a person's faith as it is the quality of a person's life. Most of us sense a difference between living and being alive. It is the difference between being active and being passive. I think we live our lives expecting with reasonable certainty that our work will pay off, and I think we ought to. I think it's worthwhile for a farmer to make a five-year plan, to walk the fields, pull the weeds, rotate the crops. While it can't safeguard against every last thing, it certainly re-

duces the number of possible disasters, and increases the quality of the harvest. A husband and wife may stay married for sixty years even though they don't work hard to love one another, but if they choose to cultivate good will toward each other, they will reap peace and happiness throughout those years.

The kind of beings that are organized are not only the kind of beings that are prepared for the unexpected—which may never happen, they are the kind that are able to more fully realize their potential—which may never be fulfilled. In the words of the one who said it better, "As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things. Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well."

—AMANDA STAPLES

## How to organize to plant a church (in New Jersey)

One of the things that I really like about Circle of Hope is that it is decidedly organic. It is not run like a business or a political campaign; it is tended like a garden. It is homegrown and down to earth. We don't add anything artificial to stimulate growth or anything poisonous to choke out potential pests. Our growth is rooted in the love of Jesus and there's enough love and truth to deal with pests if they try to attack. Things grow, and it's exciting to see what soil, seeds, water, sunlight, and love produce organically.

But organic doesn't mean unorganized. Gardens don't just plant themselves. Neither do churches. Businesses and political campaigns obviously take a lot of organization. And if we were planting a church like forming a business or running a political campaign, it'd be pretty easy to get our hands around how to organize it for the

best result: follow the plan, stick to the formula. But planting a church the way one might plant a garden is a bit trickier.

Perhaps planting a garden is not so much about organizing the minutia as it is knowing what is needed and allowing each part to do its work. I don't know if I totally have a hold of all the organization that goes into planting a church, but there are some things that are needed, we can recognize them. And as we dream about planting a church in Camden, maybe these things can help you to see the organization behind what the Spirit of God is doing organically.

It takes good soil to plant a garden. It takes good soil to plant a church. You've got to have soil. Soil is rich in nutrients and provides the environ-

ment necessary for growth. There are five cells in New Jersey. These cells are the soil. They are fertile ground for connecting people to Jesus and to Circle of Hope. In order to plant, the soil has to be ready—it needs to be tilled, it needs to be touched, it needs to be prepared. The New Jersey cells are ready, they are looking to multiply, they are strategizing about meeting the next person. Over the course of the last few years, the Spirit of God has prepared them and they are ready to do what it takes to sustain growth.

It takes good seeds to plant a garden. It takes good seeds to plant a church. You've got to have seeds. From seeds, life springs forth; roots are grown and the plant emerges, bearing fruit and beauty. The Camden planting effort has what we're calling a "formation team". They are the seeds. These ten people are meeting on a regular basis to form the foundation (the roots) of the congregation (the fruit) that we hope emerges in the fall. They are each different, they bring a wide array of personalities and gifts and they are com-

mitted to being in the soil and growing out of it.

It takes water to plant a garden. It takes water to plant a church. You've got to have water. Water goes into the soil, it reaches the roots and the roots pass it on to the rest of the plant... without water, the plant can't survive. There is flow of information that has begun to occur. It is happening person to person, it is happening in cells, it is happening in public meetings, it is happening over the internet. Plans, theology, stories, prayer requests—lots of information. This is the water. Without clearly communicating lots of informa-

tion, without making sure that it goes into the soil and reaches the roots so that the rest of the plant can benefit, the plant will die for sure.

It takes sunlight to plant a garden. It

takes sunlight to plant a church. You've got to have sunlight. The sun shines down, the plant soaks it up and it translates that light energy into chemical energy, thus sustaining life. There is a lot teaching and training that is going into planting a church. This is the sunlight. I find myself reminding people of who we are as Circle of Hope and what our mission is. People need to learn how to connect the next person, how to communicate the hope of Jesus, how to trust each other and they need to be taught this. As they take it all in, they make it part of who they are and they translate it into practical steps that provide life.

It takes love to plant a garden. It takes love to plant a church. You've got to have love. Gardening takes time, it takes attention, and it takes caring about what you're doing. People are praying. They tell me their stories. They ask what they can be praying for. This is the love. They are giving their time, spending it before God's face. They are paying attention, noting pertinent needs. They care about what we're doing.

Now to be sure, there's a lot that goes

(continued on p.6)

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into all of that, but we're organizing the Camden plant like you might organize planting your garden. We're getting the pieces together, we're putting them in place and we're waiting to see what happens. I hope it tastes good!

—NATE HULFISH

## 'A Juggling Act:' *Time Management and Parenting*

As we grow and mature from children to adults, we develop (or in some cases neglect to develop) routines and methods of organization to balance the many tasks we need and desire to accomplish. But what happens when one or more little people who depend on us enter our lives? How does this change the way we organize our lives and make priorities? I recently spoke with four Circle of Hope parents: Jenni Renoylds, mother of Brody; Mariko Snook, mother of Owen; Rebekah Edwardson, mother of Eden; and Deb Valentine, mother of Joshua and Devon, to get their thoughts on organization and parenting (I of course am the proud father of Alice and Hazel).

From talking to the four different parents it seemed that parenting is a juggling act between different and conflicting demands on one's time and energy. While single people also face similar challenges, the demands in parenting are more severe and pressing. All of the parents interviewed recognized the importance of organization and routines. The goal of these routines appears to be more sanity than maximum productivity. Without a schedule, important items such as laundry, the dishes, the packing of lunches, and 10 minutes of uninterrupted "space" do not get accomplished. Mariko Snook, who by nature is a very organized person, now thinks of being organized as a way of being able to ensure that Owen gets what he needs when he needs it, instead of ensuring that she can get more done in general. Both Deb and Jenni commented that things go O.K. when the

plan is followed, but that life gets thrown into a loop when spontaneity happens. Both a routine and plans are tools to ensure that the most critical tasks can be accomplished. This is important for non-parents of course, but becomes much more important when the "critical" tasks involve taking care of another life versus finishing a student loan application. Being organized becomes even more important when a parent might need to do both in the same night.

Organization, however, must be kept in perspective. It is to be a tool in service of greater things, and not a goal in and of itself. Several parents commented on the need to give up perfection in parenting and organization and the guilt that ensues when perfection is invariably missed. Re-

bekah commented that she would like more of a routine, but that a complete routine is never actually reached. Mariko commented on the need to let some of her organization go when becoming a parent. I, on the other hand, still need to improve my organizational discipline.

Organization, then, is something that each parent needs to adopt according to their own needs. Deb commented that some things feel organized in her family life, while others never do. Perhaps this is the way things should be—enough routine to allow important things to be accomplished and sanity to be retained, but enough slack to retain sanity, obviate guilt, and allow for a bit of the "sweet chaos" of life.

When each parent decides on their routine or plan, some activities need to be ditched while others need to be retained. Often some cherished joys and hobbies need to be sacrificed when becoming a parent in order to participate in this fuller life. Others

need to be retained in order to have elements of joy and fulfillment not related to parenting. I spoke with the four parents about this balancing act. This balancing act seems to occur differently between the parents of younger children and the parents of older children. The needs of young children (i.e. babies) are immediate and demanding. The needs of older children blend into their wants and must be balanced against the parents own needs and wants - going to the park/playground or being walked to a friends house versus the parent's desire to watch the evening news or spend 30 minutes relaxing in the tub.

For both mothers of younger children, Mariko and Jenni, the balancing act has meant giving up activities and duties with the church in order to parent effectively.

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Jenni and Mariko both had to give up leading cell groups. However, God in his mercy often gives us opportunities to serve him and one another wherever we are. Mariko, for example, has found that she can host a cell group even if she can't lead one.

For older children the process is more complicated, even

if more flexible. Rebekah described it as an intuitive process—balancing between her needs and the needs of her daughter—how many hours have we spent at the park or otherwise for Eden's benefit and how much time have we spent doing things that sustain me? Deb told me that one of her techniques is to ask the question "what will matter most in five years?" And contrary to popular belief, this doesn't always mean prioritizing "family time." Sometimes spending an extra 2 hours at the office working on a paper or presentation really is more important than attending one of Josh's baseball games. Sometimes not. But asking the question seems to help her focus, prioritize, and

remove guilt.

Both of these approaches appeal to me—both the intuitive accounting and asking what is of long term worth. I add two more approaches to the question of balancing priorities and activities when getting organized and constructing routines in parenting. The one method that I use in trying to cope with all that I have to do in a day now that my children are older is giving them a lot of chores to do. This frees up some of my time and energy to do more quality activities with them. It has the added benefit of teaching hard work and responsibility. The other method that I use is to involve and interest my daughters in as many of my interests and activities as I can. On any given day my daughters would still likely rather hang out with their friends, play dolls, or go and have me get them some ice cream at the grocery store rather than participate with me in one of my interests—going for bike ride, visiting a museum, or watching Jeopardy. But my adult interests have a funny way of rubbing off on my kids who have begun to share them, even if they will never adopt all of them. At this point, Alice likes going out for Indian food, while Hazel has developed a taste for sushi. It is nice when no trade-offs are needed.

There are two more items I observed in talking with our Circle of Hope parents. Guilt seems rather pervasive. We are never doing well enough as parents or people. I also see this guilt recognized and dealt with by the four parents. We need to live in grace from the Father, even as we are mothers and fathers. The other point is the need for community. Deb told of all the wonderful times that Aubrey and others have helped her out by watching the kids. Ben White slept over at my house on a Sunday night in January and saw my kids off to school when I had to leave on a business trip. While no one can replace us (parents) as the primary care givers, we need to lean on our church body and not be afraid of asking for help when we need it. Just a little bit of help in parenting can go a long way in maintaining order in the

family life. Thank God for the Church.

—CHRIS PUCHALSKY

## How can we manage our financial lives better?

Moments before I sat down to write this article, I told my friend I couldn't afford a going away gift for a mutual friend. It wasn't strictly true. And a few days before that, I found myself saying that I was poor out of frustration. And I'm certainly not poor. So why do I do these things? How can I better organize my life so that I'm not putting off the things I really want to do because of money? How can I better organize my life so that I am putting off that extra beer, or overdraft fee, or something that I don't really need?

I said I was poor. If I'm even slightly hungry, I'll say I'm starving. What's going on in my mind? There are people in the world who are really suffering with hunger and poverty, and I wish that is something that I kept in mind more often. Particularly to pray about.

How can we better manage our financial lives? If I'm not consciously thinking about the money that I'm spending, it can get out of control pretty quickly. That's why I've developed a couple of rules for myself to try to keep tabs. First of all, I cannot operate without a budget. Each paycheck I get is quickly broken up into two categories: essentials, and non-essentials, or fun. Essentials for me involve rent, utilities, groceries, and tithing. These are all regular expenses. Other essential expenses can arise that are unexpected, like maintenance for a car, bike, or house. It's a good idea to put a certain amount of each paycheck away for emergency expenses. It's something that I'm still working on.

With the average credit card debit for a household at \$8,568, and credit card debt increasing by \$100 nationwide in the last four years, one must be careful not to fall into the trap. And I don't really need to tell anyone about the rising gas prices, which is going to cause inflation to rise faster than normal when the economy is the worst it's been in thirty years. So what does this mean?

Essential costs will occasionally rise. That's one of the joys of owning a house. You can lock in a rate for the next thirty years while everything else rises in price (your salary, hopefully, included). The non-essential part of my budget consists of clothing, going out, buying beer, et cetera. We all put our money in things that we enjoy and/or things that are important to us. This last week, I spent more on beer than I gave to the church, and even typing that I kind of wince. The important thing to realize is that budgets can always be adjusted, fixed, and corrected.

Savings are really important. It allows us to do bigger things, cooler things,

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and stand out. I hate to frame money in that way, but in this case it's just a means to an end. After saving for a few months, I was able to spend a few days in Iceland, and I promise you it was worth every penny. Some of us are saving for a house, or another big expense. These are really cool things, and not everyone can do this. It's important to organize saving into my budget, even though I don't get there every month. It's also important not to dip into these savings, or it's hard to accrue any significant amount.

*(Continued on page 8)*

Managing money is about being smart. I have a bank that reimburses me for any ATM fees, because if there's one thing I hate, it is paying to take out my own money. There are tons of accounts, savings and checking, that pay substantial interest, even in this economy. I'd love to help people open some of these accounts. There are people in our neighborhood who pay three percent of each paycheck just to have it cashed. Not only is this a problem, but check cashing businesses are then putting people into the area who have large amounts of cash, which is easy to spend in seconds. But I'll digress on my tirade against predatory faux-banking institutions. We can talk about that later.

There are also bigger financial considerations. Married couples should consider or have a will, powers of attorney, IRAs and retirement funds, savings for college for children, and life insurance. At 22 years-old, I know that I'm pretty inexperienced, but I can at least think about these things. Most of these problems can be solved just by knowing the right person to talk to. Randy Nyce works for MMA (Mennonite Mutual Aid) and he or I could tell you how to set up some of these services with a bank that only invests money in socially conscious funds and businesses.

Circle of Hope is responsible for a lot of money. I feel like it's a pretty good place for me to invest and allow God to do some serious work. I'm thankful that at the beginning of each year there is a meeting where we all can come together and discuss and agree upon the budget for the upcoming year. Frankly, I believe that Circle of Hope responsibly manages finances. And I believe that's happening for a few reasons. First of all, we have some really smart people doing our financial stuff. Second, I really feel like Circle is honest. Rod and Joshua's salaries are published, every meeting is open, and there isn't money disappearing anywhere. We even bought a used copy machine. So how can Circle better manage our money, our common fund? I'm not sure. Maybe we should

try to buy a few buildings in broken neighborhoods and watch the property value skyrocket while we do something that is beneficial for God and the community. That'd be a good start.

—WALTER KEALEY

## 2008 Goals

*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 2008. Every issue we ask our leaders to evaluate our progress toward meeting them.*

### **Goal: Build enough capacity to take the church to the next level.**

1. Hire the Director of Operations by March 1.
2. Implement the structure outlined in the Operations Manual. Continue to refine the details in the Manual
3. Expand East's meeting space.
4. Increase our sharing in our Common Fund.

*Liz began her role as our Director of Operations. She is doing some vital work for the network and overseeing the CoHOP Teams. We just closed on a deal that will allow us to move our first Circle Thrift location to a new building at 2233 Frankford Ave, a block up the street! We plan to expand our use for our current building, and be ready for the Fall Love Feast at the new Frankford & Norris site!*

### **Goal: Take obvious steps to make ourselves known by our compassionate service.**

1. Hire the Director of Circle Venture by April 1.
2. Create a way to administer the Compassion Fund well.
3. Train our mission teams to help people connect with Jesus and His church through their work.
4. Create more "good business" in Philadelphia through the founding of businesses or partnering with other startup enterprises.

*Jeremiah has been doing a lot of good work during his first few months as Circle Venture Director. It's our first time having someone in that full-time roll, so we're all learning a lot.*

### **Goal: Plant our next congregation**

1. Receive discernment from our Ap-

2. Creatively use the time of Rod's sabbatical (May 15 to Sep 15) to advance Apprentice Training.
3. Deploy our next pastor by Nov 1.

*Nate & Tracey have been serving as pastors of Broad & Washington during Rod's sabbatical. They are getting a lot of training, as we're preparing to send Nate out this fall to lead the next planting along the Rt 130 Corridor in Camden, NJ this fall.*

### **Goal: Support and train emerging leaders**

1. Continue to refine the pastoral training of our Cell Leaders
2. Create a covenant for Coordinators and deepen their capabilities.
3. Support our Pastors and Directors as they become the Leadership Core Team.
4. Define and train the teams that function within the three areas of church planting, compassion and capacity.
5. Engage new leaders with a diversity of talents. Help people to connect to opportunities that are appropriate to their gifts.
6. Support Rod as he enjoys a sabbatical and transitions beyond church planter and founder.
7. Develop our mission to children and teens.

*Rod is enjoying his sabbatical, and we are growing and changing as a church—especially our leaders. There has been a lot of people learning new roles...especially the Directors and Coordinators!*

### **Goal: Develop our interconnections, both on the smallest and largest levels**

1. Further develop our presence online by building on our website, online book, listserv, and social networking websites.
2. Link our network processes to create labor-saving systems.
3. Use sabbatical grant money to hold a weekend retreat for our discernment process in October.
4. Link our Events Teams.

*The date and location for the retreat is set, planning is under way. We've been learning a lot of ways to use technology and better communication (much in thanks to the Director of Operations!) that can save a lot of time and labor.*