
Dialogue

Volume 8 Issue 1

Strength for the church's journey into wholeness in Christ

May 2006

The subject: *Ten Years Later*

Yes, we know that it is probably not the best fundraising technique to undercut one's major accomplishments. Any "normal" church would have had a gala to celebrate a decade in mission, offering envelopes included — especially when they had not only outlived all sorts of other church plants but planted a couple of their own! **Doh!**

The date did not exactly slip our mind, but the gala just did not seem that relevant. I guess we really are the church for the NEXT generation. We're not even that interested in our OWN history.

So this issue of the Dialogue is one thing, at least, to give us a chance to reflect, learn and celebrate the amazing goodness of God to us over the last ten years. From one family to about 400 people, from no congregations to three, to innumerable cells experienced, services provided, and friendships made. It has been fun — and looks like it will be.

Editor

Back in the mid 90s, Rod and Gwen White felt called to Philadelphia (or perhaps Africa someplace). The BIC agreed to send them here, and they packed up four boys and moved to the big city, trusting God for what would

Celebrating "ten years after" March 1996

happen. Ten years later, Circle of Hope has three congregations and pastors, 8 cell leader coordinators, and 38 cell leaders and cells.

My husband Scott remembers coming home from college one day in 1995 and finding Rod sitting on the sofa. "He told me about his vision and his observations about how the Church ought to be responding to the plight of cities. Also, we both seemed to agree that the Church had been shunning the arts for years. He seemed to think a lot of the



same things were important that I had been thinking." Scott was intrigued. He'd been looking for a church where he felt comfortable worshipping. Now was his chance to be a part of building it.

Rod started a "formation" cell. A few people started meeting together privately to pray and worship God and see how He would make His visions come true. The cell grew and quickly launched others. The first public meeting brought in a few interested people. Soon the temporary meeting place at Messiah Philly grew confined, and Circle found an ideal space at 10th and Locust. "It was literally filled with garbage," Scott remembers. "It turned out to be perfect for us."

Circle of Hope was built to last. Since the beginning, Circle has planned for the future. By organizing around a vision to build the church for the next gen-

eration, we avoid dwelling on our own issues so much. That gives us freedom to think about what God has planned next, to do things that will contribute to our vision for the next thing, and to end whatever may not be working.

The vision was always to be a network of churches, which requires more than one pastor. In the first few years a couple of people from outside the congregation considered becoming a part of Circle of Hope and starting a new congregation in Philadelphia. Some of them lasted a few months or a year, but ultimately it didn't work out. God had given Rod a vision for a church that was rooted in Acts, modeled on the first Christians. Apparently this vision didn't come naturally to the seminary grads who considered partnering with us. Eventually, we realized that just as cells grow naturally and multiply from within, congregations should do the same. Bryan Robinson's experience helped us to realize that.

Bryan had been a part of the Northwest congregation which had been planted by one of the early pastors. When the congregation was pastorless for a second time in a couple of years, Bryan's gift of leadership, combined with his vision and desire to build a church for the next generation made him an ideal pastor. He became the pastor of the NW in 2003, first volunteer, then part-time, later full. When we considered hiving off to form a third congregation, we went through a deliberate process in which we allowed God to identify the next pastor from among us and Joshua Grace was identified.

The East congregation hived off in 2004, and about 70 people planted the new congregation. At the time, Center City felt empty, but it was good—perhaps something like what empty nesters feel. Sad, a little bit lonely, but proud of what was accomplished.

Through all of our growth and failures we have grown deeper, wiser, closer to God. We have learned again and again that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him,

(Continued on page 2)

who have been called according to his purpose.”

Today, ten years after the first public meeting was held, there is so much to celebrate! We've had nearly 7000 people visit our three congregations. We have multiplied lots of cells. Almost 300 people have decided to make a covenant to be a part of this community striving to be a safe place to explore and express God's love.

The grace of God has brought us to this day. Here are some memories from ten years with Circle of Hope...

- Meeting in a Messiah Philly room on Temple's campus.
- Visiting Rod in his first Circle of Hope office, above Eddie's Tattoos, just off South Street.
- Carrying stinky bags of garbage out of a filthy space on 10th street -- our new meeting place.
- Worshiping at our very first public meeting, on Palm Sunday 1996.
- Trying to find parking on Sunday nights before we obtained parking permits.
- Experimenting with Monday night public meetings: punk rock worship on a non-traditional meeting night didn't work out.
- MxPx playing in our upstairs room on 10th street at top volume causing the police to be summoned.
- Our first baptisms in a kiddie pool in Rod & Gwen's front yard in West Philadelphia.
- Celebrating our first love feast where a handful of us got together and worked out a covenant that would shape our community.
- Selling fair trade products at Worldly Goods, Circle Venture's shop on 10th street.
- Sleeping in bunk beds and sharing bathrooms at off-season retreats at summer camps.
- Driving to the beach for summer Love Feasts.
- The evolution of our many worship teams and the growth of new musicians within our community.
- Love feasts that were small enough that one could honestly expect to know every person in the room.
- Building a sound wall in response to a grumpy neighbor's request. Paul Kohl tells it well: Our neighbor (not a nice man) set himself up against the Church by complaining about noise. Poor Rod had to go to court and fight district attorneys who made CoH look like a Move Settlement and told the judge to protect the neighborhood from the likes of us. The judge ruled in favor of the plaintiff and

subjected us to a \$5,000 fine for any future violation of the sound ordinance. We moved to Ben Franklin high school for a couple months, but this did not work out well, so we built a sound wall and moved back into our old space. One night the L&I sound abatement board inspector visited and gave us a clean bill of health saying the noise as heard in the apartment was acceptable—which was a miracle because the sound wall worked better than it was supposed to. We met at 239 S. 10th Street in peace for many years after that.

- Caring for our grumpy neighbor (see above) when he became ill. We did not seek revenge or allow ourselves to hate: we lived and loved.
- Identifying Bryan as the pastor of Northwest, based on his gifts for leading and the fact that he was doing it anyway.
- Meeting new people through art shows and concerts. Psalters, Danielson, White Trash Inc. Orchestra.
- Making Circle of Hope T-Shirts.
- Opening Circle Thrift in response to an MCC idea for a final outlet for thrift store goods.
- Competing in the BIC basketball tournament (and winning it once!).
- Buying our first building: 2007-09 Frankford. God provided us with a fabulous building at an unexpectedly low price. (The owner's wife had been praying for the right opportunity to come along. And we did!)
- Naming Joshua as the apprentice pastor who would plant the East congregation.
- Hiving into the East and those cold and dusty first days in their meeting place.
- Rehabbing Circle Counseling's beautiful new office on the first floor of a West Philly house.
- Surviving "eviction" at 10th Street.
- Meeting in the first floor of the space at B&W while the landlord started demolition and construction and all of our equipment was covered in construction dust each Sunday.
- Expanding our view of "center city" by moving to an amazing space at Broad and Washington. Our new location makes us accessible to neighbors who appreciate ESOL classes, baby goods exchanges, movie nights.

*Jane Clinton
(with Scott's help)*

I want to answer two questions concerning the growth of Circle of Hope: 1) how did the hiving idea work out and 2) will it work again?

"Hiving" in this context means the process that established Circle of Hope East, the congregation to which I belong. These questions are daunting for one person to take on, particularly the second one, so I offer an answer here with the hopes that people who have not joined the conversation already will add their two cents as well.

First, let me describe where I'm coming from as a member of this network. I have been with Circle of Hope for a good while, since about 1999. Although during these past years I've had a few stints as a leader, I've generally been more of a foot soldier. I was not around for the planning of Circle East, so I can't take any credit (or blame) for it. Taken all this into account, you could say my lack of participation affords me some objectivity on the issue.

I should also offer a definition of this strange phenomenon called "hiving." As I understand it, a hiving is when a small group of a church congregation breaks off to build a new body. As the new body coordinates with the original church to continue its mission, it also establishes an identity of its own.

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.

How is this different than a church “plant”? I believe the distinction lies in the sacrifice that the original body makes. The split leaves *both* bodies somewhat vulnerable, but if they carry out their visions effectively, the network develops a stronger foundation than it did before. More importantly, the body of Christ continues to grow.



Scott and Jane at an art opening

So how did it work out? Someone at

Did the “Hiving” Idea Work? Will It Again?

Circle of Hope Broad and Washington (formerly Center City) could give a better report about their post-hive history, but based on my observations during visits in the past few years, the congregation made out fine.

The East congregation has also fared well. Prayers were answered (that was key), and a new community has formed and is listening to the Spirit. First, there was a generous loan from the Brethren in Christ Foundation, which Circle of Hope used to secure a cheap building shell on Frankford Avenue in Fishtown/Kensington. With Joshua Grace selected as pastor, East made this building a vibrant place that now houses a worship space and a thrift store.

The construction phase of the East space in Fishtown/Kensington was a formative experience for many of us, especially those who grew up either removed from the church or safely cradled in its arms. Suddenly, there were now demands and burdens on us that had not existed before, along with an ennobling sense of ownership. This was *our* church, we kept reminding ourselves; there weren’t any church elders who were going to come in and finish the job for us.

During those workdays (and work nights), East people established real and lasting relationships. It was hard to overlook the significance of helping to build the church in the most literal sense—with your own hands. In a way, the hiving had been “working” before we held our first public meeting. Such an experience may be the most compelling argument for a

church to hive.

But many things had to unfold before we could make declare it a complete success. For instance, were we going to meet our neighbors’ needs? Were we going to pave the way for Christ to bring hope and healing in our cells and our public meetings?

As far as meeting community needs, much rested on the fate of Circle Thrift. There were growing pains, for sure, but after two years, the store began turning profits. This is a great feat for a store in a neighborhood that has long faced economic stagnation, and many of us are hopeful now that Circle East will meet its goals of creating jobs for neighbors and raising money for the Mennonite Central Committee.

As for the second question of paving the way for Christ, I hesitate to ever say we’re collectively letting Christ do *all* He can in our lives. However, I will say that every week members of this congregation are encouraged and challenged at public meetings and our cell groups. The sense of genuine community that people found at the first Circle of Hope in Center City and then at the Northwest congregation has also become real at East.

So will hiving work again for the Circle of Hope network? If someone were to strictly determine success by numbers, the answer is yes. When things get a little *too* cozy at a congregation (I’ve heard that at 200 regular public meeting attenders, it’s time to buzz about hiving), we can safely assume that a new pastor will come forward and others will show up for the next project, and that a new congregation will grow like its predecessors did.

However, we all know growth is only one indicator of success. A quick read of Circle of Hope’s statement of commitments reveals that we have much more serious goals beyond becoming larger. It’s nearly impossible to be content about a recent hiving—or overly confident about the next one—if we’re not making practical steps toward fulfilling these commitments.

There are two Circle commitments that I think are worth keeping in mind for this discussion, and they are *to form congregations as diverse as the kingdom of God* and *to generate justice and hope in our neighborhoods*. Like many other churches, diversity (from the standpoints of race and age) is something that Circle congregations—particularly East and Broad and Washington—struggle to foster. Circle Venture’s Reconciliation Team and the Hour of Reconciliation meetings that the network has held have addressed the problem, but more needs to be done.



Joshua at his own private Jericho

I definitely share in the apathy that helps sustain the problem, but I bring the issue up here because, as a fellow Circle of Hope East member, Ryan Bowers, pointed out, if a homogeneous church is looking to have, fostering diversity is an uphill battle. However, as Ryan also pointed out, we should always avoid putting diversity up on a pedestal. What a congregation does is ultimately more important than what it looks like.

Which brings us to that second question: how is the next church going to do justice? I can’t profess to have the answers here, but I can say I think a good strategy rests on keeping, to quote author Ched Myers, “one foot in the church and one out.” This approach entails simply listening to the representatives of whatever neighborhood we move into. What community needs have they already identified? What needs aren’t being reached and how can our network of committed people and resources meet them? We have a great organization, Circle Venture, which

(continued on page 4)

through its mission teams does compassionate service and works for justice. I think it would be great if this arm of our network is closely integrated with the missions of future congregations.

These are all issues that I believe are best dealt with well before we make the decision to hive and thousands of other decisions arise to compete for our attention. Let's keep the conversation going. Put in your two cents if you haven't already, because any church that has the privilege of growing larger also has the obligation to further develop an effective and informed vision of how to help build the kingdom of God.

Brian Baughan

Circle Venture started from the seed of a conviction the hearts of the people God first gathered to form us. They were convinced that empowering the poor and oppressed is always part of being a circle of hope. So they set out to install it at the heart of ours. It's safe to say that there are "doers" and there are "planners" in the world of Christian community development. Circle seems to be mostly filled with people who are doers. Circle Venture, however, is the planners' way of keeping the seed of compassionate service ready to sow and their way of harnessing additional resources to help the doers in their work.

The resources needed often include money. In order to apply for grants, accept monetary donations and make the state of PA happy, the initial planners decided to apply for non-profit status. After an organizational plan was adopted in 1998, the Circle Venture Leadership Team (Board of Directors) formed and incorporated in April 1999. Circle Venture was incorporated as "an arm of the Circle of Hope Network created to generate opportunities for compassionate service within Circle of Hope, Philadelphia and the world." Circle Venture supports mission teams created by people in the church who see a need and find a way to work toward meeting it. Circle Venture is empowered by these mission teams to lead in sharing God's love and advocating for God's peace and justice.

Since we began, CV and its teams have lead us to

- paint inner-city schools,
- fix bikes and distribute helmets
- create a small business that sold hand-

The Circle Venture Story

crafted goods (our first attempt at creating jobs with justice – Worldly Goods),

- create an MCC affiliated thrift store (Circle Thrift!),
- advocate for the poor and provide emergency resources to people in need,
- mentor children at the Fredrick Douglass Elementary School and through The Spot,
- create a computer center to serve unskilled people,
- develop an urban farm, organize peace & non-violence forums and prayer walks,
- collect and send 2 large containers of children's books & educational resources to schools in Zambia,
- organize neighborhood clean ups and community baby goods exchanges,
- helped supply the needs of the homeless and hungry,
- educate people on the worldwide issue of healthy water access (and many more issues),
- fund the development of water wells in third-world countries,
- provide English as a second language classes to immigrants,
- educate people in debt and financial issues,
- help start a reasonably-priced counseling center (Circle Counseling!),
- help reach out to at-risk kids (through Brotherly Love Urban Youth Services!),
- help connect us to allies like the Simple Way, Project Home, Kingdom-builders, Philabundance (and others) and much, much more.

Circle Venture's mission teams are continuously growing, changing and dissolving when necessary. There are currently 12 teams including Books of Love, Brotherly Love Urban Youth Services support, Circle of Peacemakers, Community Connections, Cooking for Friends, Circle Thrift Support, English for Speakers of Other Languages, Financial Stewardship, Psalters, Reconciliation, Urban Farm and Water, Circle Counseling Support. For specific information about these teams, visit our

website at www.circleofhope.net/venture.

Today our Leadership Team consists of a core of four officers (Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer and Secretary). The entire team includes the mission team leaders. As we move forward, the needs of our neighbors near and far will remain at the heart of all our plans.

*Kate Nicely
with Trevor Day*

Even back in 1997, when I started attending Circle of Hope (then there was only one, Center City), the vision and goal for a network of Circle of Hope congregations was already underway. Then, in 1999, the network began as African American and Texan, Joe Snell was hired



Worldly Goods on Tenth.

to find a location and plant the next congregation. I don't remember the details of how the decisions were made, but I do remember helping Joe and Tim move into a house as well as working on and cleaning the 5619 Germantown Ave location. I also recall the core team being formed and the Public Meeting and cells beginning.

After Joe left in December of 2000, Bryan and Brenda Robinson facilitated the Public Meetings and kept the NorthWest community and congregation alive and well. Then in July of 2001, Circle of Hope NorthWest joined together (married was the term used back then) with Mike Major and his New Dimensions church. Both were small cell-based congregations with similar goals and needs that could be met by the other. But by January 2003, mainly due to change in cell philosophy and personal health issues, Mike resigned and with him went a majority of the original New Dimensions.

This was devastating in a few ways for the NorthWest. One was that the at-

tempt at racial reconciliation seemed to fail in this instance between Christians who were trying to be relational with each other. Another conflict arose over the idea of a cell model other than what Circle of Hope had enacted being planted and then Mike stepping down. When the cell leaders (at this time all from Center City because that was the only other congre-

The Northwest Journey

gation) lovingly guided us back to Circle of Hope strategy for cells and Public Meetings, the guidance was not received well. Instead, many saw Center City as an oppressor. The NorthWest was in limbo land. We stopped meeting at 5619 and instead met on Sunday mornings at a person's house.

By God's grace (as well as Rod and the cell leaders), Bryan and Rod had been talking and ironing things out to have the Circle of Hope NorthWest return. In March 2003, Bryan Robinson became our Pastor! We were very small, just Bryan, Brenda, their two boys James and Steven, Natalie, Amy (my wife) and myself. Soon after, we connected with some Eastern Seminary folks, Keith & Ali, Joy, Tiffany, Stephanie, Calvin, and etc. and began to grow/build a solid leadership team that is still intact and functioning today. As time progressed we added to our community, children, youth, older folks, black, white, latino, home owners, renters, homeless, those who eat plenty and those who have little to eat. In other words we gained a great mix that crossed racial and economic lines, which in and of itself is a great, but also a very rewarding challenge. We have witnessed God changing lives in dramatic as well as subtle ways in all in our community.

We have tried a couple of different tactics for the PM, each having some positive outcomes, but eventually needing to be reworked. Our current re-invention of the PM began the week after Easter -- we will be having the PM's on Sunday nights (youth want to go out on Saturday nights) and having two PM's

5:00 PM – a study through the Bible and worship to meet spiritual and cultural needs for some folk.

6:30 PM – a Hip-Hop service to meet spiritual and cultural needs for the some other folk.

Please continue to pray for Circle of Hope NorthWest as we continue to strive

to live out Christ's example, by developing relationships and serving those within our NorthWest (Chestnut Hill, Roxborough, Mt. Airy, Andorra, Germantown, East Falls, Oak Lane, and etc.) section of Philadelphia.

Jason Martin

In 1995 when the Formation Team for Circle of Hope began to gather, I also began my graduate studies in Counseling with an eye toward a vague goal of helping people in some form. By 1997 when I completed my Masters degree, the vague goal had taken its first step toward clarity and Circle Counseling began that summer. Using the back office and entrance of Circle of Hope's meeting space on 10th Street in Center City, I began practicing psychotherapy. The vision was to provide low-cost psychotherapy to those otherwise unable to afford it. People came quickly. I focused my work on those outside the Circle of Hope family, but found many people within Circle looking for help, too. As my desire to see people helped through this kind of work grew, I contacted another therapist I knew through my on-going work with Eastern University where I had received my graduate training. I thought Carol would readily understand the mission behind Circle Counseling and I had great confidence in her abilities as a therapist. The goal took another step toward clarity as Carol and I devised a model which brought her to the Circle Counseling Office one day a week to see clients from within Circle of Hope at reduced fees. I would be sure to not schedule clients on the day Carol was due to use the office. At this time, Dr. Robert Smith, who had served as my clinical supervisor, also began to conduct his psychiatric practice part-time out of our one little Circle Counseling Office. It was a revolving door model. When one of us was there seeing patients, the others were not and we rotated in and out with great efficiency. More people came.

By 1998, I was convinced that the work of Circle Counseling needed to grow. I had in mind that through the use of graduate interns from Eastern University, we could expand our services and keep costs down for clients. To do this, I would need more credentials in order to provide accredited supervision to interns. I enrolled in a doctoral program and while Circle Counseling grew slowly, I inched toward completion of my

doctorate in clinical psychology. It took six years. In the meantime, we added another rotating therapist to our mix and sadly said goodbye to Bob as he retired and his health declined.

As a part of my doctoral training, I began to provide therapy at the counseling center of a university in West Philadelphia near my home. As I walked home one day I noticed a vacant building on Woodland Avenue. Slowly a new idea refined the goals of Circle Counseling into their current form. With Circle of Hope losing the lease on 10th Street we needed a new home, a larger home. After some prayer and financial arrangements in 2004, we bought the vacant, rather tired looking building on Woodland Avenue that I

The Little-known Circle Counseling Story

walked by and began the dramatic renovation project that so many people from Circle and the larger network of Brethren in Christ family helped to complete. By May of 2005, Circle Counseling had officially moved to 4617 Woodland Avenue. Although still partially under construction, the therapy work went forward. Today we have three offices and a group room in the Woodland Avenue building and are actively expanding our services. Generally we see over 30 clients each week and have room for more. There are now four therapists including myself who have embraced the vision of Circle Counseling to provide therapy at reduced fees, each offering one day a week. Carol, Allene, Jo, and myself count it a privilege to serve in this work.

The vague desire to help people that God stirred up in me a decade ago has become much more than I would have dared to imagine on my own. Through the encouragement of the community of believers that is Circle of Hope and those who have generously come along side this vision from across the Brethren in Christ, Circle Counseling has become an exciting place of healing. I trust that we will be faithful to follow God's continued leading through this next decade and will find new ways to serve people with professional mental health services grounded in faith.

Gwen White

(continued on p.6)

As far as I can discern, I have been in 15 cells since Circle of Hope started its first cells in '96. And that does not count



The beginning of 4617 Woodland

the Cell Leader Cells called Coordinating Groups. So my head is swimming with reflection and wisdom about how to attempt a face-to-face missional community called (in our body-like world) a cell.

Some of the cells I inhabited began with a sputter and ended with a blossom. Some started with optimism and ended with a thud. Some were energized by a bright spirit and some were deadened by an ambivalent, self-absorbed few. In other words, they were the church in microcosm, only the problems were in my face, no place to hide. I liked the reality – they either moved toward transformation or resulted in some kind of death.

Through all my cell experiences, I can gratefully say they proved the value of our vision. In the first days of cells we actually wrote into our Map that we were going to “have a vision and stick to it.” It turned out like that quote from G.K. Chesterton, “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.” We tried it and kept trying it. I don’t think it has been found wanting.

I have learned new things from the people in my cells and learned a few things again that I supposedly already knew. Here are just six of the things that our long experiment in being a network of cells has proven to me.

People need community

Of course, some people are too busy, too cool, too picky, or too fragile to really participate in their need for community, and I often feel like I am judged odd by them. But



Gwen at the NW Love Feast 2001

generally, most of us know that we need really each other. Even if we don’t like or understand each other, we need each other.

I like to use the word “community” to define the safe place where we express that need because it is the place we commune – make something common to all of us, share, experience a state of intimate, heightened sensitivity and receptivity to each other and to God.. Lots of people mainlined individualism too long and their communionator doesn’t function well, but a cell is a great rehab. It also keeps you out of all sorts of rehab you might otherwise need.

People can be trusted to form the church and lead it.

I hope it is obvious by now that one of the risks we took when we set the Circle of Hope course is to disperse the leadership. We wanted to limit the “talking head” motif and avoid creating a sea of faces in an audience watching a show like so many cows waiting to be fed.

I, in particular among cell leaders,

Learning from Ten Years of Cells

have trusted some pretty marginal apprentices to take the wheel of a new cell at multiplication time. (Please note a Circle of Hope proverb: *Accepting failure and moving on in hope is basic to living in the grace of God.*) But you know what? People have done fine. Love finds a way. Faith is a real motivator. We judge people too harshly and don’t let them use what they’ve got. In Christ. They can do it. They must do it to thrive. And we need them to share what they’ve got, or we are impoverished.

The truest community in Christ is not based on mere affinity

That doesn’t mean being birds of a feather has no place or doesn’t feel good. It is just less true, and weaker. We have had women’s cells that seemed useful for a season, but they usually die. One time I was the leader of a women’s cell — they finally multiplied me out; then they died. We have had all black cells, all young cells, all cool per-

son cells, all middle class cells – they all tend to die.

There is probably a biotic reason for this. Even primitive tribes seemed to know that they needed to get some input from another gene pool or they would soon be reproducing monsters. I’ve tried to specialize in bringing together unlikely candidates for community and I love the love and growth that results. I am drawn to praise time and again to see Jesus working out love with unlikely partners who will work with him.

People get to know Jesus and themselves through Christ-centered community

The Christians of the previous generation pretty much specialized in winning an argument about Jesus and calling it evangelism. Meanwhile, every time you run into Jesus in the Bible, He isn’t even bothering to defend himself. This is an issue.

I’m an evangelist, too. Every Jesus-follower is an evangelist on some level (Please note another proverb: *Any believer, who is not doing their part in the “family business” of redeeming the world, is missing the point of their ongoing existence.*) But I don’t think making an argument gets the job done. Dipping someone repeatedly in Christian community works a lot better. After all, Jesus did pray, “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” The best evangelism is incarnational – it comes in a body, it is organically grown in the soil of Spirit-seeded humanity, it is caught as much as taught. Our cells have been a good place for that to happen.

This takes a long time! All liberating growth takes time, I am so glad we have kept at it.

A missional community creates gravity, security, and creativity

As you can see, I take cells quite seriously. It has not been disappointing to put my heart into them. Some people do stare at them, like an explorer visiting aborigines somewhere, and say, “I know ‘bureaucracy,’ I know a little ‘family,’ I understand ‘club’ and ‘team,’ but what is ‘cell?’” We don’t always know what it is, either, but I think God does.

A cell is another entity like Jesus

who is fully present in his space but connected to eternity, Jesus who is fully attentive to who is in front of him and totally going toward a goal, too, Jesus who brings miracle into the moment, who makes the most of what is, and who even calls into being what isn't. That's what we are working on in the cell.

When we pull it off, Christ-centered community in a cell is a beautiful thing that sends roots down deep enough to weather the normal storms of the sin and death that keeps trying to blow down our spiritual house. What a cell attempts to do is make a time-island in the schedule where reality is sure to be entertained. Or put it this way, a cell is where there is a good chance that you will be received as who you are and where your longings about who you'd like to be will not be abused too much. Or try this, a cell is where you can try on your true self in Christ and walk around in it without being laughed at, or if you are laughed at it will be by people who are laughing with you. And all that goes for the next person to walk in, too.

Hard is not bad when it comes to Jesus love.

Cells are not always easy. For instance: They are often lead by extroverts who can't stand having anyone be quiet or slow to reveal themselves, so introverts beware! They are open to self-absorbed people (their order of priority for cell day might be: work, then gym, then dinner, then cell — any special event will get in before cell) so might feel like you are pouring your love into a sponge, sometimes. Downright wicked people do drop in to see if they can get you into an argument, subvert your relationships and doubt your reason to exist. Cells are not the garden of Eden — at least before the fall.

What's more, people leave the community even though you gave your heart to them. They do not always reciprocate as you'd like. Not being settled in with a comfy circle of people who already know and love you can be tiring, especially when your comfy circle demands your time.

I don't think loving was easy for Jesus, either. But he was willing to do the hard-loving necessary to undo the not-loving. As we have worked with him over the years, I think we have realized over and over that the "yoke" of the hard-loving is a lot easier than the "yoke" of the not-loving. The "cup" of hard-love is destiny,

the "death" of hard-love is life. We do not shrink back from exercising that faith face to face in our cells, working out our salvation with real people with an eye on completing our part of God's redemption project.

Below is a picture of most of the people in my present cell (I had to steal some photos from MySpace, too). What a wonderful motley crew! After our few months together we all know a lot about each other's problems, uncertainty, and beauty. We've laughed and cried and fought a little. We've avoided each other and sought each other out. We've found out how similar and how unlike we are. We know who we like naturally and who scares us. We've struggled with getting together and are struggling with being serious enough to multiply and do it all again while retaining what we've received. It is very good.

Rod White



Goal Check *Jan-April 2006*

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 2006. Every issue we ask our leaders to evaluate our progress toward meeting them.

Network

Propel the network's common purpose through better communication

Our website is being redesigned. We're working at telling our story better.

Knit the church together with common events that express our passion

Most of what we have in mind is still in the talk stage.

Develop our ability to live reconciled

Right now, work at further events to promote this is at a standstill.

Refine our practical ability to cooperate as congregations.

Steps taken here will help us elsewhere. Dan Snook and Rebecca Six were hired at East and BW, respectively. Dave Valentine became a new kind of Coordinator; the Administrative Coordinator.

Prepare for our next "hiving off"

We have had discussion but not much planning, here.

Broad and Washington

Replenish our numbers with Center City, South and West Philly people.

Our numbers have been replenished. Many from our target areas.

Show our face in our neighborhoods and on campus through the works of Circle Venture

We have not been as deliberate about this as planned. We did participate in a peace march, tree planting.

Make a difference as we integrate into our neighborhood

We have made contact with our neighborhood association and local art groups. Our space has become known through our events. We have offered services through ESOL and Baby Goods Exchanges.

Help people make deeper and more productive connections

Our move into our offices, finishing up the building gave us a better chance to relate. We hired a pastoral assistant who had more hours to help organize and communicate. We have refined calendar, website and other tools. Tracey's cell held a women's retreat.

Include, inspire and instruct by using our building efficiently, generously and creatively

The Events Team has treated us to a diverse set of events, inviting over 600 people in since mid-Feb. We have begun to refine administration of the space.

Northwest

Not reporting

Improve our PMs to better serve our CMs, regular attenders and visitors

Continue to grow our cell groups by multiplying existing ones and starting new cells.

Improve our community connecting and the quality of our service ministries

Expand our tools and resources for spiritual development

Continue to create avenues that help grow our church multi-culturally and which creates a balance of people from different socio-economic experiences.



*Brotherly Love Urban Youth Services
Banquet*

East

Grow deeper roots in our neighborhood

Several people from the congregation have either purchased their home in the area or relocated to the area recently.

Develop a deeper relationship with God as a group

Our worship times continue to develop and continues to be transformative for many

Reorganize and re-fit 2007 Frankford

We are still exploring this as an option. Circle Thrift potential to be a larger blessing for the direct neighbors as well as the global, so we are looking into some other options as well.

Deepen connections with communities/agencies we already know

Continuing partnership with New Kensington CDC has led to some fruit...great connections with Kensington High School and Congreso de Latinos are on the near horizon

Circle Venture

Strengthen each mission team by providing organizational guidelines

The teams made budgets and set goals. Our quarterly meeting was well-attended and formative.

Deepen the sources of support for our mission

We have raised \$10K of our \$35K goal. Our networking with donors has improved.

Hire new Circle Venture Development Coordinator

We combined with B/W to hire Rebecca Six, who does some of what a Development Coordinator would have done.

Help Circle Thrift to make world-changing profits

Under Martha Graces' leadership Circle Thrift has begun to make a profit!

Offer the Network regular and varied ways for people outside the mission teams to express compassion

We made our core team more representative. We helped create an online calendar. We raised the profile of the teams.

Join the Cell Leaders at a mid-year **Council** meeting of the Circle of Hope Network of congregations planned for **July 8 at East, 9am.**