

ASAL International
GROWING KINGDOM BUSINESSES TOGETHER

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ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATE *(Leland Ulrich, Founder & CEO Emeritus)*

Healthy Civic Organizations—Seeking the Peace of the City

IN THE FALL OF 2022, I introduced the Seven Pillars of Sustainable Kingdom Communities and promised to unpack each pillar in the following newsletters. We have since walked through Healthy Churches, Healthy Families, Healthy Individuals, Healthy Education, Healthy Kingdom Businesses, and Healthy Mutual Aid & Non-Profit Organizations. One pillar remains—I have saved the hardest for last.

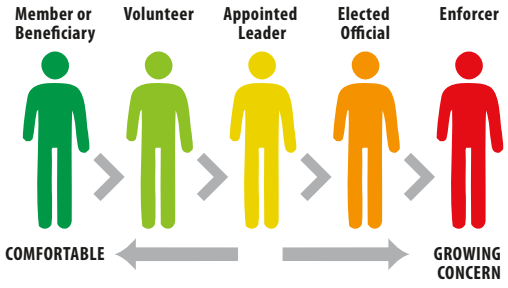
The word "civic" makes many of us (conservative Anabaptists) uneasy. Our forefathers paid dearly for refusing to let the state rule over matters of faith. We hold to nonresistance. Many of our people do not vote, hold public office, or swear oaths. Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). So why does a pillar called Civic Organizations belong in a framework for Kingdom Communities at all?

Much like our grandparents' teaching on business and finance, our teaching on civic life has been pertinent, but incomplete. It has told us clearly what to avoid. It has said much less about how to live faithfully as neighbors in the places God has planted us.

Where Do We Draw the Lines?

Civic organizations serve the shared life of the whole community (believer and neighbor alike)—roads, water, fire and emergency response, colony administration, cooperatives, and clinics. They sit closest to where community life meets government and law. Jeremiah told the exiles in Babylon, *"And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it"* (Jer. 29:7). That is the posture of this pillar—pilgrims who are also good neighbors.

Most of us already take part in civic life more than we realize. Our people fill volunteer fire company roles, serve on road and water committees, and are often the first to arrive when disaster strikes. Our colonies have long negotiated with governments for freedom of worship and exemption from military service. Our discomfort begins when a role moves toward force, oaths, political power, or binding fellowship outside the faith.



Most of our church groups are at peace on the left end of this scale (graph at left). Because we are nonresistant, we do not carry weapons or serve in police or armed security forces (Matt. 5:39). Most of our brotherhoods also do not run for partisan office or join oath-bound societies (2 Cor. 6:14). In between lies honest disagreement, such as an elected seat on a local water board. The goal here is not to move anyone's line, but to help each brotherhood see clearly where its lines are, and why.

I propose the following eight components of healthy civic organizations:

1. Vision

A healthy civic organization has a clear vision of the community it hopes to see—a declared future outcome just this side of eternity. Without vision, civic

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work shrinks to maintenance. With vision, fixing the road becomes part of building a community where families flourish, churches worship freely, and the Gospel is lived out in full view of our neighbors. A civic vision should fit within the church and brotherhood's vision, and never compete with it.

2. Mission

If vision is the future outcome declared, then the mission is what you will do to get there. A water committee's mission might be *to provide clean, reliable water to every household at a fair cost.* Clarity of mission keeps civic organizations from drifting and protects against a quiet danger: serving the interests of a few rather than the good of all.

3. Core Values

Core values are the guardrails that keep civic work on the narrow path. For us, this is where convictions must be named plainly: the Lordship of Christ over every allegiance (Acts 5:29), honor for those in authority (1 Pet. 2:17), nonresistance and peacemaking (Matt. 5:9), honesty that needs no oath (Matt. 5:37), and doing good unto all men (Gal. 6:10).

These values tell us both how to engage and where to stop. We can serve on the fire company or the road committee without seeking political power. We can honor the law of the land and still say with Peter, *"We ought to obey God rather than men,"* when the two collide.

4. Purpose Statement

When vision, mission, and core values are clear, a sense of purpose emerges. For civic organizations, the purpose is to seek the peace of the city so that we may *"lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty"* (1 Tim. 2:2). Notice that Paul tied that quiet life to prayer for those in authority. Our civic posture begins on our knees.

5. Organization

"For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace" (1 Cor. 14:33). Healthy civic organizations have defined roles, clear lines of authority, and known processes. Structures that grew informally over generations eventually breed confusion. Leaders must serve (Matt. 20:26), hold influence loosely, and remember they are stewards of a public trust, not owners of it.

6. Operations

Operations are the everyday work of roads, water, emergencies, and records. This is also where civic organizations meet the law most directly through permits, registrations, and inspections. In many countries shortcuts are common and sometimes expected. Kingdom civic organizations refuse them. *"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's"* (Matt. 22:21). Lawful, transparent operations earn a trust that no amount of talk can buy.

7. Finances

Civic organizations handle money that belongs to the whole community. This is a sacred trust, *"Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men"* (2 Cor. 8:21). A budget, regular reporting, reconciled accounts, and independent review are essential. Nothing erodes community trust faster than unclear handling of shared money.

8. Governance

Governance asks the most of us, and it works in two directions. Internally, it means oversight and accountability. Acts 6 gives us the model: men *"of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom"* were appointed to oversee a shared responsibility fairly.

Externally, it means our relationship with the authorities. *"The powers that be are ordained of God"* (Rom. 13:1), and we pray for them, honor them, and pay what we owe. Yet our ultimate allegiance belongs to Christ alone. Where a specific role falls on the scale (previous page) is for the brotherhood to discern prayerfully, under the counsel of the local church. That is why civic organizations must remain closely connected to Healthy Churches.

The Triple Bottom Line

1. **Kingdom Impact**—Does our civic engagement honor Christ and protect the freedom and witness of the church?
2. **Social Impact**—Is the whole community, believer and neighbor alike, better served, safer, and more at peace?
3. **Financial Stewardship**—Are shared resources managed transparently and sustainably for generations to come?

Closing Thought:

We are strangers and pilgrims on this earth (1 Pet. 2:11). That does not make us careless neighbors. It makes us the kind of neighbors who seek the peace of the city because our hope is in another one. When civic organizations function in harmony with the other six pillars, anchored in the Lordship of Jesus Christ, every pillar is strengthened and the light of the kingdom shines into the world around us.

This concludes this series on the Seven Pillars of Sustainable Kingdom Communities. Thank you for walking this road with me since 2022.













Leadership Classes in Costa Rica

TESTIMONIAL from the Field

Peter Bergen, Business Coach—Mexico



WHAT COMES TO MIND when you hear "Costa Rica"? I picture a country with beautiful, welcoming coastlines. On June 1, the ASAL team had the privilege of participating in a two-day training session with Leland in that iconic country.

Our first encounter with the country's traffic wasn't very pleasant; there were traffic jams like I'd never seen before. With patience, we left San José behind and arrived in Jacó, where a beautiful rented condo was waiting for us.

My next task was to find out exactly what "Pura Vida" means. After understanding the many definitions of that phrase, I felt at ease.*

The condo was just a few meters from the ocean, nestled among hills covered in jungle and lush vegetation. There were toucans flying back and forth; something I'd dreamed of seeing for a long time.

In the last two training sessions with Leland, we've focused on the triple bottom line of kingdom businesses. It was a completely new term to me when I first heard it at ASAL, and I assume it will be new to some of our readers as well, so I'd like to explain it briefly. If our businesses achieve these three positive outcomes, then we can say they are truly successful.

1) **Impact on the Kingdom:** Is your business the salt of the earth, as Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount? It's about paying fairly and on time, without lying about quality or prices, and treating employees and suppliers with dignity—not as mere tools. In a country like Costa Rica, where "Pura Vida" is sometimes used as an excuse for informality, a business that is punctual, honest, and keeps its word is already preaching the gospel. Perhaps many people don't read the Bible, but everyone will read our invoices and observe the way we do business.

2) **Social Impact:** It involves paying a fair wage on time, training people whom others would not hire, and treating our team like family—not as cheap labor. It's about teaching them to save, to lead, and to grow. That breaks cycles of poverty far more effectively than a simple donation. It also involves caring for the environment where our business is located.

3) **Financial Impact:** Without an impact on the kingdom and without a social impact, there can be no lasting financial impact. A business with a strong financial impact isn't the one that sells the most but the one that best manages its income. It's impossible to be a good Christian on Sunday and mismanage our business during the week. As the saying goes: *"How you do one thing is how you do everything."*

As a Russian Mennonite—part of a people who understand the value of hard work, frugality, and helping one another—I deeply hope that these principles, in the kingdom, in social matters, and in financial matters, will be put into practice in our businesses and become our hallmark.

One of the things that made the biggest impression on me came after the two days of classes when some of us on the team went to visit the businesses that ASAL has financed in Costa Rica. I loved seeing the commitment and dedication of the brothers and sisters in that country.

One of the things I liked best: we left San José and headed inland toward the business district, and after nearly two hours on the road, the city of San José was still visible, towering over the valley. We were driving up the mountains, through the mist and amid the intense greenery. The whole setting reminded me of the Swiss Alps.

Another thing that really caught my attention—and even made me smile—was this: in all my years, I had never met a Weaver who didn't speak English, nor a Kornelsen who didn't speak German. Seeing how God has planted our Mennonite family in Costa Rica—where they now speak only Spanish and have their own history—reminded me of just how large and diverse our people are.

I'm increasingly amazed by the depth of the topic of finances and leadership. It's not just about business; it affects our families, our churches, and our schools. We can't be excellent in church on Sunday and disorganized with our finances on Monday. It's impossible to excel in one area and be lackluster in another. As the saying goes: *"How you do one thing is how you do everything."*



*Pura Vida literally translates to "pure life" or "simple life," but in Costa Rica it is more than just a phrase—it is a national motto, a lifestyle, and a philosophy. Pura Vida embodies a positive, relaxed attitude toward life, commonly used as a greeting, farewell, or expression of gratitude.

From Idea to Fruit: 6 Links of a Healthy Organization

Roman Miller, Founder & Communications Officer

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT element in the function of an organization? Some would say ideas. Others would say motivation, or action. Each answer may be partly right. No single element carries an organization on its own. In a business, a church, a home, or any other body of people, these six elements work together like links in a chain—ideas, suggestions, formulas, commitment, motivation, and action. Each one draws on the link before it and gives strength to the link after it. When we isolate one, or exalt one at the expense of another, the whole structure becomes unbalanced. Ideas without action remain dreams. Action without a formula becomes busyness. The health of an organization lies in keeping every link strong and connected.

1. Ideas—The Starting Point

Every human invention and every human activity begins as an idea. Philosophically, an idea is a mental representation, a concept that guides thought and behavior.

Ideas are the foundation of innovation, progress, and transformation. They shape the way we live, work, and understand the world. An organization with a steady supply of ideas has the raw material for growth and vitality.

Yet an idea alone is only a seed. It holds great promise, but it must be planted, spoken, and shaped before it can produce anything.



2. Suggestions —Giving the Idea a Shape

A suggestion is an idea that has been spoken aloud and offered to others. It is a specific proposal or recommendation, given in response to a request for input or to address a particular problem.

Suggestions are more concrete and action-oriented than abstract ideas. They also carry something an idea does not: communication and collaboration. The moment an idea becomes a suggestion, other people can examine it, question it, and improve it.

This is where an idea first meets reality. An organization that welcomes suggestions gives its ideas a path forward.

3. Formulas—An Accurate Representation

A formula completes the picture that the idea and the suggestion began. Whether mathematical, structural, or creative, a formula turns a vague concept into a clear, repeatable, and actionable framework.

The value of a formula is consistency. It can be taught, followed, measured, and applied again and again with the same result. People no longer have to guess what is expected of them.

That clarity matters for what comes next. People rarely commit to what they cannot see clearly.

4. Commitment—The Glue

A formula brings clarity, and clarity makes commitment a viable choice. Commitment is the glue that turns a formula's ingredients into a working result. Without it, even the best plan or recipe will fail to deliver.

In any formula, whether a business strategy, a personal goal, or a relationship, commitment moves the process from intention to execution. It is more than making a promise. It is dedicating yourself to follow through consistently, even when challenges arise.

Many good plans fail at this link. The plan was sound, but no one bound themselves to it.

5. Motivation—The Drive to Act

Commitment fuels motivation. When we commit, we align our actions with our values, our goals, and our sense of who we are. That alignment engages both mind and body, and it produces the inner reward that sustains effort over time.

We often wait to feel motivated before we commit. The order is usually the reverse. Motivation that rests on feeling alone fades with the first difficulty. Motivation that grows out of commitment endures, because it is anchored in a decision already made.

6. Action —Where Fruit is Produced

Fruit is the product of action. Doing is what transforms a thought into a tangible result, and that result is the fruit of the original idea.

Our spiritual tradition teaches this same principle: intentional actions generate consequences that shape what comes after. It is known as the law of sowing and reaping. In every version, the harvest follows the work, not the wish.

Action is the last link, and the one by which the others are judged. An idea is proven by what it finally produces.

Keeping the Chain Intact

So which element is most important? The one that is missing.

An organization rich in ideas but poor in commitment will talk and never build. One full of activity but short on ideas will work hard and go nowhere new. The task of leadership is to find the weak link and strengthen it.

Ideas become suggestions. Suggestions become formulas. Formulas invite commitment. Commitment fuels motivation. Motivation produces action. And action, in its season, bears fruit.

KINGDOM TEACHING

WHO KEEPS YOU HONEST?

Why Voluntary Accountability Beats Forced Accountability

EVERY BUSINESS OWNER is accountable to someone. The only question is whether we choose our accountability or it chooses us.

Several years ago in this newsletter, I shared my own confession after years in business: *"Voluntary accountability pays ten-fold dividends over forced accountability."* I believe that even more today than when I first wrote it.

Forced accountability shows up uninvited. It comes as a bank calling a loan, a supplier cutting off credit, a key employee walking out the door, or a wife who quietly stops asking about the business. It is based on results, and by the time the results arrive, the damage is usually done.

Voluntary accountability works upstream. It invites people in before the results show up, so they can speak into the behaviors that cause results. *"Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety"* (Prov. 11:14).

Why We Avoid It

Entrepreneurs are wired to lead, to decide, and to carry the load. Going it alone can feel like strength, but it is often fear... Fear of being exposed, questioned, or slowed down. Most of us don't need help knowing what to do. We need help doing what we know.

Building Your Circle

Consider who could fill these four seats in your life:

1. **A peer.** Another business owner who understands the pressures and will ask the hard questions without an agenda.
2. **A coach or advisor.** Someone with experience who can see patterns you can't see from inside your business.
3. **A board or partners.** Even a small business can benefit from an advisory group that meets quarterly to review the numbers and the plan.
4. **A brother in the church.** Someone who knows you well and has permission to ask about your heart, not just your numbers.

Permission and Visibility

Accountability without visibility is theater. Your circle can only help with what they can see. Share your scorecard, your critical number, and your commitments. Give them permission to speak, and then ask regularly, *"What do you see that I don't?"*

When they answer, resist the urge to defend. Listen, thank them, and act.

"Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend" (Prov. 27:17).

Who keeps you honest? If you can't name someone, start this week.

IRELAND

COUNTRY Highlights



1. **Geography:** Ireland, located in northwest Europe, is divided into the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland (part of the UK). They share an open border, enabling free movement of people, goods, services, and capital. The Republic of Ireland is an EU member, while the UK left in 2020. The Republic of Ireland constitutes 83% of the island's area. The islands are often called the British Isles, or "Britain and Ireland."
2. **Size:** Ireland covers an area of approximately 84,421 km² (32,595 sq. mi.), making it the 20th largest island in the world. It is roughly the size of the U.S. state of Indiana.
3. **Population:** 5,300,000 in the Republic (approximately the size of South Carolina)
4. **Capital City:** Dublin
5. **Religion:** Christianity is the main religion in the Republic of Ireland—the Catholic Church is the largest denomination. The Irish constitution upholds freedom of religion and prohibits the state from endorsing any specific religion.
6. **Language:** Two official languages, English and Irish (Gaeilge)
7. **Unique Facts:** Ireland is nicknamed the Emerald Isle because of its lush green fields. One of the oldest lighthouses in the world is located in Wexford. County Cork was once the largest exporter of butter in the world. The Irish Potato Famine lasted from 1845-1852. Approximately 1 million died and 2.1 million left the country which reduced the population to 5 million.

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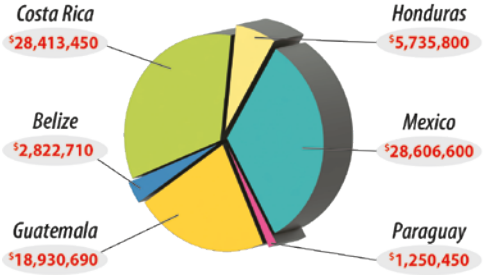
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