

REDEEMER

R E P O R T

NOVEMBER 1996

DOUBTERS WELCOME

BY TIM KELLER

“...the joyful effects of the gospel in our own lives give us an enormous energy for witness.”

As a college student I attended a campus Christian fellowship which always had a booktable of Christian literature available for purchase. A popular little pamphlet was called *Doubters Welcome*, and it reflected the spirit of that campus group and its attitude toward unbelievers. I remember thinking what a shame it was that most churches didn't have the same welcoming attitude.

The third of Redeemer's "core values" is that we want to be a place where those who are not believers (or who are not sure what they believe) find that their questions are invited, their doubts and difficulties are respected, and their struggles have been anticipated. We are acutely aware of and rejoice in the presence of doubters in our midst. We

are very insistent, yet extremely non-combative as we present the reasonable beauty of the Christian faith in every aspect of our ministry.

Why do we do this?

First, the joyful effects of the gospel in our own lives give us an enormous energy for witness. How can we keep our mouths closed about such a wonder? But second, the humbling nature of the gospel leads us to approach non-believers without superiority and with respect. Since we are saved only by God's grace and not our own goodness, we expect to find wisdom and compassion in non-Christians which at many points may exceed ours. Third, our experience of God's love through the gospel removes the fear of others' disapproval. These influences of the gospel—joy, humility, and love—helps to prevent us from

treating non-Christians as "evangelism cases"—people that we relate to, talk to, and care for only in order to win them over to our side. That would be to objectify and dehumanize them, and, ironically, it is unwinsome. We don't love people in order to evangelize them. Rather, we evangelize them because we already love them. The more these dynamics are present in our lives the more Redeemer will powerfully draw in new people like a magnet (*Acts 2:47*).

How do we do this?

In evangelism, we take an intelligent, not an authoritarian approach. We remember what it is like not to believe, and we do not expect people to believe simply by being told "This is true." People want to know

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ACCOUNTABILITY GROUPS

BY TIM PETTIT

You know the heart-gripping scene: You swerve your car into the right hand lane in Midtown and—aaagh!—you narrowly miss sideswiping a Yellow Cab. Of course, you say, it was in my blindspot.

Even more harrowing is the thought of how many of us are careening through the Midtown of life, narrowly missing crunching moral and spiritual collisions and then shrugging them off. You say you'll be more careful next time, but it's impossible, isn't it? After all, a blind spot wouldn't bear that name if you could see it!

The only real solution for a

blindspot is to have someone along with you who can see traffic that's outside your range of vision, and so it is in the spiritual realm. The next time you wipe your brow in relief after still another spiritual near-miss, ask yourself: Who is looking after my blind spot? Who is willing to point out my wrong-headed decisions, while it's still not too late to change them? Who is graciously but firmly asking me some hard questions about my life? In short, to whom am I accountable?

Ouch! That last word makes us wince. We know what it means to be financially accountable for a bank loan. Memories of being accountable to a teacher or professor don't fade quickly. Anyone who works for a company that enjoys making a profit can easily define the phrase, "I'm accountable to my boss."

So why should I make myself vulnerable and answerable to someone for something as personal as my spiritual life? A wise man once said

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why, and we encourage their questions and expect to be put on the spot to provide reasonable answers.

Second, we take a process, not a “crisis” approach to conversion. We expect that it will take multiple exposures to the gospel, in a variety of ways, before the penny drops and it all makes sense. We afford people the opportunity to ask questions after every service, in the School of Discipleship Classes, in home fellowship groups and in every other venue we can think of, so that they receive the information about Christianity that addresses their situation.

Third, we take a “presuppositional” approach to persuading people about Christianity. (Sorry to use a big word!) That means that we believe every person, even the skeptic, already does believe in God (*Romans 1:18-25*). We therefore we find “clues of God”—insights into truth—that they have, and use them to show the way back to their Creator and Redeemer. Jesus responded positively to

a man who was in “process”, who asked, “I believe—but help my unbelief!” (*Mark 9:24*), and at Redeemer we want to do the same.

Where do we do this?

Everywhere. At Redeemer we put out the Doublers Welcome Mat at every service and meeting, always expecting and hoping to be “overheard” by those who don’t believe. We believe that worship must be done in such a way that non-believers can understand and be included. In I Corinthians 14:24-25, Paul asserts that “seekers” are to be expected and accommodated in Christian worship. He demands that the meeting be conducted in a way that is comprehensible and convicting to outsiders, without altering its nature as a worship.

We provide classes and “after meetings” where people can be debriefed after services and helped to understand the Christian faith. This is patterned on Acts 2, where non-believers were first impressed with the

worship of the disciples (“we hear them declaring the wonders of God”), and then received a more thorough exposition of the gospel in response to their question (“what does this mean?” v.11). Also, we seek to have most of our small groups and service ministries open and inclusive of people regardless of where they are on their spiritual journey.

We are extremely fortunate to minister in a large city, where Christians are not able to segregate themselves from others. Urban Christians tend to have many more friends and acquaintances among people who don’t believe than those who are isolated in suburban and rural areas. At Redeemer, we aim to create a climate where the Christian comes and quickly realizes, “if I brought my unbelieving friends here, they will be surprised to see how attractive and sensible Christianity is.” As long as Christians are having that thought, Redeemer will continue to change many lives.

ACCOUNTABILITY GROUPS (continued from page 1)

this: “Two are better than one...for if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up...And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.” (*Ecclesiastes 4:9-12*)

Men, we in particular need to be encouraged and exhorted to become accountable to one another. (Women seem to become interdependent far more naturally than men; the Redeemer women have had a mentoring and accountability program going at Redeemer for years!) We have recently seen the remarkable spectacle of 40,000 men gathering at Shea Stadium for Promisekeepers and nearly 500 men

at a retreat in the Poconos to worship Jesus. Whatever deficiencies these venues may have had, they at least revealed a hunger among men to be open with one another about their spiritual lives.

Jesus gathered Peter, James and John around him. Moses had Joshua. David and Jonathan are famous for their spiritual friendship. Paul relied on Barnabas, Luke and Silas. May I suggest that it is time for all of us, particularly men, to begin praying for God to connect us with two or three others who will help each other weigh decisions and monitor one another’s spiritual blind spots. These need not be people who are like you ethnically, socially, educationally or emotionally, or near to you in age and interests. (In fact, if they are too

much like you, they might be prone to the same blindspots that you are.)

Ask God for members of the same sex as you who are:

Full of God’s grace: they are aware of how freely God continues to forgive them.

Honest: they are not in awe of you and are committed to the truth.

Authentic: they will not attack you like a sandblaster on a soup cracker; nor will they shrug off your sin with, “Gee, that’s not so bad.”

Available: they are willing and able to meet on a regular basis.

In a future article, I’ll write about what makes an accountability group work. In the meantime, for more information you can contact me, Tim Pettit, director of church life, at 808-4460, ext. 41.

REDEEMER REPORT

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Redeemer meets Sunday at
HUNTER COLLEGE AUDITORIUM • EAST 69TH BETWEEN PARK AND LEXINGTON
services at 10:30 • 6:00

BUY-A-PIE Youth Fundraiser

Wouldn't the aroma of a freshly-baked pumpkin pie be just the thing for your too-busy-to-make-anything Thanksgiving Week? For a mere \$8.00, you can get a homemade pumpkin pie on Sunday, November 24, from our Youth Group. You'll be helping them and a Hispanic church in Queens with which the youth are partnering to raise funds for future youth retreats and activities. For advance orders, call Mark and Paige McIlraith at (212) 749-5596.

Harlem Prayer Walk

Did you ever wonder why God asked Joshua and the Israelites to march around the city of Jericho? Surely one of the reasons was that we pray more effectively for God's intervention in a situation when we have personally seen the full scope of the need. Bearing that in mind, you are invited to join a group from Redeemer on Sunday, November 17, to pray for the West Harlem community near Morningside Heights.

We will meet downstairs in the C-level of Hunter College at 1:00 p.m. for a quick lunch after church and an orientation to the Harlem re-development plan from Partnership Ministries. Then we will travel together to the first block where Partnership will begin its work in youth training, housing rehabilitation, and economic development. After walking around the target neighborhood (between 118th-119th, and St. Nicholas and 8th Avenue) there will be a de-briefing afterwards at Christ Church with the Rev. James Clark. Redeemer contact for this event is Dennis Day. Please call him at 212-222-2942 with questions and to let him know if you want the brown bag lunch. (See related article on page 4.)

Donation Sought for Nursery Parent-Pager System

What do you do when you have a child who becomes sick in the nursery, or who begins to cry and cannot be comforted, or when you need to ask a parent an urgent question? You go look for the parent, of course. What if you're located at Hunter College, and the parents are spread out among a thousand other people across two city blocks of a college campus?

Up until now, the answer has been, "You look very, VERY hard for the parents, sometimes for a very, VERY long time." After considering several options, however, the Nursery Staff has recommended that Redeemer purchase an on-premise paging system, much like those you may have encountered at restaurants or stores while waiting to be served. Parents of children under 4 years old will receive a silent pager when they bring their child to the nursery. The pager is clipped to a belt or kept in a pocket. If it becomes necessary for the parent to be contacted, the pager will vibrate in an unmistakable way, alerting the parent for the need to return to the nursery for a moment.

The advantages of this type of system are numerous: Parents have the security of knowing that they can be informed immediately if a problem arises, so they can attend worship and School of Discipleship classes with an undistracted mind. Nursery attendants are not sent out of the room searching for parents, thus reducing their effectiveness in caring for the other children in their charge. And security is enhanced, since no child will be delivered to any other person than the one returning the pager.

The only drawback to the plan is the expense of its implementation. The system currently under consideration will cost \$8,009 for the master transmitter, 70 individual pagers, nine charging racks, and a voltage regulator. Redeemer is hoping that specially designated gifts will cover the unbudgeted cost of this system. If you would like to contribute, please contact Goldie Anderson at the Redeemer office 212-808-4460 ext. 14.

VISION FOR
1997
PRESENTED

A special presentation was delivered to the congregation on October 27 following the morning worship service. Instead of the usual School of Discipleship classes, hundreds of people remained in the auditorium for a State of the Church address by Tim Keller, who outlined the future goals of Redeemer.

In analyzing both the current state and future of the church, Tim Keller said "We reviewed our core values and asked, 'What makes Redeemer distinctive? What defines us as a church?' Then we looked at where we would have to go as a church in order to live out those values in 1997. Our time, our energy, and our priorities, as always, have to be guided by three things: Gospel Change, Urban Outreach, and Movement Mindset. The original rallying cry of Redeemer used to be 'We're not a church for ourselves.' In order to be true to that, we will have to commit ourselves to become radically generous, spending our money not on ourselves or on our pet projects, but wherever the need exists in order to win New Yorkers for Christ, mature them into servant-leaders, and empower them to meet the needs of the city."

Dr. Keller illustrated his talk with slides summarizing the values and goals of Redeemer, and ended by challenging the congregation to commit themselves and their resources towards ministry.

A deli luncheon was held following the presentation where members and friends of the congregation heard testimonies about changed lives as a result of Redeemer's ministry. During the congregational meeting following the luncheon the 1997 budget of \$3.2 million was approved.

Nearly 5000 people received a vision brochure in the mail. If you would like to receive one, call Drew Field at the Redeemer office.

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HARLEM DEVELOPMENT MINISTRY

Who exactly is Partnership Ministries, Inc. (PMI) and why are we helping them to re-develop one Harlem neighborhood? (See page 3- Harlem Prayer Walk.) Hope for New York, wanted to find new projects with a comprehensive Christian community development focus and PMI met its criteria.

Christian community development attempts to meet all the range of needs in a particular neighborhood, instead on concentrating on just one issue like homelessness or education reform. PMI will begin with Learning Centers in Harlem (for adults and children) a computer-based education and job-training program they have had success with in other communities. In addition, they will rehabilitate housing in the targeted West Harlem neighborhood, begin some economic development by creating new small businesses and offer addiction treatment to residents who struggle with alcohol or drug problems.

PMI has a developed a Neighborhood Bible Study system that will teach spiritual truth and help residents get involved in local churches. By meeting the needs of people, including education, employment training, housing, jobs, addiction recovery and spiritual training, PMI can substantially change this neighborhood. And it will take many volunteers and concerned individuals to do this — so come and find out more at our Harlem Prayer Walk on Sunday, November 17th.