

REDEEMER

R E P O R T

MAY 1997

The eighth core value of Redeemer has to do with the establishment of a corporate life.

A GOSPEL SHAPED COMMUNITY

BY JEFF WHITE

“A city set on a hill” is something which stands out, something which is distinct. That is what Jesus called his disciples to be. But are we? Or do we blend in with the culture, unnoticeable and unnoticed? The answer is fairly clear.

“...the purpose of his saving work is the formation of a people, a new family...”

Occasionally a solitary Christian stands out — a radiant example of what a person transformed by God's Spirit should look like and be. There have always been individuals who by their actions seem to be set apart from the rest of us mortals, even in non-Christian traditions. These rare individuals don't do much by way of recommending their particular set of beliefs to the rest of us. We figure it is not their beliefs which gave rise to their character, but the unique giftedness of the person which would have been remarkable no matter what set of beliefs they professed. Such people draw our admiration. They might even inspire us to action.

Usually, however, we convince ourselves that the level they have

achieved is unattainable for the rest of us. We are thankful that they exist and engage in their particular heroics, but we consider them part of a rare, unusual breed. Without being similarly endowed, we don't expect the same of ourselves. We are common. But surely when Jesus said that we were to be “a city set on a hill,” he had more in mind than a few rare Christians standing out from the crowd or even a bunch of individual Christians standing out in the crowd.

“A city set on a hill” is a community image, not an individual one. Jesus assumed that there would be visible communities of believers, who by the quality of their corporate life were noticeable and distinct. The New Testament writers thought of themselves first as a community, rather than as individuals.

Once we realize that, a reexamination of the Scriptures demonstrates that corporate imagery is the dominate theme of the Bible. We are the “body of Christ,” “a temple of living stone,” “a living sacrifice.”

In fact, the promise which is at the heart of the Bible — “I will be your God and you will be my people” — is nothing less than God's promise to build us into a community in which he himself is the chief participant.

The purpose of God's saving work in Christ Jesus is not the rescuing of separate individuals who remain relatively unconnected. Instead, the purpose of his saving work is the formation of a people, a new family over which he presides as Father. Community is the goal of the gospel. At Redeemer we intend to keep before us these images and the truth to which they point. We are serious about our calling to be a visible and distinct community. What are to be the unique contours of this community? Well, first and foremost it is to be a community which believes the gospel. We are a community which believes that though we are deserving of God's rejection for having wickedly rejected and ignored our Maker,

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HOME FELLOWSHIP GROUPS — TESTIMONIES OF CHANGED LIVES

BY TIM PETTIT

David Ernst says it was his personal pain which drove him to a Home Fellowship Group in Queens two years ago. Once there, he got more than he ever anticipated.

“My first feeling was that I thought it would be a self-improvement thing and get me out of my isolation,” said David, who was feeling “depression, anxiety

and despair” about losing custody of his son to his wife, from whom he is separated. Instead of self-improvement, David said, he encountered a personal faith in Jesus Christ.

“I used to think that going to the group was just a 'good thing.' Now I see it as a necessity,” David said. “I need spiritual direction. I can't do it by myself. I've very aware

now that I can't live without God, without Jesus Christ.”

After two years of studying the Bible and praying with group members, David found himself lying in bed this past March, thinking, “If I died right now, I know exactly where I'd go. I'd never had a thought like that before. I wondered where it came from. But I

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nonetheless, through Jesus Christ's perfect life, costly death, and glorious resurrection we have been reconciled to God and adopted as his children, never to be rejected. That message, when believed and embraced, will shape us. As we joyfully worship the God of the gospel it will forge us into a community which uniquely embodies the story of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ in our life together.

What will this community look like?

1. We will be a uniquely **accepting** community, "accepting one another as God in Christ has accepted us." Knowing that we have been accepted by God at our worst, we will extend a similar acceptance to others without demanding that they change before we offer it to them. We will offer grace instead of judgment.

2. We will be a **holy** community. Though we are to accept people as they are, we are not to be content with leaving them where they are. The gospel tells us that having been adopted into God's family, we are destined to become like Jesus, our elder brother. We are to urge one another to develop the family likeness.

3. We will be a **truth-telling** community. Because we want to help each other live lives that are in line with the gospel, we will engage in gentler but honest truth-telling, which will lead others to want to change. Because we know we are accepted in Christ, we can hear each other without being defensive and we can risk being rejected for telling the truth.

4. We will be an **encouraging** community. Convinced that we are loved by God, we will be able to let

go of the rivalries and competitiveness we feel with others. We will be set free to honor, value and love others. We will be "for" them and encourage them towards greatness. This will make us a passionately praying community.

5. We will be a **sacrificially generous** community. We are those who "know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, so that through his poverty we might become rich." The gospel will make us particularly giving of our money and our time.

6. We will be a **suffering** community. Jesus loved us while we were enemies and through his suffering turned us into friends. Refusing to retaliate or take vengeance into our own hands, we will love and forgive those who seek to harm or persecute us, whether they are in the church or outside of it.

When we live like this in a way visible to outsiders, the community becomes both the goal of the gospel and the means of proclaiming the gospel. Our distinctness, therefore, is not to produce a "we-they" mentality with those outside the church so that a distance develops between the church and the world we are sent to. We are to be a contrast society, not so we can sequester ourselves from others, but for the sake of others, offering an alternative way of life which has its source in God's love for us, shows forth his beauty, and attracts others to him. A community which stands out is much harder to ignore than an individual.

Community and Fellowship Groups. It is the biblical vision of community which leads Redeemer to place so much emphasis on Fel-

lowship Groups. Far more than Bible study groups, they are to be primary Christian communities which embody the gospel. Because community life on this order is not optional for the Christian, small groups are not really optional either. The Scriptures demand that Christians be involved in on-going face-to-face relationships with others in the church. For that reason, Redeemer is committed to the cultivation and multiplication of Fellowship Groups. We are also committed to developing leaders skilled in encouraging others to form these kinds of communities. And we are committed to seeing existing groups become increasingly conformed to this pattern of life.

What will this mean for those who have made Redeemer their church? For some it will mean putting forth the effort and energy to become a skilled HFG leader. For everyone it will involve committing to a small group and developing a community mind-set in which we view ourselves as responsible to and for others. It will involve learning to ask not "what am I getting out of this?" but "what should I be putting into this?" And it will involve inviting outsiders into the midst of our groups and encouraging them to participate in life in Christ.

Admittedly, we are not very good at being a community. The individualism of our culture has left the muscles necessary for community life underdeveloped and atrophied. It will take time to redevelop them. But anything worth doing is worth doing properly. We will get better at it. And as we do, we will become "a city set on a hill" which, however dimly, shines with the glory of God and brings healing to the nations!

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

Divorce Seminar: What does the Bible say about divorce & remarriage?

Find out at our Divorce & Separation Seminar, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., May 10, at the Norwegian Seamen's Church, 317 E. 52nd St. (between First and Second Aves.) Registration is \$10 and includes continental breakfast and beverages. Workshops will be offered on "The Stages of Divorce," "The Effect on Children," and "Forgiveness." Registration is available at the door or you can call the church receptionist, 808-4460 ext. 10.

Make Plans for the Fourth:

We can take 80 people to a small, antique railroad hotel in Vermont for canoeing, tubing, fireworks, biking and hiking over the Fourth of July weekend. We'll virtually have the run of the Hotel Coolidge when we arrive the evening of Thursday, July 3; our festivities end the afternoon of Sunday, July 6. The cost for six meals, three nights lodging and canoe rental is just \$190 per person for double rooms, \$175 for triples, \$165 for quads; family rates are available. Van transportation is \$50 round-trip. Space is limited, so be ready to register in the East Lounge beginning May 11! For more info, contact Sue Pettit, 718-822-6192.

If we build it, they will come!

The better we make our junior and senior high youth program, the more kids it will attract, and the program will get even better, and... We're looking for men and women who can contribute at least one Sunday morning or evening a month to our growing youth ministry. Besides the Sunday programs, you can be involved in a variety of activities, trips and retreats for the youth. Upcoming events include rollerblading in Central Park and white water rafting. Call Michele Smith, 517-5830 or Tim Pettit, director of church life, 808-4460 ext. 41.

Partnership Ministries (our Harlem ministry project)

is holding a benefit luncheon to support their Independence House program for people with drug addictions. The lunch will be on Saturday, May 10, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in White Plains. The featured speaker is Patrice Gaines, the award winning reporter for the Washington Post who authored the book *Laughing in the Dark*. Tickets and directions to the hotel can be obtained by calling Carolyn Burke at (914) 737-2053.

Stolen Offering Update

The March 9 offering, which had been stolen, has been recovered, thanks to the vigilance of Hunter College officials. We have been calling every person who wrote a check for that offering and asking whether they want their check deposited, returned or destroyed.

MEMBERS RECEIVED BY PUBLIC PROMISE AND BAPTISM

March 9

- Ping Moy
- Chi-Ling Moy
- Beatrice Im
- Steve Shaffer
- Elizabeth Printki
- Chuck Kwong
- Lilian Kwong
- Margaret Taylor
- Bill Kurtz

April 13

- Teresa Argomedeo
- Yooli K. Chung
- Mari Nagasawa*
- Lee Chung*
- Susan Cocke
- Philip Cocke
- Anne Crosby
- Kathleen Shin*
- Shin Shin Foo*
- David Garcia
- Peter Teng

Infant Baptism
Sydney Newberry Phillips

**Adult Baptism*

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HOME FELLOWSHIP GROUPS — TESTIMONIES OF CHANGED LIVES

knew I had assurance. This was the first Easter that I would consider that I celebrated it as a Christian. I feel an incredible cleansing going on."

Redeemer member Laurie Collins first invited David to her fellowship group in Brooklyn, but it was too far. Then she urged him to find one in Queens, where David lives. What stands out in David's mind about his first visit to that apartment in Long Island City was how the group members prayed for each other in groups of three and four. "It was strange—I knew about prayer, but it was always a private thing," David recalled. "Here, it was a public thing of admitting that you had needs."

In April, the group rejoiced with David as the courts awarded him custody of his toddler son, Christopher. When he missed a recent group meeting because he was caring for Christopher, three members visited him on a Saturday to encourage him. "David is really taken by how God has returned his son to him," said Karl Wolf, the leader of the home group. "David knows that his job as a single father is not going to be easy, but he's determined to do it through prayer."

Karl said one of the major changes in David now is that "he's dealing with the real issues. When he first came he would often take up theological questions. Now, he delves into questions like, 'What is prayer?' In other words, he is focusing on the real Christian tools." For David, the encouragement of fellow group members is what will continue to draw him to the group. "Their fellowship pulls me toward a place I want to be."

"...the encouragement of fellow group members is what will continue to draw him to the group..."

SEX AND LOVE IN A RELATIVISTIC CULTURE

The Relationship Ministries will feature a special guest lecturer at the regular monthly meeting on Monday, May 12. Greg Jesson, professor of philosophy at the University of Iowa, will present a thought-provoking lecture on *“Sex and Love In Our Relativistic Culture.”* This event would be a great opportunity to bring your non-Christian friends, as it will dwell on the Christian apologetic as it relates to our deep human need for love and relationships.

Mr. Jesson is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Iowa, where he teaches on the faculty. He previously obtained philosophy degrees from UCLA and USC, where he studied under Dallas Willard. He speaks all over the country on Christian apologetics and philosophy. The Relationship Ministry will be held as usual at the Church of the Advent Hope, 111 E. 97th Street, at 7:00 p.m. Mr. Jesson's talk will be followed by small group discussion.