

REDEEMER

R E P O R T

JUNE/JULY 1997

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

REDEEMER AND THE DIACONATE

BY TIM KELLER

“...true faith will inevitably show itself through deeds of mercy.”

A visitor, looking at the list of deacons and deaconesses in on the bulletin cover, once said to my wife, “Since you don’t have a building, what on earth do your deacons and deaconesses do?” Her puzzlement was understandable, because in most Presbyterian churches the diaconate tends to function as janitors and treasurers, with ushering thrown in for good measure. But there is good evidence that the earliest church understood the work of the diaconate to be based on the ministry of Stephen in Acts 6, who took over the daily *diakonia* — the financial and material support of the Christian widows.

The Reformed churches, especially on the European Continent, recaptured this vision and renewed the diaconate so that it cared for the poor, the elderly, the sick, the single-parents, refugees/immigrants, disaster victims, and those in prison. At Redeemer, our deacons, and the deaconesses who are appointed to

serve and assist in the work, continue this tradition. They meet needs in and around the Christian community. I am discovering every year that the diaconate is more crucial than even I had thought (and I’ve written two books about it!) Here are the a) theological reasons, and b) practical reasons why this is so.

Theological Importance.

Jesus’s proof to John the Baptist that he was the Christ rested on the fact that he healed bodies and preached to the poor (*Matt 11:1-6*) even as the prophets said he would (*Is. 11:1-4; 61:1-2 cf. Luke 1:52-53*). The church, as the Body of Christ still working on earth, carries on Jesus’s ministry of both word and deed (preaching and compassion.) Christians are to open their hands to the needy as far as there is need (*I John 3:16-17; cf. Deut. 15:7-8*). Within the church, wealth is to be shared very generously between rich and poor (*II Cor. 8:13-15; cf. Lev. 25*).

Following the prophets, the apostles teach that true faith will inevitably show itself through deeds of mercy (*James 2:1-23*). Materialism is a grievous sin (*James 5:1-6*); *I Tim. 6:17-19*, one that calls into question your very salvation. Not only do all believers have these responsibilities, but a special class of officers — deacons — are established to coordinate the church’s ministry of mercy. This shows that the ministry of mercy is a required, mandated work of the church just as is the ministry of the word and discipline (*cf. Rom. 15:23-29*). Paul tells the Ephesian elders in his farewell address that he has taught them the whole counsel of God (*Acts 20:27*). It is highly significant, then, that in his very last words, Paul exhorts them to give to the weak and poor (*v.35*). Not only did Paul consider mercy to the poor as part of the “whole counsel of God”, but he deemed it so crucial as to make it the very

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THE HARD HEARTS OF CHRISTIANS

BY KATHY KELLER

“If life doesn’t break your heart at least once a day, I’d say that was a lack of imagination.” — Garrison Keillor

Over the years, the church has been accused of so many grievous errors (often rightly accused), that to charge it with lack of imagination doesn’t at first seem all that serious. But since it is the imagina-

tive faculty that allows us to make what is abstract and distant into a powerful presence, then its absence will handicap our ability to enter into the world beyond the margins of our own narrow experience.

It takes a special cognitive ability to imagine somewhere beside your own tiny universe and to empathize with the needs of peo-

ple who are not like yourself. Of all people, Christians should be supremely good at this. After all, we have a God who did not stay in a safe and sanitary heaven, but incarnated himself into his messy, broken, rebellious creation.

For some reason, though, Christians often show them-

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last piece of teaching he gave them.

The church is not simply a collection of individuals who are forgiven. It is a “royal nation”, a new society (*1 Pet. 2:9*). The world must see in us the wisdom of God, namely, what family life, business practices, race relations, and interpersonal relationships can be in all their beauty under the kingship of Jesus Christ. We are a pilot plant of the kingdom of God. (See Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, Tyndale, 1970, pp. 81-93.) The church is to use its gifts and power to heal all the results of sin — spiritual, psychological, social, physical.

Practical Reasons

We are discovering every year that the work of the diaconate is more crucial to Redeemer’s vision than we thought. Why? First, because we are a gospel-centered church. One of the main signs that we know we are saved by mercy and not by works is that we have a new sacrificial generosity toward others (*II Cor. 9:13 and context*). Every Christian is a priest (*1 Pet. 2:9*) offering up deeds of mercy and service as a pleasing sacrifice (*Heb. 13:15-16*). All of us will have the reality of our faith judged by our mercy (*Matt. 25:35-36; James 2:12-13*). The diaconate reminds us and leads us in this ministry which is a response to grace.

Second, because we are a center city church. Suburbs zone out people with needs, and small towns and rural areas often have informal networks to care for their needy, since there is less mobility there. In cities, there are simply more emergency needs, and fewer

informal networks to meet them. If Redeemer is to really minister to the city, its diaconal presence must be extremely strong. Redeemer seems like a fairly large church, but it is a fairly manageable small town! The job of the diaconate is to network the groups and people of Redeemer with the practical needs which many face.

Third, because we value community. We are not gnostics — those who separate soul from body, and who denigrate the importance of the body. One way that is done is to stress “spiritual” fellowship — the sharing of ideas or emotions — without “material” fellowship — the sharing of our homes, possessions, money, and material resources. The early church clearly avoided this dichotomy.

Acts 4:31ff needs to be very closely studied at this point. When the Spirit fell on the disciples, it created boldness, as it always does (*Romans 8:15-16*). This boldness had two results — a courageous witness (*Acts 4:31*) and sacrificial giving to one another (*Acts 4:32*). When the Spirit fell, no Christian looked at his or her possessions in the same way. They did not “call” anything they owned. This sheds much light on how the Bible sees our attitude to possessions. A lack of generosity is not so much caused by stinginess as by fearfulness. The more the Christians were assured of God’s love for them — the more spiritually secure and confident and fearless they became in that assurance — the more generous they became. They opened their homes and purses to others.

Fourth, because we are an out-

ward facing church. For various reasons we cannot mention here, we find that increasingly, non-Christians will come inside the Christian community and live there and “try on” the faith, testing it from the inside. Thus diaconal ministry within the community (*Acts 2:44ff*) will be extremely important for witness. Our church must practice corporate, radical hospitality to people who are giving the gospel a hearing. Jesus is a hospitable God. We are to be hospitable people (*Romans 12:8ff, 1 Peter 4:10,11*) The diaconate is one of the main ways Redeemer becomes an “open home” to the church.

Donation Update

In a previous newsletter, we noted that the special IRS tax deductions for donated securities might expire in May, 1997. More recent information indicates that the change in tax laws affects only private foundations, not public not-for-profits like Redeemer or Hope for New York.

Therefore, we expect that your securities donations to Redeemer and Hope for New York will continue to be deductible at the full market value. This is still a particularly tax-advantaged method for giving.

(Redeemer’s account number is: 7354-3138. DTC: 0164). Call 808-4460 x 18 for more information on giving securities, or giving, period.

REDEEMER REPORT

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The Redeemer Report is a publication of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church.
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Redeemer meets Sunday at
HUNTER COLLEGE AUDITORIUM • EAST 69TH BETWEEN PARK AND LEXINGTON
services at 10:30 • 6:00

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THE HARD HEARTS OF CHRISTIANS

selves to be below average in their ability to see beyond the narrow boundaries of their own circles. They quickly forget the hopelessness, despair, anger and cynicism that they experienced as unbelievers, except to feel threatened by it when it is directed towards the church. In coming to firm theological convictions themselves, they forget that we are not saved by the correctness of our theology, but by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty for our sins, including our errors of interpretation.

Don't get me wrong. I am the last person to speak lightly of theological conviction. My own convictions have been hard won, and my eyes light up whenever I get a chance to defend Reformed theology, divinely designed gender roles, the inerrancy of the Scriptures or other positions dear to me. I love a good, clean fight! I'm even convinced (along with Mark Noll, in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*) that much of the spiritual anemia in the modern church is directly linked to feeble theology. But I am under no illusion that the "rightness" of my beliefs is the basis on which God has chosen to bestow his blessings on me, or to use me in ministry. And I can just about prove to you that this is so.

Just to pick one clear cut issue, take the disagreement about whether to baptize infants (as do Presbyterians, Catholics, Methodists, Episcopalians, etc.) or to wait until the child can make his or her own profession of faith (as do Baptists and most fundamental and independent churches.) Clearly, someone is WRONG. Both camps can't be correct in their interpretation of Scriptural teaching. But,—*quel* horror—God has not withheld his blessing from churches and individuals on either side of this question! Unbelievers find faith in both Baptist and Presbyterian

churches, lives are changed, churches grow, the Gospel is honored and the kingdom of God expanded, apparently without reference to who has the correct doctrine.

Pointing this out to an older gentleman once, I was amazed to hear him sigh and say "Yes, it's very naughty of God to do that, don't you think?" Though I realized he was speaking somewhat in jest, there was a element of truth in his regretful statement. It would be so much more fitting, we think, if God would just bless the correct and curse the incorrect. Then it would be easy to tell who was right and who was wrong. The downside of this otherwise tidy solution is that then God's favor would no longer be on the basis of Jesus's substitutionary righteousness, but on our own merits.

What does this have to do with a lack of imagination? Just this. The persecution that Christians are promised again and again in the New Testament often occurs at the hands of their own brethren. Unbelievers have persecuted the church, of course, but those episodes pale next to the Inquisition and its modern day successor, trial by media. Why should this be true? Why should Christians so often vent their spleen on one another, attacking brothers and sisters who, though they hold opinions which may differ on peripheral issues such as politics or Christian liberty, still agree as to the central beliefs, such as the death and resurrection of Jesus?

I think it is a lack of imagination. The lostness of the unbeliever is not a present reality to these hard hearted Christians, nor is their union with brothers and sisters who do not share their views. They are safely insulated among like-minded fellows, and their imagination cannot stretch to believe that there are those who fail

to measure up to their standards, but who nevertheless love the Lord and who may even have things to teach them.

Worst of all, their hearts are not broken, like Jesus's heart was, over the pain of the world, because they never allow themselves to imaginatively enter into the despair of those who are separated from God. The smug and self-righteous prayer of the Pharisee "Thank God that I am not as that sinner!" is as close as they come to even thinking about the plight of someone outside the household of faith. Fortunately, that is not the prayer that God regards, and it is the sinner who pleads "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" who goes to his home justified, and not the morally upright, doctrinally correct religious professional.

In his book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Philip Yancey records St. Augustine's comment regarding the splintered, spitting, fractious church of his day: "The clouds roll with thunder that the House of the Lord shall be built throughout the earth; and these frogs sit in their marsh and croak—'We are the only Christians!'" At the end of the day, it is a failure of imagination if one part of the church believes itself to be the only true and faithful church. God's kingdom is bigger than what we imagine.

"It would be so much more fitting, we think, if God would just bless the correct and curse the incorrect..."

NEW E-MAIL ADDRESS FOR THE REDEEMER REPORT

If you have suggestions, comments, input or news for *The Redeemer Report* you can now e-mail the newsletter directly at RPCNews@aol.com, or you can also write c/o *The Redeemer Report*, 271 Madison, 16th floor, NY, NY 10016.

ALL-IN-ONE-DAY INTRO TO REDEEMER JUNE 14

On Saturday, June 14, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Williams Club, 24 East 39th Street, the popular All-in-One-Day seminar teaching the vision, ministry, community and theology of Redeemer will be offered. This is not only for those who know they want to become members, but also for anyone who wants to learn how God is transforming New York with the gospel. You can attend all or part of the day. This is a great chance for people interested in joining the church to catch up on missed sessions, and for those with irregular schedules to get it all in on one day. Pre-register at 808-4460 x10.

OFFICER INSTALLATION AT EVENING SERVICE JUNE 8

Recently elected elders and deacons will be installed during the evening service on June 8. No deaconess candidates will be installed at this time, as none of the women nominated last November were able to stand for election at the May congregational meeting. However, see related article on page 6.

CPR TO MEET ALL SUMMER FOR PRAYER

Though other ministries take a break in the summer, our need for prayer doesn't diminish, so the monthly Corporate Prayer Renewal will continue meeting throughout the summer. The Monday evening meetings will be: June 23, July 28 and August 25 at the Church of the Advent Hope, 111 E. 87th Street, at 7:00 p.m.

CHURCH FAMILY UPDATE

New Members:

Elizabeth Ahn
Luke Allsbrook
Renee Allsbrook
Eileen Ayala
Mike Baez*
Dwayne Bell
Albert Gavalis
Lorena Gavalis
Martin Hilliard
Annah Kim
Sang K. Kim
Sarah Kim
Andrew Leithhead
Irene Leithhead
Karen Ludlow
Kevin McDonald
Laura Murray
Marc Murry
Gary Mui
Fred Olsen
Warren Reynolds
Tom Scanlan
Risa Sharpe*
Mark Smith
Kim Tam
Steven Young*
Sue Yu

*Received by adult baptism

Infant Baptisms:

Ashley Ayala, daughter of Eileen Ayala
Cairo Hae-Mi Kim, daughter of Rollan and Marie Kim
Stephen Kim, son of Sang and Mira Kim
Nathanael Young Lee, son of Duhee and Gina Lee

Marriages:

Steven Arcieri and Mary Catherine Walsh, on May 9, 1997.
Kristi Wedemeyer and Matthew Hilgaertner, May 25, 1997, in New Orleans.

Births:

Hannah Neva Strom, born to Neva and Jeff Strom, April 23, 1997.
Pierce James Halsted, born to Cindy and Bruce Halsted, May 1, 1997.

Make sure we know about important events in the congregation by e-mailing the Redeemer Report at RPCNews@aol.com, or by writing c/o The Redeemer Report, 271 Madison, 16th floor, NY, NY 10016.

SUMMER 5-DAY CLUBS FOR KIDS — FIVE DAYS OF FUN FOR KIDS AGES 5-12

This summer Redeemer's Children's Ministry will be sponsoring three 5-Day Clubs in the month of July, the weeks of July 14-18, July 21-25, and July 28-August 1. Like Vacation Bible School, 5-Day Clubs are a way to expose children to the Gospel in a fun atmosphere. Children hear Bible stories, sing songs, learn Bible verses, and hear what Jesus did to show his love for them.



Unlike Vacation Bible School, 5-Day Clubs do not meet in church-

es, but in homes, apartments, parks, or other suitable locations. The number of children that gather can range from a small group of 3 to 50 or more, depending on space and the number of children invited.



Three of Redeemer's college age young people are raising financial support and receiving training to lead this year's 5-Day Clubs. We are currently looking for host fam-

ilies who will open their homes for only one hour per day during one of the weeks mentioned.



In addition to providing meeting space, host families also should be prepared to: invite boys and girls in their building or neighborhood, prepare a simple snack for the children attending, encourage parents to stay during the club time and build relationships with them, and invite the children and their parents to attend church with them on Sunday if they do not already have a home church.

Goldie Anderson can answer any questions you may have about the 5-Day Clubs. She can also explain how you can be involved in prayer and financial support. Call her at (212) 808-4460 x 14.



QUARTERLY PRE-MARITAL SEMINAR JUNE 28

Redeemer both recommends and requires (for those who want to be married by a Redeemer pastor) attendance at the Pre-Marital Seminar, led by the Rev. Jeff White. Saturday, June 28, from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. is the date for this quarter (the next date will be October 11.) There is a fee of \$25 per couple for materials. Please pre-register by calling 808-4460 and leaving a message with the receptionist at extension 10.

F.Y.I.

June 1 is Volunteer Appreciation Day

Once a year we try to honor those volunteers without whose tireless efforts Sunday worship could never take place. Although they work "as to the Lord," and not for human approval, it wouldn't hurt to say "Thanks" to one of the many people tending children, brewing coffee, ushering, making tapes, or carrying out any of the other hundreds of tasks that go into a Sunday at Redeemer. Better yet, ask how YOU can get involved!

Children's Choir and Picnic on June 22

June 22, is the Children's Ministry Super Celebration Sunday. In the morning (11:00-11:30 a.m.) all school age children will be promoted to their new classrooms. Following the morning worship service, the Redeemer Children's Choir will present a mini-concert in the Hunter Auditorium, from 12:15 to 1:00 p.m. After the concert, all families are invited to meet at Central Park for a Pot-Luck Family Picnic (bring enough for your family and to share.) For more information, call Goldie at 808-4460 x 14.

Jim Om Ordination Evening of June 29

At our April congregational meeting Jim Om was formally called as an associate pastor. In May he passed all of his ordination exams at the meeting of Northeast Presbytery. Come celebrate with our whole church family as Jim is ordained during the evening service on June 29.

DIACONATE TO HOLD SPECIAL ELECTION; NOMINATE DURING JUNE

Due to attrition and an increased work load caring for the mercy needs of the congregation, the diaconate would like to increase the numbers of deacons and deaconesses presently serving. Election of deacons and deaconesses will therefore take place at the fall congregational meeting this year.

If you wish to nominate a candidate, first make sure that person is an actual member of Redeemer and is willing to stand for election (translation: Ask them!) You also must be a member to nominate someone, since only members may nominate and stand for election as church officers.

Nominations must be made in writing and signed by the member who is doing the nominating. Signed nominations should be brought by the church office or mailed to : 271 Madison Ave, 16th floor, NYC, NY 10016