

REDEEMER

R E P O R T

SEPTEMBER 1997

HOME FELLOWSHIP GROUP SIGN-UP SEPT. 21

(But why bother? Is it really worth the effort?)

BY DREW FIELD

...they are the Body of Christ, doing nearly everything the church does on a smaller scale.

Redeemer functions as a church in two primary gatherings: the large worship celebration on Sundays, and the smaller Fellowship Groups that meet throughout the week. The Christian life together as a community, operating as a body the way Jesus intended, cannot exist unless both of these two primary gatherings are part of our corporate life. Beyond these two meetings, there are, of course, scores of opportunities for ministry, service and one-on-one fellowship, but worship and group life are the core—the non-negotiable places where the full richness of the Christian life is experienced.

Most Christians recognize the necessity of worship fairly easily.

In worship, the whole church comes together to exalt God, to praise his glorious character, to hear and respond to his Word. Just as crucial, however, are Fellowship Groups, where an intimate community gathers to draw close to God, to care for one another, and to apply the gospel to every day life. In the early church, believers worshiped at the temple or synagogue together, then gathered in house church fellowships to do the critical work of loving and serving one another.

Fellowship Groups are important because they are the Body of Christ, doing nearly everything the church does on a smaller scale. A well balanced group worships, prays, applies Scripture, and nurtures each other. The participants

become like a family. When a need arises, the groups handles the need. The group wrestles through complicated issues of the workplace, or friendships, or ethical dilemmas. Over time, the group matures, with each person adding their gift—a well spoken encouragement, a thoughtful prayer, a penetrating insight, a wise counsel, even a loving rebuke—so that everyone becomes more like Christ.

A Fellowship Group is a place where Christ can be seen working in each of the participant's lives. Faith is built when we witness God at work transforming a life, when we see how the Gospel produces a joyful confidence and a humble courage. These are real people with real needs—who re-

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FALL OPEN FORUMS

Redeemer resumes its series of Open Forum outreach evenings on Sunday, September 28, at 6:00 P.M. in the Hunter College Auditorium with an program entitled "Men are from Brooklyn, Women are from Queens," a look at the Christian perspective on the relationship between the sexes. The program will begin with a concert of songs from musical theater, featuring George Merritt (one of the stars of Jekyll and Hyde) and other Redeemer members from the casts of Broadway shows.

Following the concert, Tim

Keller will give a lecture and afterwards you will have the chance to respond in an open-microphone question and answer session. Last year's "Broadway" Open Forum had the highest attendance of any Redeemer service, so make your plans to bring a friend and arrive early.

On October 26, it's a night at the opera as Redeemer presents its third annual Opera Open Forum. Once again, Christian

singers from the Metropolitan Opera, New York City Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, and others will grace the stage to sing arias and ensembles on the theme, "Shame and Grace," a look at the problem of forgiveness. This year's performers will include Mark and Belinda Oswald, Jim Courtney, Cassandra Riddle, Kyle and Laura Pfortmiller, Michelle Jennings, and others.

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HOME FELLOWSHIP GROUPS

ceive God's tender help through the ministry of the body in a way that simply cannot occur in a large group worship setting.

These benefits are not realized at the first meeting. Like all long-lasting good things, it's hard to notice a big difference in your life after even a handful of sessions. Every group that I've ever been in feels awkward at first, but within a few months contains some of my closest friends. Yet in our instant-results culture, we tend to think "I didn't get anything out that, why bother!"

Many people drop out of groups just before they've had any significant impact. Discouraged, they often continue to avoid group life. Been there, didn't like it. Or, they flock to low relational groups like a task-oriented team, or a con-


tent-oriented study. Results seem quicker and more measurable. Meanwhile, like a fad diet, they are starving themselves of the healthy nutrition that only comes from a well-balanced diet of Christian experience.

Intimate life together is not just nice, or helpful, or fun, it is essential to Christian growth. We will be stunted unless we sharpen one another, encourage one another, spur one another on. "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Heb 10:24-25). That's why we insist that our Fellowship Groups build

deep, genuine relationships, the kind that the writer of Hebrews envisioned as a normal part of Christian life.

[Note: If you really aren't convinced yet, get out a concordance or a concordance program on your computer and search all the "one another" passages in the New Testament. Then ask yourself—how could anyone obey these injunctions to serve, love, rebuke, encourage, help, etc. "one another" *except* in a small group fellowship?]

Fellowship Group Sign-Up day is Sunday September 21, after both services. Take advantage of the nearly 100 groups throughout the city by signing up for the most convenient location and meeting time. And, once you arrive, stick it out.


MUSIC NEWS

Musicians Dinner

All of Redeemer's musicians – from opera singers to choir members, violinists to drummers – are invited to our second annual Fall Kickoff Dinner on Monday, September 17 at 7:00 P.M. at the Church of the Advent Hope, 111 E. 87th Street. There is no agenda for the evening, just free food (every musician's two favorite words) and plenty of time to renew old friendships and make new ones. If you plan to attend, please call Annie Mintun at the music office, 808-4460 ext. 25 to reserve your spot.

Join the Choirs

Every September we begin a new season for our four choral ensembles: the Redeemer Choir, the Gospel Choir, the Motet Singers, and the Men's *a cappella* group. All of the choirs are open for new members. These ensembles provide a variety of levels of commitment, music styles, and schedules, so if you enjoy singing, there is a place for you! To learn more about becoming involved in Redeemer's choral program, call Tom Jennings at the music office, 808-4460, ext. 25.

NEW PRESBYTERY BEGINS

At a called meeting on July 13, New York City churches and churches in the surrounding New York and New Jersey suburbs met to form a new presbytery, or regional governing body. The new presbytery (which does not yet have an official name) is an historic first in the annuals of Presbyterianism. Congregations in the new presbytery worship in six languages: Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Chinese, Korean, and English, with a Haitian church plant proposed.

The first stated meeting of the presbytery will take place on October 11. Dr. Edmund Clowney, former president of Westminster Theological Seminary, will preach at the opening convocation, as well as leading a seminar on preaching Christ from the whole Bible.

REDEEMER REPORT

Kathy Keller

Shirley Dryden • Yvonne Dodd

Dave Jacobs

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

ADVENTURES IN CAMBODIA

Dr. Beth Ahman returned home safely from Cambodia last month, after a year of serving as a missionary eye doctor from Redeemer. Beginning September 15 Beth will be employed as Assistant Clinical Professor at SUNY School of Optometry.

This is one of her last e-mails from Cambodia before the disturbances (which led to her evacuation) made it difficult to communicate.

I just wanted to tell you about God's perfect provision in my Battambang room. (I would share this with more people but I think they'd miss the humor and beauty of God's solution.) My room and bathroom are situated in the back of a small, dark and low-lying house. The room is large but dank.

Up until now my living space has always been on the second or third floor of a house. I have come to appreciate the upper floors as the first floor of houses generally have more mosquitoes and water bugs. Well, for me water bugs are one of the lowliest of God's creations. Not

only are they ugly and filthy, but they run in unexpected directions. Suffice it to say that I hate them.

When I saw my new room, dark and damp, I said to myself "This will be a new challenge." But, after living here a week I had only come upon one dying water bug in the afternoon. In the middle of the night I had been up but never run across (shudder) one.

So, the story gets more interesting. One night I was reading when out of the corner of my eye I spied a dark flash. There ran a little brown mouse. Now, I have always been rather fond of mice, having raised them as pets when I was ten. I let the mouse hide behind the bureau and continued on with my reading. About an hour later I put my book aside and decided to check out the whereabouts of the mouse because he had never reappeared. No mouse behind the bureau.

Finally I started to check some unused drawers. Ah! One quick peek in the bottom right hand

drawer revealed both a mouse AND the carcasses of tens of water bugs. Could this little fellow be taking care of my needs? I left him undisturbed in the drawer. My answer came a couple of nights later. At bedtime a dying water bug was in my bathroom. I couldn't deal with it and decided to take care of it in the morning. In the middle of the night I woke up. Upon turning the light on in the bathroom I saw the flash of my friend's tail again and behold, the dying water bug monster had disappeared.

This confirmed my theory that the mouse was on 'water bug patrol' to our mutual benefit. Although my friend is looking rather plump and may be multiplying soon, I will only be in this room another three weeks. I know mouse babies wouldn't be too active in that space of time even if born today so I've decided to leave things as they are, thanking God for the creativity and humor of his provision for my needs.

I just wanted to tell you about God's perfect provision...

HABITAT TEAMS RETURN FROM BALTIMORE

"Keeping at it!" was this year's theme at Baltimore's Sandtown Habitat—which is exactly what we did. For five years in a row teams from Redeemer Church have traveled to Baltimore to build homes for the residents of the Sandtown community with Habitat for Humanity. Many team members have returned year after year, not only "keeping at it" with home-building, but continuing to build relationships as well.

This year the first team left June 22, and was hosted by Covenant Presbyterian Church in Burtonsville, MD. (Covenant Church provided our housing, showers and food for the week.) The second team left July 13, host-

ed by Hunt Valley Presbyterian Church. Two members of the June team enjoyed their experience so much, they went again in July (Paul Logan and Stephanie Chung).

Each workday began at 8:00 am with worship and celebration. By 8:45, we were at our respective worksites. The Redeemer teams brought enough "talent" and construction experience that we were split into teams: as an example, Scott Smith led the painting crew. Two homes were dedicated during June, and four homes were finished and dedicated in July. Redeemer members worked on both "finish" houses with tight deadlines for completion by the time the TV crews arrived for the dedi-

cation ceremonies. (Our own Tom Russack was featured on the evening news adding fresh paint to the cornices from the scaffold of the dedication house.)

A special thanks to team leaders David Biggs and Tom Russack from the June team and Ken Kurpiewski of the July team for all their hard work on the details of our mission weeks! Team members were Amy Prast, Paul Logan, Stephanie Chung, Grace Yang, Yvonne Dodd, Melvina Fan, Craig Davis, Scott Smith, Jill McKay, Douglas Turner, Larry Schnapf, Adrienne May, Amy Gilbert, Jo Kadlecek, David Tong, Derrick O'Connor, Derek Wee, Linda Mitchell, Adrian Valeriano and Albin Sadar.

CHURCH FAMILY UPDATE

NEW MEMBERS:

David Biggs*
Larry Bucher
Sherry Bucher
Cory Cates
Kari Jo Cates
Yoon Choi
Marcele Cornejo*
Craig Hanson
Mary Anne Heaphy
Debra Hilelson
Moses Lee
Donna Lee
Eric Lenk
Yung Bong Lim*
Grace Namkoong*
Sibyl North
Darryle Owens
Dawn Owens
Anna Pettit
Kari Robart
Gerda Snyman
Anthony Sacramone
Susie Synn
Karen Toepfer*
Jose Torres
Patti Wellons*
Diana Lee Young
John Young*

**Received by
adult baptism*

PREPARE/ENRICH FOR COUPLES

BY HANNIBAL SILVER

Redeemer Counseling Services is now offering a tool called Prepare/Enrich Couple Inventories for those seeking premarital or marital counseling. These inventories provide an assessment of relationship satisfaction by surveying ten major areas of the couple's relationship. They also provide a framework for dialogue on important personality issues such as assertiveness, self-confidence, avoidance and partner dominance.

We have several goals for using the Couple Inventories, among them: to explore the couple's relationship strength and growth areas; to explore the couple's relationship with their families-of-origin; to develop their personal, couple and family goals; to learn skills to resolve conflicts through active listening, and to streamline the couple's counseling.

Prepare/Enrich inventories are not intended to predict the ul-

timate marital success or happiness of a couple. They cannot be passed or failed, although low scores on a majority of areas may indicate the need for further counseling. They are not intended to replace professional judgment, but rather to supplement it.

The proper use of this counseling tool can help couples to see an X-ray picture of their relationship, and to seek in the Gospel God's prescription for growth in holiness in the context of relationships.

In addition to individual couple counseling, Redeemer Counseling Services will offer a training program this fall designed for couples interested in couples' ministries through small groups. (Prepare/ Enrich can also be used in group settings under professional supervision.) For more information on Prepare/Enrich Inventories or couples' Small Group Training, call Grace at (212) 370-0475.

➤ BAPTISMS ➤

Child Baptism:

Marcus Lee, son of Moses & Donna Lee

Infant Baptisms:

Victoria Lee, daughter of Moses & Donna Lee

Alec George Leithhead, son of Andrew and Irene Leithhead

Rebekah Lanier Naylor, daughter of Tilghman and

Elizabeth Naylor

Daniel Gregory Slayton, son of Gregory & Marina Slayton

Zachary Noah Smith, son of Michael and Amy Smith

Correction:

We apologize to the family of Hannah Neva Strom Dula for incorrectly identifying her parents. She is the daughter of Neva Strom and Thomas Dula, and was born on 23 April, 1997.

IS UNCONDITIONAL LOVE BIBLICAL?

BY KATHY KELLER

Pundits often supply us with lists of sentences and phrases that they classify using witty designations; for example, the four most frightening words you can hear on your answering machine (“This is the IRS...”), the four most pacifying words you can utter in the midst of an argument (“You may be right”), or the most despairing sentence you can hear your spouse say while on vacation (“I can’t find my wallet.”) Take my word for it on this last one.

My vote, however, for the scariest phrase around is “Unconditional Love.” I have spent several decades hearing about the importance of loving one other unconditionally, that is, without their having to conform to

my hopes, expectations and needs in order to merit my love. We are told that we must love our spouse unconditionally, love our children unconditionally, love fellow Christians unconditionally, etc., and that putting conditions on our love is tantamount to not loving at all. Conditional love is a selfish desire to have others behave in a way that satisfies my own needs, and is not even worthy of being called love.

I have no real quarrel with the exhortation to love selflessly instead of selfishly, but I wonder whether “unconditional love” really represents the breadth and depth of love that we are called on by Christ to give to one another.

For instance, what about when a person whom you are trying to

love who actually goes into negative numbers? By that I mean, not only do they not do anything positive to elicit my affection, but they actively discourage my love through hurtful, harmful, sinful behavior. What then? Am I still obligated to unconditionally love someone who has been mean, cruel or harsh to me? I find that the call to love unconditionally doesn’t offer much guidance at this point.

David Powlison, professor of counseling at Westminster Theological Seminary, has helped me by introducing a new term into the discussion. Christian love, he said, is not Unconditional, it’s Contra-conditional. God doesn’t say to us “I love you no matter what you do” but rather He says “I love you in spite of what you do.” This is a vastly different thing than merely trying to make room for the other person to be who they are, rather than having to conform to my expectations and desires. Contra-conditional love is the only kind of love which doesn’t burn out when faced with the daunting task of loving sinners.

I often think that the advocates of unconditional love must be hoping that somehow we can all just ignore the abuse and hurt that we experience at the hands of those we are trying to love and practice a kind of “healthy denial.” No, it didn’t really hurt that badly, I can take it, hit me again, I’m still breathing. But contra-conditional love has no need to practice denial. That kind of love looks at the reality of the sin and says, “Yup, what he or she did to me was wrong and bad, no doubt about it. But just as my sins against others are covered and paid for by Jesus’s sacrificial death, so, too, this sin against me has already been paid for by Jesus.”

Our acceptance of others and our ability to love even the most

...we are actually to pattern our love for each other on how he has loved us, namely, sacrificially.

F.Y.I.

Harlem Bible Study training Sept. 13

If you are interested in getting involved in the Neighborhood Bibles studies in Harlem with Partnership Ministries, you are invited to come to a training day on Saturday, September 13th. Volunteers are also needed for the afternoon computer clubs with children. Call the Rev. Clarence Jacobs at (212 874-5117).

WIC Fall Coffee-and-Connect Breakfast Sept. 14

Do you feel out of touch with what’s being going on at Redeemer? Miss your friends? Need to make some new ones? Drop in at the Women In the Church coffee and continental breakfast from 9:00 until 10:15 a.m. on Sunday, September 14, in room C002 (downstairs, turn right after exiting the elevators.) Reconnect with your friends and make some new friends, as well as hearing about what opportunities the fall holds for women to learn, grow, support one another and get out of town in leaf season! (The WIC retreat, October 24-26.)

Annual Anniversary Breakfast September 28

Redeemerites treasure what few opportunities we have to get together for a meal, share how God has been transforming lives, and have a more leisurely time for interaction than just shouting over coffee in the East Lounge. Yearly we celebrate God’s power in bringing Redeemer into existence by having breakfast together in the Third Floor Cafe of Hunter’s West Building, from 9:00 a.m. until the service begins at 10:30. Tickets will be on sale in the lobby following each service beginning on September 14.

City Vision and Volunteer Workshop

Interested in volunteering with our mercy ministries? Set aside Sunday, October 5, for our annual City Vision Ministry Fair after the services. Volunteer training classes will be held the same afternoon.

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UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

unlovable morsel of humanity flows out of our experience of first BEING an unlovable morsel of humanity, one who has received grace and love from the sacrificial hands of Jesus. When Jesus tells his disciples in John 12:12 “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you,” he means that we are actually to pattern our love for each other on how he has loved us, namely, sacrificially. God did not merely pretend that our sins didn’t exist so that he could love us no matter what we did or continued on doing—instead, he laid our sins on Jesus so that they could be consumed in His death and put to death in us.

The sacrifice that Jesus made in order to be able to love us was to die so that our sins were punished on the cross, instead of us having to take the punishment for them ourselves. When we model our love for others on Jesus’s love for us, it means both that we will have to remember that our own sins had to be paid for by Jesus’s death, AND that sometimes we will have to “die a little death” in order to go on loving a person who is hurting us. Either way, our eyes need to be fixed on Jesus, so that we can love others the way He first loved us.