

REDEEMER

R E P O R T

JANUARY 1998

RENEWING THE CITY: PART 1 - CHURCH PLANTING

BY TIM KELLER

The greatest missionary in history had a simple, two-fold strategy...

We've been talking alot lately about Redeemer's vision for a renewed church leading to a renewed city. Our hope is to have not just a good church through the gospel but for a renewed New York City. We don't want merely to ask, "What could our church be through the Spirit's power?" but also "What could our city be through our sacrificial service?"

But making a difference in a city as large as this one is complicated. How might we best serve the city, and through our service renew it? This is the first of three articles on three basic strategies through which Redeemer aims to "renew" our city: 1) With church renewal through new church planting, 2) With social renewal through Christian community development, 3) With cultural renewal through serving Christ in our vocations.

WHY CHURCH PLANTING?

Redeemer aims to initiate a whole movement of new churches in NYC. Is that really necessary? Someone might say: "Aren't there already enough churches in this city? We don't need more, but better churches—more unity, more vitality." Of course we should devote ourselves to re-vitalizing stagnant churches, but that is no substitute for church planting. There are three reasons why I say that.

#1 THE BIBLICAL MANDATE

Jesus' call. Jesus' Great Commission was not simply a call to "teach" and "make disciples" but also to "baptize". In the New Tes-

tament we see that baptism meant incorporation into a worshipping community with a) theological boundaries, b) administration of the sacraments [i.e. baptism and the Lord's Supper], and c) life accountability or discipline. (Cf. Acts 2:41-47) So although many types of ministries and institutions have been formed in the name of Christ, the foundational structure Jesus told us to spread is the church.

Paul's strategy. The greatest missionary in history had a simple, two-fold strategy: a) The way to most permanently influence a country is through its chief cities (Acts 16:9,12), and b) the way to most permanently influence a city is to plant churches in it (cf. Titus 1:5 "appoint elders in every town").

#2 PRACTICAL WISDOM

New churches best reach the unchurched. Dozens of denominational studies have confirmed that the average new church gains most of its members (60-80%) from among people outside any worshipping body, while churches over 20 years old gain most of their new members (0-20%) from people moving from other congregations. Thus new churches are 5-10 times better at drawing new people into the Body of Christ.

Why would this be? As a congregation ages, powerful internal institutional pressures lead it to allocate most of its resources to

please the tastes and address the interests of insiders much more than those outside. This does not mean that many older congregations cannot win new people or that many newer congregations cannot be stagnant. But it does mean that, overall, unless at least 20-30% of all the churches in a city are new, the total number of Christians in that city will be declining, even if there is "a church on every corner." The only way to change a city (just as in Paul's time) is through new church planting.

New churches best reach new residents, new generations, and new people groups. New residents are disproportionately found in new congregations. Why? Because in new churches, newcomers do not need years of tenure before their voices are heard or before they can gain real leadership and influence in the congregation.

New and younger generations are also found in larger numbers in new congregations. Why? Older congregations strongly reflect the tastes and sensibilities of older generations.

Newly arrived groups of people (e.g. new ethnics, new vocational or class groups, etc.) are always disproportionately found in new congregations. It is very difficult for older congregations to create the "cultural room" and share

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power with people from new classes or cultures. Intentionally multi-cultural new congregations are best to reach an entire neighborhood when it moves from being mono-cultural to multi. (For example, if an all-black neighborhood becomes 30% Hispanic, a new congregation is far more likely to create a multi-ethnic church that mirrors the community than an older church.)

Brand new immigrants to the U.S. almost always need congregations that minister to them in their own language if they are to be served and welcomed into the church. If we wait until their language and cultural practices are more assimilated to American dominant culture, we will find that many of them are lost to Christian influence.

New congregations best attract creative leaders. Venturesome people who value creativity, risk, innovation and future orientation are found in higher percentages in new churches over established congregations which put much more stock in tradition, tenure, routine, and kinship ties. It is important to add that tradition, tenure, and kinship ties are good things—so why shouldn't churches honor them? But unavoidably, older churches box out many people with strong leadership skills that are harnessed better by new churches.

New congregations best renew older congregations. Strangely enough, it is often seen that starting new churches in a community is one of the best ways to revitalize the older churches nearby. The new church often has the freedom to begin new ministries and approaches that end up spreading to

the established ones. Sometimes the “success” of new churches force older congregations to evaluate themselves in fresh ways. Often the converts from new churches end up many of the older congregations (though initially some key leaders from the older churches gravitate to the newer!) Though there can be some unfortunate minor tension and “competition” in the short run, everyone profits long term if the newer church(es) are not sectarian and territorial.

#3 HISTORICAL LESSONS

During the 19th century, Protestant churches planted one new church for every increase in the U.S. population of 350. Thus by 1906 over a third of the congregations of this country were less than 25 years old, and the percentage of the American population that was involved in local churches steadily increased. For example, in 1860, 37% of Americans were church members but by 1926, 58% were.

But after WWI, new church planting slowed drastically, for a complex variety of reasons. (For example, while the overall population grew by 300%, the number of Protestant churches only grew 35%.) As a result, mainline Protestant churches have had huge declines in membership since the 1960's, and Catholic church attendance has also fallen. If we want to renew our country spiritually, we will have to plant thousands and thousands of new churches annually.

APPLICATION TO NEW YORK CITY

NYC has about 3,000 churches of all sorts—which represents only one church for every 2500 people

here. If we really want to see the number of active Christians in NYC double, there is only one way—to get that ratio down to 1 to 1,200 or less. That would take 3,000 new churches. Redeemer wants to plant 50-100 churches in its “network” over the next 20 years—but will that “change New York?” No. It will happen only if we have such a heart and spirit that attracts and reaches out to other churches and associations who would also catch a vision for church planting.

This is where a Church Planting Center comes in. For our own movement we need to establish a permanent training and funding center that can assess, train, and supervise urban church planters. But could we find 300 other churches in NYC that would be willing to let us serve them by equipping them to begin their own movements of planting church planting churches? That could spark the beginning of a process that would bring widespread renewal among already established churches.

Obviously, to start, we will have to begin a church planting movement of our own that is an attractive model, and begin a Church Planting Center that really “works.” After that, we will have to develop a servant attitude toward the other churches of the city, and even churches and denominations that are interested in urban church planting around the country and around the world. After that, who can tell what ways our Church Planting Center could serve the cause of Christ in the world if we are willing to be faithful and humble servants of his Church?

REDEEMER REPORT

Kathy Keller

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

Membership Marathon Day Saturday, January 17

Our most popular option for getting through all seven class segments needed for membership at Redeemer is to do them all in one, fell swoop, believe it or not. So twice a year we offer the entire set of membership classes on one Saturday, from 9:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. (If you already have some membership segments, you only need to come for the ones you lack. Check with Elaine Rollogas at the office, x21.) This month the date will be Saturday, January 17, at the Williams Club. It would be nice (though not strictly necessary) if you called the Redeemer office (808-4460 x10) to indicate your intention of coming, so we can have a large enough space to accommodate everyone.

February Ski Retreat on President's Weekend

We will again be going to the Radisson North Country Inn, in Lebanon, NH, and skiing at charming Ascutney Mountain, in Brownsville, VT. We have Jeff White as our speaker and worship guide. Amenities at the hotel include swimming and jacuzzi. Various options for activities include skiing and snowboarding lessons. Cross-country skiing will also be offered. For more information call Ellie Ellsworth 212-864-3349 or e-mail cabsymp@aol.com.

MERCY AND JUSTICE IN THE TRUE CHURCH

BY ANDREA CLARK

The Christian Community Development Association's 9th Annual Conference (held this year in Birmingham, Alabama) was once again a place of vision renewal and encouragement for me. This was my third CCDA conference and I went expecting to hear from God. One of the overarching themes of these conferences is how God's people in God's Church are agents for mercy and justice in the world.

One of the workshops I attended renewed my vision for the church taking a stronger role in the holy work of mercy and justice. The title was "The Urban Church: The Local Church as God's Vehicle for Social Change" taught by pastors Mike Higgins and Randy Nabors from New City Fellowship, a PCA church in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Two assumptions made at this workshop were that society does need changing and cities need help. Redeemer's vision recognizes and addresses these assumptions in many ways, two being the Diaconate and Hope for New York. The pastors emphasized that in spite of historical failures such as cultural irrelevancy, ethnocentrism, immorali-

ty, or abuse the church is still God's chosen instrument to accomplish His purposes. "We make no apology—we believe in Church!" they stated.

They continued to hold my attention with their description of what a "good" church looks like: a self-supporting, self-governing, indigenous organism which is able to care for its own while always seeking to grow. Discipleship is intentional and worship is a preeminent need. It is age-inclusive and intergenerational. Ministry happens from within and without through evangelism, compassion, and mercy—charity and development. "Good" churches are like adapting wineskins: able and willing to change structures to fit the needs. Excellence is always the goal. I see Redeemer increasingly embodying these characteristics.

I left the workshop and the conference reminded that the vision for mercy/justice work in the church must flow from the Gospel or the work will look no different from a secular social service organization.

(Andrea Clark was recently hired by Redeemer as the first diaconal casework supervisor. She makes her home in Harlem and is seeking to simplify her life.)

**REDEEMER
COUNSELING
SERVICES ADDS
NEW COUNSELORS**

Redeemer Counseling Services is the counseling wing of Redeemer, located on the 8th floor of the same building as the church offices, 271 Madison. A team of counselors there handles everything normally seen in counseling offices, as well as pastoral counseling issues and lay counseling training.

Recently Keith Clement, the Director of Counseling, announced the addition of two new counselors to the staff. For more information or to make an appointment, the Counseling Office phone number is 212-370-0475.

Cheri Mayfield

Cheri recently moved from Texas with her husband Dave and their cat. Both Cheri and her husband are vocal musicians and occasionally perform together. Cheri holds a M.A. in Biblical Counseling from Grace Theological Seminary in Winona Lake, IN. Cheri has worked with adults and adolescents and specializes in sexual abuse, gender-identity, and issues of loneliness. Before joining us at the Redeemer Counseling Services, Cheri was a licensed counselor in Texas in private practice. In addition, she worked directly with staff, faculty, and students at Dallas Theological Seminary.

Grace Choi

Grace, who is also the Administrative Assistant at the Counseling Services, holds a M.A. in Clinical Psychology from Wheaton and has completed counseling related courses at Alliance Theological Seminary in Nyack, NY. "I'm involved in counseling because I believe in the Gospel of grace (Acts 20:24)." Grace in particular likes to work with the issue of cross-cultural struggles, co-dependency, and eating disorders. She has experience as a case management counselor with the Center for Family Services in Naperville, IL and as a resident counselor at Tanglewood Acres, Inc. in New York.

A team of counselors handles... everything normally seen in counseling offices... (and) pastoral counseling issues and lay counseling training

CHURCH FAMILY NEWS

(If you have news of births, deaths, weddings, or other important occasions in the lives of our members and friends and would like to see them recognized, please e-mail RPCNews@aol.com or write to The Redeemer Report, care of the church office.)

Births:

Daniel John Sprufero, born September 26, 1997 to Sal and Rose Sprufero.

Infant Baptisms:

Veronica Chloe Aziel Andreades, daughter of Ellery and Mary Kaye Aziel Andreades

Elizabeth Grace Field, daughter of Drew and Donna Field

Pierce James Halsted, son of Bruce and Cindy Halsted

Jesse Jerome Martinez, son of Ernesto and Joy Martinez

Tobias Christian Whitford, son of Tom and Chris Whitford

New Members:

John Barger

Lingmei Lin Choong

Thomas Dula

Clare Gutteridge

Suzanne Kang

Kara Kline

Holly Krueger

James Krueger

Rebecca Mace

Scott Strickman

Neva Strom