

REDEEMER

R E P O R T

JUNE 2000

LEARNING FROM REDEEMER'S HISTORY

BY TIM KELLER

This year begins our second decade of ministry in New York City. Milestones like that tend to make one think about what has been learned along the way, so back in the Fall I revisited our history with the staff. The ministry lessons we gleaned from examining our history are not so much broad principles (like our "core values," for instance) as they are practical insights for work and service. I am presenting some of them below so that we at Redeemer may not forget them and have to learn them all over again. (Those of you who may be reading these outside of 'center city' Manhattan should remember that not all of them will fit your context.)

1. Reciprocal love for the city. Early on we discovered that it was not enough for Christians to feel

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pity or even just affection for the city. Staff and leaders had to humbly learn from New York City and its people and respect them both. Our relationship with the secular, driven, bright, restless people of Manhattan had to be a consciously reciprocal one. We

had to see God's 'common grace' in them. We had to learn that we needed them to fill out our own understanding of God and his grace, just as they needed us for the same. We had to be energized and enriched by the city, not just drained by it. Even Jesus so united his heart with the people he ministered to that he 'needed' their friendship (Matt.26:36-41).

2. Live where you minister.

When we got here we noticed that the majority of ministers and leaders did not live in the communities where their churches or parishioners were. Ministers of churches in poorer communities often com-

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HE SAID, SHE SAID

Teaching Peacemaking In Children's Ministry

BY THOMAS ESTLER AND
KIMBERLY DASSE

Kimberly: I love conflict. I love being around it, I love observing it, and I love participating in it. Not a few of my family members claim that I am an expert practitioner of it.

My friend Thomas approached me about teaching Peacemaking — a practical application of what the Bible teaches about conflict resolution — to 4th and 5th graders at Redeemer. He charmed me by saying how great it would be to work together, how my experiences as a lawyer would help the children. With ego flattered, I accepted, and to-

gether we made a commitment to teach the 4th & 5th grade Peacemaker class every Sunday morning.

Thomas: I would have liked to avoid that tired old chestnut that "as teachers, we learned more from our teaching experience than did our students," except that it turned out to be so totally true. The biggest conflicts that have ever occurred in my friendship

with Kimberly took place as we prepared for teaching a class in conflict resolution.

To begin with, Kimberly and I have completely different teaching styles—that can be understood by the fact the Kimberly is an Assistant Attorney General for the State of New York, and I am a yoga teacher.

When you think about it, this

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- ALL-IN-A-DAY MEMB. CLASS - JUNE 3
- PREMARITAL SEMINAR - JUNE 10
- "LOVE IN THE CITY" RETREAT JUNE 3
- 4TH OF JULY GETAWAY

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muted from safer and more comfortable neighborhoods; many ministers of churches in Manhattan commuted from more affordable neighborhoods. They did so because to move in with the people they were trying to reach entailed great sacrifices (whether moving economically 'up' or 'down.')

We learned that it just doesn't work. In a myriad of subtle ways, the leaders were unaware of the issues their people really faced, and their ministries didn't connect. Fortunately, Jesus didn't commute from heaven, but moved in with us (John 1:14).

3. A de-middle-classed gospel. Many of us ministering in NYC were raised in Anglo-American middle class culture, which puts great emphasis on sentimental language, a lack of communicative directness, control of emotions, general tidiness and order, a barely disguised disdain for both the poor and the social elite, and a love for the obvious in art. We discovered that most of us from these backgrounds have unconsciously elevated such cultural characteristics to the status of Christian virtue. That created problems when people from other cultures and classes did not become Christians exactly like us! The implications of this insight for our ministry are rather various and complex, but they include the following:

a) Commitment to excellence. The normal middle-class sense of financial proportion had to change. The Bible tells us not to be extravagant, but we had to re-adjust our emotions to the cost of things in the city. There could not be the same

pride in threadbareness that exists (somewhat self-righteously) in the evangelical church at large. Mediocrity of presentation in the name of stewardship was, ironically, lousy stewardship! **b) Avoidance of evangelical 'jargon.'** The evangelical church has developed a remarkable number of clichés and

"The evangelical church has developed a remarkable number of clichés and terminology which is really a form of tribal language..."

terminology which is really a form of tribal language, opaque to the outside world. We relentlessly work to speak with simplicity rather than jargon, with joyful realism rather than sentimentality or pomposity.

4. Speak to your whole community, not just the ones in the seats. If our church was to be a church for the whole neighborhood, we learned that we had to preach and minister as if the people who didn't believe were already there. We had to conduct church as if the whole community was listening in. Early on I learned that if I preached as if non-Christians from the community were there (even if they weren't yet), it was not long before they were there, brought by their Christian friends.

Why? Even in thriving churches, the whole service usually assumes: a) a lot of Biblical knowl-

edge, b) a 'we-them' mentality (we Christians vs. the big, bad world), c) much evangelical terminology. Thus most Christians, even when they are personally edified in church, know intuitively that their non-Christian friends would not appreciate the service. Therefore the central 'critical event' in the entire ministry of Redeemer is this: when a Christian comes to church and says, "oh! I wish my non-Christian friend could see (or hear) this!" If this is forgotten, soon even a growing church will be filled with Christians who commute in from various towns and communities far and wide rather than filling up with Christians and seekers from your church's immediate neighborhoods. We must follow our Lord here, who refused to spend all his time with believers (cf. Matt.9:12-13)

5. If you're not in a small group, you're not in the church. Many in the church recognize how mobile our society has become. Fewer and fewer places are filled with people who have been born and raised in a region, therefore they lack local networks of family, relatives, and long-time friends. But both church leaders and church members still tend to expect that care and nurture will happen through informal, word-of-mouth communication and unplanned relationships between (usually) pastors and parishioners.

It took us nearly two years to realize that the traditional approach wouldn't work in a city. It is through a network of 'cells'—small group fellowships—that we can nurture and care for one an-

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REDEEMER REPORT

Kathy Keller
Buddy Mungo
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other. After a while I began to warn people: "If you are a member or regular attender at Redeemer and you have a spiritual problem, or you get sick, or you have some kind of acute need in your life—we certainly will try to help. But if you are not in a group and we are slow to respond, you don't really have a warrant to complain. It is through small groups that we can provide care, and it is through the groups that we know quickly if you have a need the Body can meet. So—practically speaking—if you aren't in a small group, you aren't fully in the church."

6. Counter-intuitive wholistic ministry. When Redeemer was new, I found that most people had a very powerful desire (need?) to place us somewhere on an ideological spectrum from "Liberal/Left wing" to "Conservative/Right wing." Were we a fundamentalist church or a liberal mainline church? Or were we nice, tepidly middle-of-the-road? There was nothing more crucial than to use the gospel in the life of

our church to defy such stereotypes and to (thus) become impossible to categorize. On the one hand the gospel of Christ and justification-by-faith brings deep, powerful psy-

"Not only do we fail to live these 'lessons' out because of our own weakness, but also because none of them is perfectly attainable."

chological changes. Though I am sinful, I am accepted through Christ. This discovery "converts" people, so they sing, "My chains fell off, my heart was free; I rose, went forth, and followed Thee." On the other hand, the gospel of the cross and the kingdom brings deep, powerful social changes. It defies the values of the world—power, status, recognition, wealth. The gospel is triumph through weakness, wealth through poverty, power through service. This changes our attitude toward the poor and toward our own status and wealth and careers.

Together, these two sides of the gospel create a unique kind of church. So many fundamentalist churches tend to be legalistic in their approach (even if they technically believe in justification by faith.) Though they stress evangelism, they are not all that attractive or effective. Legalism does not produce 'reciprocal' love for those without faith. On the other hand, so many liberal churches, though they stress social justice, are not all that effective at it. Their people's lives are not electrified by conversion. They do not have deep experiences that humble them and change the way they look at the poor.

Therefore, a gospel-centered church should have a social justice emphasis and effectiveness that greatly exceeds that of the liberal church. Meanwhile, it should have an evangelistic fervor that greatly exceeds that of the ordinary fundamentalist church. A gospel-centered church should combine zeals that are ordinarily never seen together in

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sounds more like a scenario for a network sit-com. Really, can't you hear it: "We could set a show in a conflict resolution class taught in a Presbyterian church to 4th and 5th graders by a lawyer and a yoga teacher." Could anything be more preposterous?

Kimberly: One week Thomas was teaching about mediation. "Who knows what you call it when someone helps you resolve a conflict between you and your friend but still lets you control the outcome?"

"Mediation!" Kevin (not his real name) tossed off in his self-assured, oh-so-cool way. We initiated a role-play to demonstrate

HE SAID, SHE SAID

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mediation: a brother and sister are fighting over an understood bedroom boundary that the other cannot cross—even when looking for a misfired grenade launcher.

Oh-so-cool Kevin was the mediator. He was more than adept at getting to the heart of the prob-

lem, allowing no blame-shifting, and demanding honesty from the "brother and sister" players. Thomas and I looked at each other as our jaws dropped. Rarely in my career as a lawyer had I seen such skill. "Kevin, how did you get so good at Peacemaking?" I asked. "Anger management," he clucked, as if it were common as swim lessons.

Thomas: In the initial classes, Kimberly thought the children should be discouraged from sharing actual conflicts from their lives, and that we could effectively teach Biblical conflict resolution on a purely hypothetical lev-

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HE SAID, SHE SAID

el (and thus protect the kids from shame and embarrassment). Kimberly also didn't want the students to know about any conflicts that were challenging her life so that she could preserve an image of a role model that had mastered the material she was teaching.

I, on the other hand, wanted to be absolutely confessional in illustrating concepts of how greed, pride, and selfishness propelled me into conflicts with others and grieved God.

I used other unorthodox teaching methods that Kimberly questioned. When I systematically taught the kids how they could get out of trouble (short-term!) by making excuses, covering up, shifting blame, lying, and pretending to be innocent—it was a very popular class—Kimberly was left to give professional testimony on how these things led people to unhappiness, legal turmoil, and prison.

Kimberly: We often asked for progress reports about how these skills were working on the home front and whether the kids were being peacemakers or peacebreakers. Angela told how she had messed up the apartment while making homemade roach bait with soap and molasses: peacebreaking; but when her mom scolded her she cleaned it up, peacemaking.

Sunday School itself provided opportunities for peacemaking. While reenacting Jesus's triumphal entry on Palm Sunday, Nedda (not her real name) a dainty young fourth grader we count on for getting class participation rolling, exclaimed "Oh, let me be the donkey! Let me be the donkey!" Sam—a burly, future-linebacker—exclaimed, "I get to be JESUS! Let me be Jesus!"

Nedda, knowing the story a little better, grew horrified at the implications of this casting—an-

other life and death opportunity for preventing conflict! After discussing the situation, we decided to revise history just a little and

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memorialize the event with Jesus strolling beside the colt.

Thomas: Although Kimberly pressured me to change my ways with all the tenacity that makes her a great attorney, I was immovable with all the serenity of a yoga teacher. Within a few weeks of our teaching together, Kimberly changed her mind about the effectiveness of my teaching, and began to view it as providential that we were put together, and that differences did not necessarily indicate weakness, but possibly dissimilar gifts.

Kimberly: Another conflict between us occurred just after Thomas and I committed to teaching the class together. I had taken some comfort in the fact that it really would be his class and I would be second banana. Before we taught our first class, however, he unilaterally decided to take a three-week trip to Costa Rica. Little did I know that this "commitment problem" would become a theme: with me, the great martyr, being "forced" to take up the slack and Thomas, the free-flowing spirit, wandering about the planet having fun. I never knew how well the lessons I was teaching would impact me.

We teach kids that there are three ways to respond to conflict: attack, escape, and work-it-out. I found myself attacking quite of-

ten: "You have let the kids down!" or "You are only thinking of yourself!" Other times I would escape: "No, I'm not annoyed," or "I'm fine."

Then one day it occurred to me that I had to resolve my conflict. In our second lesson, which I alone taught, our memory verse was "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it." James 4:1-2. How my desires battled within me! It wasn't fair that he, this Bedouin nomad with no steady job or any responsibilities who spends his time writing a novel (a good one at that), got to jet off to Costa Rica at the drop of a hat, assuming I would "hold down the Sunday School fort," while I worked at a new, very stressful job and prepared for class.

We did, however, work-it-out and it seemed like things were on track until his next six-week adventure was on again — unilaterally announced. I saw red, quietly seethed, and mentally determined never to work with him again. To his face I smiled and graciously said, "O.K., have fun!" in a classic escape response: denial.

We again talked. As he earnestly explained he was totally committed to the class, but desired the freedom to travel when he wanted. I blankly looked at him and realized with whom I was dealing: a person whose desires were battling within him as well! I also realized that I loved this subject matter, the kids, and knew that my threats to quit were futile because the children's ministry was under my skin and, despite what this dear friend felt or did, I was committed.

Thomas: I am still battling with this inability to commit to constant attendance when adventures come calling. Although I have

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made sacrifices to stay in town when opportunities have tempted me, in truth I will be out-of-state for at least half the summer—(if nothing else comes up!)

Thus it continues in this, God's hysterical school of life, that the biggest conflicts that have occurred in our friendship (Kimberly's and mine) have centered on a class we teach in conflict resolution.

I am grateful for the opportunity that God gives us in conflict—opportunities to grow closer to our friends as iron sharpens iron. To become better friends, to depend on God's grace, to see our weaknesses more clearly through the eyes of Jesus, and pray that his transforming power will make us more like Him.

MATCHING GRANT RENEWED FOR NEW SONG

New Song Community Church rejoiced to announce that a foundation has agreed to match every dollar raised towards the completion of their building renovation, up to \$250,000. Their building, on St. Nicholas Avenue in Harlem, is viewed as the cornerstone of neighborhood life. It will serve as a base for the congregation's life and ministry, as well as for community activities. Donations may be made by writing a check to New Song and putting it into the Redeemer offering plate, or by mailing it to: New Song Community Church, Morningside Station, P.O. Box 1711, New York, New York, 10026. Questions may be e-mailed to: newsongrjw@aol.com

4TH OF JULY GETAWAY REGISTRATION

Time is running out to register for our fourth annual 4th of July Getaway, and the rooms are filling quickly! Details, photos and registration are available at www.RedeemerChurch-Life.com until June 12. The trip runs from Saturday morning, July 1, through Tuesday evening, July 4, and features three-nights' lodging, a guided canoe trip, a mountain cookout & bonfire, innertubbing, hiking and biking. There will also be times of worship and

teaching.

"The timing of activities at the 4th of July Getaway was great," recalled Kathy Kalena. "I felt relaxed, never rushed, and everyone's needs were well thought out before events were held."

Redeemer's weekend Getaways are a great place to make new friends, even for newcomers to our church. For more information, you may contact Tim Pettit, director of Church Life, at 808-4460 x141.

FYI

All-in-a-Day Redeemer Membership Class June 3

Several times a year the seven Redeemer membership classes are offered in a one day marathon from 9:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. You may complete all seven segments, or just pick up the ones you are missing. The classes will be held at the Redeemer office, 271 Madison Avenue, 16th floor. You must register by calling Ramona Garnes at 808-4460 ext. 128 or emailing her at ramona@redeemer.com.

"Love in the City" In-town Retreat June 3

Charlie and Jeannie Drew will lead a day-long, in-town retreat entitled "Love in the City." Q and A, small group discussion, and a time for private reflection will surround a series of talks. The retreat will run from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 a.m. at the American Bible Society, 1865 Broadway at W. 61st Street and a continental breakfast will be served. There will be a \$10 admission fee to cover the cost of the hall and refreshments. You must register by calling the church receptionist at 808-4460 x110.

Pre-Marital Seminar on June 10

If you are giving even preliminary thought to getting married, you'll want to attend our next Pre-marital Seminar on Saturday, June 10, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

The seminar is held at the church office, 271 Madison Ave., between 39th and 40th, on the 15th Floor. The cost is \$25 per couple (for materials) and refreshments will be served.

The seminar is a pre-requisite for couples who want a Redeemer pastor to marry them. It is also an effective diagnostic tool for couples who are just beginning to talk about the possibility of marriage. You must pre-register by calling the church receptionist, 808-4460 x110.

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the same church. This is one of the main ways we make people look twice and take our message seriously. Needless to say, this cannot come from any direct kind of competitive comparing of ourselves with others. We must never look at other churches around the city in order to try to outdo their programs. That would be mechanical and artificial. This gospel-driven, counter-intuitive combination of zeals can only come through teaching, prayer, and repentance.

Conclusion: It would be easy to read this list as a claim that Redeemer is fully practicing all these insights. That is certainly not the case. Not only do we fail to live these 'lessons' out because of our own weakness, but also because none of them is perfectly attainable. For example, we can't create a service that is equally helpful for everyone in Manhattan. Many people who are the farthest from Christianity will still find any Christian worship service hard to take. Nevertheless, for the indefinite future, we need to be guided by the 'school of hard knocks' that has taught us these things. After all, God is Principal of that school, as he is of all others.

THE FIELDS SAY GOOD-BYE

BY DREW FIELD

As Donna, our kids and I leave New York City to start a new church in Silicon Valley, we sadly say good-bye to our friends and partners here at Redeemer. This church has been far more than just a place to work – it's been our community for ten years. And it has been foundational to our understanding of how the church should be the church.

Even though we are going to the other side of America (the San Francisco Bay Area), we are taking with us memories of our friends, of the miracles of lives changed by the gospel, of a passion for worship, and of an extraordinarily vital church. Since we first attended Redeemer in 1990 as newlyweds, we began forging friendships that will last our lifetime, especially through the six different fellowship groups that we've participated in. Our children also have been loved and affected by numerous adults and friends who have taken the time to pour their lives into them.

In some ways we don't exactly feel like we're leaving. The Silicon Valley church planting project is an extension of Redeemer, since we will model ourselves after the same values and mission. Through a national network of churches connected to Redeemer we will visit New York often. And since many people commute between the two areas, we hope to have lots of visitors. You can stay in touch with us through www.SiliconValleyProject.org.

So, thanks to many of you (too many to count), for a decade of prayers, love, wisdom, sharing, service, encouragement and friendship. Philemon 7 says: "Your love has given [us] great joy and encouragement, because you... have refreshed the hearts of the saints." We are thankful to God for you.