

# REDEEMER

R E P O R T

NOVEMBER 2000

*["The series on "Defeaters" will continue intermittently throughout this year.  
In November and December I will be writing about the "The Culture of the Large Church.""]*

## UNDERSTANDING THE CULTURE OF YOUR CHURCH'S SIZE

BY TIM KELLER

**T**he first impression most people have of Redeemer is its size. It's a BIG church by nearly anyone's standards. On the first Sunday of October we had nearly 3,200 adults worshipping in three Sunday services. So why am I taking the time to belabor such an obvious fact?

Some recent reading, in particular a book by Lyle E. Schaller called *The Very Large Church* (Abingdon, 2000), has convinced me that it is one thing to acknowledge our size and another thing to truly understand it. A strongly positive or a strongly negative reaction to the size (any size) of church comes from a lack of insight and understanding. To understand a church's size-culture means to learn a) which things are easier, b) which things are harder, c) and which things are simply different—not better or worse—than in churches of other sizes. Let me explore how understanding the culture of a very large church like Redeemer can help us to be more productive, more intentional about community and less uptight about things which don't suit us one hundred percent.

### ***Some Things Are Easier***

One of the main things that gets easier in very large churches is meeting and reaching both younger adults and people who are on a self-identified religious pilgrimage. Both empirical studies and anecdotal evidence confirm that "seekers" and persons born

after 1965 are disproportionately found in very large churches. That is, the percentage (not just the number) of attenders who are young or "searching" is much

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greater in a church of 2,000 than in a church of 200. Why would that be?

For one thing, people who do not feel an obligation to go to church (because of kinship or tradition) will only attend a church if their questions and issues are being addressed. They are much more likely to find a 'fit' in a large church where there are a greater number of choices and options provided for learning, support, and service. To mention just one example: a musician who is skeptical of Christianity is much more likely to attend a church where there are scores of other professional musicians who are meeting in fellowship groups, holding

seminars, and performing at a high level of excellence.

Furthermore, when someone "on a spiritual journey" walks into a large church, they are happy to be unrecognized. That takes the pressure off. Ironically, when a Christian walks into a large church, they are often unhappy if no one has greeted them or engaged them in conversation. The same thing that attracts the religious 'outsider' distresses the Christian 'insider.'

In general, mission and outreach get much easier (humanly speaking) in a very large church. It is easier to muster the volunteers and the resources to do mercy and justice ministries. It is easier to attract the volunteers and the resources to do church planting. (In fact, very large churches can generally do a better job of church planting than can denominations, smaller churches, or lone pioneers.)

For the reasons mentioned just above, we must not be too strongly negative about very large churches, despite the difficulties we will mention below. In an increasingly secular society, we need this critical 'bridge' way of reaching out to the world.

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*MORE...*



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## CHURCH SIZE . . .

### **Some Things Are Harder**

Just as a large-sized church makes outreach easier, it makes many facets of “inreach”—com-

*“A common pattern is for a large church to outgrow its internal communication system...”*

munity and communication—harder. These are things we must acknowledge and address creatively if they are not to be our downfall. Here is a list of the difficulties.

**1) Geographical spread.** Very large churches usually develop a high profile; they become famous and attract Christians who leave their own local churches to com-

mute long distances. This means that the chances are the person sitting next to you doesn’t live anywhere near you. It makes friendship development, community building, and local community service much harder.

**2) Communication.** Lyle Schaller writes: “A common pattern is for a large church to outgrow its internal communication system and plateau as many people feel a loss of the sense of belonging, and eventually decline numerically.” (p.174) The smaller the church, the easier it is for everyone to know ‘what’s going on.’

**3) Accountability.** In smaller churches, it is nearly impossible to ‘drop out’ and not be noticed, but in a very large church it is quite easy. Informal ways of ‘keeping up’ with people’s emotional and spiritual progress and health are ineffective.

**4) Succession.** The bigger a church, the more the church be-

comes identified with the Senior Minister. How can the Senior Minister retire without people feeling the ‘church has died’?

Our staff has done a remarkable job of consciously addressing most of these difficulties in the past few years. For example, our excellent small group system addresses the ‘Spread’ and the ‘Accountability’ problems head on. We warn people that if they are not in a small group it will be easy to ‘fall between the cracks.’ The “Multi-site Model” that Redeemer adopted takes on both the ‘Spread’ and the ‘Succession’ problems. Our plan is to meet at different locations around Central Park every Sunday. That way, people can

*“We warn people that if they are not in a small group it will be easy to ‘fall between the cracks.’”*

worship closer to home. Also, when I retire from ministry, each site can call its own Senior Minister.

However, we have also come to realize that we have not done all we can about the great problem of communication in the large church. Pray for our wisdom here!

### **Most Things Become Different**

Perhaps the hardest thing for us to realize is that each church has its own unique ‘size culture’ with

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## NEW YEAR’S IN VERMONT

**S**tart hunting up your wool socks and hats. We’re heading to the Vermont mountains to celebrate New Year’s Eve with a host of snow activities.

You’ll make many new friends as we snowshoe across a mountain meadow, rocket down a hillside on toboggans (four-person sleds), and build a real igloo.

Our evenings at the quaint Hotel Coolidge will feature worship and teaching sessions, plus a coffee house and a New Year’s Eve celebration, both featuring Jon Werking, the pianist with the Broadway show “Fosse.” The weekend runs from Friday night, Dec. 29, through Monday, Jan. 1.

Registration, details and photos are at [www.RedeemerChurch-Life.com](http://www.RedeemerChurch-Life.com). The deadline for registering is December 18, but don’t delay: This Getaway always sells out quickly!

### REDEEMER REPORT

Kathy Keller

Buddy Mungo

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EAST 69TH BETWEEN PARK AND LEXINGTON  
services at 10:30 • 6:00

CHURCH OF ST. PAUL AND ST. ANDREW  
86TH AND WEST END AVENUE  
services at 7:00

# FALL WEEKEND REPORT

**W**hat happens when 70 strangers from Redeemer converge on a tiny hotel in the Vermont mountains for a long, fall Weekend Getaway?

"I came away with enough contacts to cause AT&T to smile," said Alex Loke. "Often, a simple self-introduction led to absorbing conversation on diverse matters, from personal testimonies, to health care, to ethnic languages and even chewing gum!"

"I appreciated the lack of cliques," said another Redeemer newcomer, Devon Quinn. "That was something I was concerned about. There were few people I met who were not friendly, open, and eager to get to know us and hang out."

"I was looking forward to an opportunity to be able to get to know some church members better than a quick 'Hi!' during the coffee hour after the 6:00 p.m. service," Devon said.

A traditional Vermont flavor filled the three days, as Redeemer folks hiked and biked

through the brilliant fall foliage, carved pumpkins, made apple cider, rode in a horse-drawn wagon, flipped Frisbees and told stories around a bonfire.

Over the October 6-9 weekend there were also worship and teaching sessions in the Hotel Coolidge in White River Junction, plus late-night socializing and game-playing in front of roaring fires in the hotel's two stone fireplaces.

"The weekend struck a very nice balance between the recreational and devotional," recalled Judy Hilkey. "The worship services for me were thought provoking."

Despite the work beeper on his belt, "I also liked how quiet, peaceful, and serene the entire weekend was," said Devon. "I really didn't think about work for more than 2 seconds."

Devon also said that being placed in six-person "orienteering" teams, which used a map and compass to find their way through a wooded mountain course, "got us out of our comfort zones and enabled us to have a challenge with some new people we didn't

BY TIM PETTIT

know. And we got to enjoy some lovely natural panoramas while we were at it!"

Although Redeemer's weekend Getaways reflect our church's largely single population, one married couple, Juan and Kate Franco, said they "started friendships that might make a big difference in our lives."

Juan said that "the orienteering and the games gave us enough time away from each other to allow us to meet new people as individuals. Other activities, like the trip to the waterfall and the meals, gave us the chance to connect with new people as a couple."

Although the mountains and woods are now just a fond memory, Devon Quinn said the results will be long-lasting. "I've been looking for a church in which to plant my feet—where I feel comfortable, with my peers and fellow Christians—and I really feel that that just may be Redeemer."

For information about future Redeemer weekend Getaways, log on to [HYPERLINK](http://www.RedeemerChurchLife.com) <http://www.RedeemerChurchLife.com>

## CHURCH LEADERSHIP NOMINATIONS

**D**on't forget to send in your nominations for Elder, Deacon and Deaconess during the whole month of November. Nomination forms can be emailed to you—however, you must mail or fax in your signed form to Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Andrea Clark, 271 Madison Avenue, 16th floor, New York, NY 10016; fax 212.808.4465. Questions? Call Andrea at 212.808.4460 ext. 146.

And please—remember to check that a person is an official member of Redeemer and willing to be nominated before you send in a name. (You have to be an official member, as well.)

## INTRO TO REDEEMER

**C**an't find the time to finish Introduction to Redeemer classes? Take the all day seminar - or just those one or two segments you need. The next one is Saturday, November 4, 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. at the Redeemer Church Office. Space is limited, so you must pre-register at 808-4460, x 110.

# SCHOOL OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY CYCLE BEGINS AGAIN NOV. 5 TOPICS FOR EVERYONE

**C**hristianity exists primarily in community. Redeemer's School of Christian Community is designed to help attendees work Redeemer's teaching and personal Bible study into their life - to learn what Christian Community is all about. The classes introduce Redeemer: What the church stands for (our core values), how it is structured, how individuals can get plugged in. Classes for the second cycle are primarily 45 minutes long after the morning service beginning November 5 for seven weeks. Details will be in the bulletin November 5, but here are some advance notices:

**What does community look like in an urban setting and how can it happen?** A new class on working the gospel out within city life is taught by three women with experience in and a passion for the city: Coordinator of Children's

Ministries Kate Johnson; Dorothy Leas (MAR degree in Urban Mission from Westminster Seminary); and Andrea Clark, Diaconate Director: (See sidebar for details and schedule.)

**What is worship all about and why do we worship the way we do? What is Redeemer's philosophy of worship?** This class meets for two weeks only and is taught by Director of Worship Arts, Dr. Tom Jennings.

**Learn the skills of small group dynamics, as a member or a leader:** Led by Fellowship Group Director, Chris Gilbert.

**Raising children? Explore the gospel application to child rearing** with Associate Pastor, Charlie Drew. Not just for parents

**Explore the theology of prayer using the Lord's Prayer as a pattern,** with Scott Hinzman.

**Discover our place in God's**

**global work in the context of Redeemer Global Missions.** This class offers the opportunity to be part of a short-term team and is the first of two classes; the second begins in January. Taught by Julie Silvester and the Global Missions Training team.

If you have basic questions about Christianity, bring your inquiries and skepticism to **Credibility**, taught by Associate Pastor Tony Hinchliff.

Prepare for church membership or are just learn what Redeemer is about and how you can fit into this community: take **Introduction to Redeemer**, taught by elder John Chao.

The second cycle of the year starts November 5 and runs for seven weeks through December 17. Look for the bulletin insert on November 5 for full details on classes, locations, times and teachers.

## COMMUNITY BUILDING IN AN URBAN SETTING

**H**ave you wondered why you are drawn to NYC? Do you feel pulled in many directions? Have you considered leaving NYC? The School of Christian Community (SoCC) is offering an unusual class where these and other issues are raised and discussed. The class will be offered beginning Sunday November 5 for three Sundays only, November 5, 12 and 19 after the morning service. It will then culminate in a Saturday seminar on December 2 at the Redeemer offices 9:30 - 3:30 p.m.

The class will encourage Biblical community in New York City by provoking discussion, presenting alternative approaches, and strengthening our Christian bonds and connections. This class will discuss the real or perceived barriers to community and urban living. You will be encouraged to put down roots, not in isolation but in community, to work together sorting out individual problems from a gospel perspective. Though the city is a difficult place to live, it is a magnet for people; if we are lacking resources, it might be because we're thinking individually, rather than corporately.

(Call Jerry Dienes at the church office, 212-808-4460 ext. 110 to sign up for the December 2 seminar. Continental breakfast will be provided. \$5.00 suggested donation.)

## CHURCH FAMILY UPDATE

### Vows:

Joshua Li-Man Chang	Makiko Hidaka Freeman
Michelle Chia-lin Ruth Lee	David Kyung-il Park
Leonie Jacqueline Sena	Eric Gustavsen
Jeffrey Michael Williams	Emilie Gustavsen
Blair Alexander West	Joanne Marie Austin
Ann Michele West	John Charles Austin
Gregory Conrad Fendler	Esther Choi
Clifford Baxter Lane	Linda Butros Eberhardt
Warren Lok Ho	Lisa Chai Lim
Anna Law Ho	Lucinda Evelyn Lysek
Barney Yoo	Mickey Henry Sanchez
Yunchi Nam Yoo	Michelle Tiffany Teachey
Mary Harding Cist	Gladys Torres
Eugene Joseph Cassidy	Yolanda Maria Torres
Henny Suryawati Muktiwijaya	Garcia A. Scott
David Joseph Douglas	

### Infant Baptisms:

Erin Britt Oakes, daughter of Teresa & Timothy Oakes  
Caroline Hyejin O, daughter of Seona & David O  
Cooper Han Kim, son of Rollan & Marie Kim  
Celeste Jacqueline Sena, daughter of Leonie & Juan Sena  
Breana Jacqueline Sena, daughter of Leonie & Juan Sena  
Hunter Alexander West, son of Ann & Blair West  
Connor Ethan Yen, son of Gema & George Yen  
Eleanor Cate Gustavsen, daughter of Emilie and Eric Gustavsen  
Boyd Lewis Allsbrook, son of Luke & Renee Allsbrook  
Graham Peter Eberhardt, son of Linda & Steven Eberhardt

### Adult Baptism:

Emilie Gustavsen

## REDEEMER OPEN FORUM

Remember our Friday night, off-site Redeemer Open Forum and concert on December 1 at Florence Gould Hall. The title is "*Love Among the Ruins*" and will feature singers from New York City's finest opera companies. Tickets are going fast, so call 212-8084460 ext. 147 for information about how to get one before they're gone.

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## CHURCH SIZE . . .

many features that are not 'better' or 'worse' than other sized churches—they are simply different. Assigning a moral value to many of these differences would be shortsighted and insular.

An example from another realm may help. Residents of the fiercely multi-cultural city of New York have learned that many customs and practices which they learned at home as "just the right way to behave" differ significantly from their friends' from other origins. Northern European cultures tend to be more cognitively oriented and less emotionally expressive than southern hemisphere cultures in Latin America and Africa. As a result, northern Europeans may seem 'cold and calcu-

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lating' to Latins or Africans. In turn those cultures may be characterized as 'emotionalistic' or 'indiscreet' by Europeans. But I hope most mature people realize that these cultures are simply different with regard to emotion. Each culture has its own assets and emphases.

Now let's consider two different church 'size cultures.' In a church of under 300 people, it is expected that a member should be able to get the Senior Minister personally on the phone without much difficulty. After all, the pastor is the shepherd of the flock, and if a member of the flock needs care, it should be readily available. However, in a church of 3,000 peo-

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## UNDERSTANDING THE CULTURE... (CHURCH SIZE)

ple it is empirically impossible for the Senior Minister to be as accessible as that. Nor is it necessary,

*“...people attach moral significance to the features in their ideal size-culture.”*

since in a large church the main preacher is not also the main pastor, as is the case in a church of 300. There are scores of others who provide the pastoral care which is the exclusive province of the Senior (or only!) Minister in the smaller church.

What happens, however, if someone in a church of 3,000 insists that the church is ‘uncaring’ if he can’t get the Senior Minister on the phone? One of the main problems in churches is that people attach moral significance to the features in their ideal size-culture. They don’t see alternative size-cultures as merely “different” but as “bad.”

But if you insist that all different sized churches have the same characteristics, you may be imposing a size-culture on a church that is simply inappropriate. In some small churches of my acquaintance, a first-time visitor receives a visit from two church members the afternoon following their attendance— bearing a plate of warm cookies! Is this church friendlier than a large church which allows newcomers to process their involvement at their own pace and choose when they are ready to identify themselves? There are some who would say unequivocally “Yes!”—arriving at the doorstep of first-time visitors with warm cookies would always be a welcome gesture. But if Lyle Schaller is right about seekers preferring the low pressure atmosphere of a large church, then these are just different types of “friendliness,” not “friendliness” versus “unfriendliness.”

So, in conclusion, it is not only important to acknowledge the difference between church cultures, but to see that it is just a difference—not a moral failing when a church functions differently than what you may have been accus-

tomed to previously. People from large churches shouldn’t read the informality of small churches as inefficiency. People from smaller churches shouldn’t read the effi-

*“People from smaller churches shouldn’t read the efficiency of the large church as ‘impersonal.’”*

ciency of the large church as ‘impersonal.’ Of course, each of us has a right to prefer some cultures over others—but the gospel prevents us from moralizing and judging them.

Next month, I will look at six characteristics of very large churches which should not be judged as good or bad, but must merely be accepted as the way things are, and provision made to make the best use of what God has done.