

REDEEMER

R E P O R T

JUNE 2004

SEX AND CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

BY: TIM KELLER

Paul wrote: “The body is a unit...for we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given one Spirit to drink.” (1 Cor 12:12-13) When we are born again by the reception of the Spirit (Titus 3:4-7) we are at the very same moment made part of a new people. We are baptized by one Spirit into this communal relationship with other believers. Christ always saves us into a community, his body. You can’t be a Christian and simply live your life as you see fit as an autonomous individual. A church is a ‘body’, and such a metaphor implies a very tight connection! We do

not simply ‘hold meetings’ but we share a common life together — eating, recreation, prayer, spending time, sharing homes and possessions. We are to bring our whole lives into contact with whole lives of other Christians. Christians are, therefore, ‘accountable’ to one another for the way we live our lives.

Perhaps the area of life where this emphasis goes most against the grain of our culture is in the area of sexuality. Individual freedom and autonomy is perhaps the main theme of our society at large but it is applied with particular intensity to the subject of sex. The attitude is often expressed like this: “What I do in the privacy of my

bedroom is my business alone.”

This is, however, untrue from nearly every perspective. First there is the most obvious aspect — the medical and economic one. Sexual practices that lead to a dizzying array of diseases burden society with an enormous cost — not only in money for treatment, research and institutional support but also in personal heartache.

Second, there is the increasingly recognized social cost. A decade of trends in research has culminated in an important study, *Hardwired to Connect*, by the Commission on Children at Risk. The commission consisted of leading children’s physicians, psycholo-

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A GOOD FRIDAY CELEBRATION

BY: HYUN SIM

Good Friday was celebrated on April 9th of this year. Perhaps commemorated or observed may be more appropriate terms in this context. The entire premise of a Good Friday forces Christians into a conundrum of sorts. How does a believer properly commemorate the gruesome reality of Jesus’ abject public

humiliation and immense physical agony at the hands of an angry mob and utter rejection by a loving Father? The commercial success of Mel Gibson’s film only added to the confusion felt by Christians this year. Can one reconcile the horrific events of Good Friday as graphically depicted in *The Passion of the Christ*

with the celebration of His ultimate victory over death culminating in Easter? The Pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales* resorted to self-flagellation to commiserate with Christ’s suffering on the cross and to assuage their collective guilt. With all due respect to Chaucer and Mel Gibson, this past Good Friday was the most

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joyous of occasions as my family celebrated the 100th day of my daughter Emmanuelle's life.

In Korean tradition, families hold a big celebration when a baby turns one hundred days old because infants usually did not live that long in days past. During this *baek-il* party, family members gather together and special ceremonial food is prepared. Just as the number seven was considered special in the classical world, the number 100 connoted maturity and perfection in ancient Korea. Upon reaching this 100 days threshold, the baby had broken through the barriers between life and death, survival and non-survival. Therefore, the 100th day commemoration also consists of giving thanks to God for the baby's survival and praying for future blessings. In a sense, we were celebrating Emmanuelle's personal triumph over death on Good Friday, during the holiest time of year when Christians worldwide honor Christ's sacrifice and ultimate victory over death on our collective behalf.

My daughter has already shown a penchant for accomplishing big things on major holidays. Emmanuelle was 2004's New Year Baby, born at the stroke of midnight on January 1st at New York Presbyterian Hospital. As the New Year approached with Dick Clark's Rockin' New Year's blaring in the back-

ground, the delivery room quickly filled with a rowdy cheering section of doctors and nurses wearing hats and wielding noisemakers.

Amazingly, she was born just as the New Year's Ball was descending in Times Square. Emmanuelle, my wife Anne, and I barely had two hours to rest before the press barrage began. The next forty-eight hours were a complete blur consisting of a press conference with Mayor Bloomberg and side interviews with local media outlets. Anne and I never imagined that, because of the circumstances surrounding her birth, Emmanuelle's name itself would serve as a Christian witness. When a reporter asked about the meaning behind her name, we referred to Matthew 1:22-24 (The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him "Immanuel"— which means, "God with us.") I'll never forget when a fellow believer randomly phoned Anne at the hospital to praise God for the birth of our daughter and to inform us that his church was similarly excited and proclaimed 2004 to be the "Year of Emmanuelle." Since her birth, Emmanuelle has never ceased to remind us and, apparently others, that "God is with us" indeed.

Pastor Keller's latest sermon series centers around Christian hope—the unique sense of

optimism that we as Christians take away from our relationships with Christ. Like every parent, Emmanuelle is the most concrete reminder of Christ's presence in my life. Every time I pinch those cherubic cheeks, listen to her coos, or recall the amazing circumstances of her birth, I can't help but think of her as God's little miracle gift. However, I also understand that my limited and conditional love for her is only a soft echo of God's infinite love for us, which culminated in Jesus' death and resurrection.

I realize now that I had never fully grasped why Christ had to personally die to ultimately triumph over death on our behalf. Without the events of the original Good Friday two thousand years ago, Emmanuelle's 100th day celebration holds little meaning today. How ironic that we celebrated Emmanuelle's life on a day when as Christians, we also solemnly observed Christ's suffering and death! However, in a broader sense, Easter weekend, including Good Friday, memorializes the emancipation of all human lives and the restoration of our proper relationship to the Creator. To this young father, God has chosen an infant daughter to serve as a living embodiment of Christ's love, grace, and, most importantly, hope.

REDEEMER REPORT

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HUNTER COLLEGE AUDITORIUM
East 69TH (Between Park & Lexington)
services at 10:30AM • 5:45PM

ETHICAL CULTURE
West 64TH and CPW
service at 9:15AM

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
Corner of West 79TH and Broadway
service at 7:00PM

gists, research scientists, and youth professionals. It was quite broadly based (sponsoring groups included Dartmouth Medical School and the YMCA) and was wholly non-partisan. Yet its findings were quite startling. Children who are raised in families with their biological mother and father and within some kind of 'moral community' (church, synagogue, etc) are far less likely to develop psychological and social problems than those who are not. They are far less likely to have trouble in school, go to prison, use and deal in drugs, commit violence, and so on. From 1955 to 1990 the suicide rate for adolescents aged 15 to 19 has gone up 410% — a sure sign of a lack of health in our social fabric. The Commission found that children who are raised in intact families and strong moral communities are far more likely to feel that life is worth living and to have a sense of both purpose and value.

Traditional cultures saw sex as something that was part of the larger project of creating households and families. Sex obviously produces children, but it also (to use Wendell Berry's term) is a 'nurturing discipline' which uniquely creates joy, tenderness, and long-term unity between two people for the purpose of creating the very long-term, stable, nurturing households which are the only safe place for children to grow and flourish. When sex occurs within a whole life covenant — marriage — it melds two people into one indissoluble unit.

Our attitudes toward sex have of course changed drastically. As a society we now

believe that sex is not for building stable community but rather is an individual's means of personal fulfillment. Yet the result is a burgeoning number of psychological and social problems among children that brings an enormous social cost. It turns out that how you use your sexuality actually effects everyone around you.

Sexuality either builds and strengthens the social fabric or tears it apart. If we use our sexuality only for individual recreation rather than the nurture of long-term relationships and community, then everyone suffers. Your sex life therefore is not just your business. It is everybody's business.

The Christian world-view only reinforces this basic, ancient understanding that our sexuality (and how we use it) is other people's business. The beginning of Genesis tells us that sex was made for marriage. For Christians, sex within marriage is the way to produce a mini-Christian community, a mini-church, which can serve as a sign of the coming kingdom. It does so when 'speaking the truth in love' it grows each of its members into people of joy and character (Eph 4:15-16; cf. Eph 5:25-27.)

Despite all of this social and Biblical evidence, Christians in churches are deeply shaped by the cultural message that your sex life is nobody else's business.

The Christian writer Lauren Winner tells a true story of a Christian woman in her early twenties who was living in a home with six other Christian women. She had a boyfriend who lived down the block and she often spent

the night at his apartment. As it turned out, they were not having sex, though they were doing everything but having sex. None of her roommates knew they weren't having sex, but nevertheless not one of them ever asked her about it—not a loving question or a gentle challenge or even the offer of a listening ear. Why not? Probably the roommates told themselves they didn't want to be nosy. But more likely they were living their lives according to the larger culture's story of individual freedom rather than the gospel's story of inter-dependent community, love, and truth. (This is taken from the manuscript of a forthcoming book by Lauren Winner on the subject of chastity.)

Of course, there is a sin on the 'other side'. It is the sin of Phariseism—of gossip, slander, and condemnation. Plenty of us have been in small town communities or perhaps in churches in which sexual sin was the basis for making destructive personal attacks. But we must not over-react so that we trade our gospel birthright for a mess of cultural pottage.

We are called to confess our sins to one another (James 5:16); to admonish and confront one another (Rom 15:14) though humbly and gently (Gal 6:1ff); to challenge one another (daily!) to avoid doing the wrong thing (Hebrews 3:13); to encourage and coach each other to do what is right (Hebrews 10:24-25); to wisely, joyfully counsel one another (Colossians 3:16.)

Yes—even about sex.

VOLUNTEERING AT THE DEWITT NURSING HOME

BY: ELIZABETH SCHATZ

Anyone who thinks the elderly are weak and fragile should shake one of their hands.

On my first few visits to DeWitt nursing home, I instinctively laid my hand over the hand of a resident, sometimes to steady myself as I squatted beside a wheelchair in an attempt to get at eye level while ignoring the fact that my feet were going numb, sometimes to get the resident's attention to start a conversation. Every time, the resident I touched gripped my hand with the intensity of a trapeze artist.

I tend to think that holding hands is the easiest way to let someone know you are listening, that you are present, that

you care. The residents at DeWitt Nursing Home and Rehabilitation Center - some live there full-time, others stay to recuperate after surgery - like to know someone is there.

One resident, who speaks no English, communicates by grabbing your hand and mightily pumping it up and down while saying, "Hey! Hey! Hey!" One man, who passed away last fall, always kissed my hand repeatedly while we talked - no surprise that he met and married a fellow resident several years before; he charmed her by saying she looked like his ex-wife (and undoubtedly by bestowing lots of hand kisses).

I started volunteering at

DeWitt about two and a half years ago, joining the ranks of Redeemerites who have been conducting worship services once a month there for years. I've always enjoyed working with the elderly, a fact I attribute to having grandparents who were pretty old, even when I was born. In fact, my paternal grandmother probably started my love of hand-holding. When she was old and didn't much feel like talking anymore, she would caress and squeeze my hand every time I did something nice, like bringing her ice cream. It was better than a hug. While college friends volunteered at elementary schools and day camps, I stole away

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FAITH AND WORK

This winter I'd started sitting in on Katherine Leary's faith and work-based classes on Sundays after the 10:30 a.m. service at Hunter to help me face my career stagnation. I didn't have the energy to figure out my next step alone, and in the classes I heard encouraging real-life stories from speakers whom God had successfully redirected. I also met other "classmates" who were facing major changes and together we decided to start an experimental and temporary prayer group devoted to career and job issues.

We agreed to meet on Wednesday evenings over one month spanning February and March and also dedicate our own time daily to pray for one another. In the middle of this, one member of the group who felt God calling her to minister in this way offered to host and lead career

review-exploration sessions for each one of us on several Saturdays in March and April. During these afternoons we focused on just one person who shared four stories or key experiences from their life. The stories were meant to capture something we had done that was uniquely satisfying and describe who was involved with us in the process to reach the goal.

We listened, learned, understood and gave back honest and encouraging feedback. Then we went home and wrote up our impressions and assessments and e-mailed these to the individual and the others involved. We offered fresh perspectives on what was courageous, creative, vital and inspiring about our stories and what they suggested vocationally. We reminded one another that accom-

BY: ELIZABETH SMITH
plishment doesn't always equal money in the bank and that true confidence doesn't come from worldly accomplishments.

A couple of weeks later, in late April, we had a "reunion" potluck and were treated to a spontaneous coaching session from one person's spouse who is a Human Resources executive. The whole experience of this community was unexpected and excellent, from its roots in Katherine's classes, to the Wednesday prayer meetings and daily prayer commitment, to the intensive Saturday explorations, to the social and reflection time. The bond of community will continue even if the formal commitment is over. I hope this sparks you to get involved through classes, home groups, volunteer work, and see how God is already at work.

to the local retirement home.

I realize that working with the elderly isn't for everyone. Nursing homes remind us of hospitals, of death. They smell funny. The people aren't always very clean. But to me, it is one of the most rewarding ways to show love through action rather than words.

After all, I'm 27 - what can I possibly find to talk about with an 84-year-old woman who used to pay \$175 for her Upper East Side apartment and still comments on the outrageousness of the rent? The residents run the gamut from Jewish to Roman Catholic, British to Bahamian. Some residents are as sharp as a tack (one always has the newspaper tucked into the side of her wheelchair, and she knows way more about current events than

I do). Others can be baffling. I have been visiting with one resident for two years now and every time we talk, she gives me a different version of her life story: she is from Richmond, VA, she is from Harlem, she has seven siblings, she has seven children. I have no idea what the truth is, but we hold hands and laugh. I tell her I'll pray for her, and she leans her cheek over to me for a goodbye kiss.

The conversations, whether you discuss the Yankees or the Lord, is secondary. In my opinion, it is the genuine care and respect that you show by listening, by serving them snacks, by rubbing their shoulders when they get agitated and cry out. It lets these residents know that they are not forgotten.

During the sermon portion of our service, many of the residents dose off. I don't find it disheartening; I find it endearing. First of all, they become bright-eyed as soon as the service is over because they sing their theme song, "I'll be Loving You, Always," to us as an ersatz benediction, and everyone - I mean everyone - sings. Second of all, ferrying the Gospel to their hearts is the work of the Holy Spirit. I am merely the vessel. And sometimes, the vessel just needs to hold hands with a friend and tell her that I'll pray for her cataracts.

Editor's Note: For more information about volunteering at DeWitt Nursing home, or any of Hope for New York's volunteer opportunities, please go to www.hfnny.org

NEW FEATURES AT WWW.REDEEMER.COM

Have you visited redeemer.com lately? If you need information about a specific event or ministry the latest info is always on our website. Redeemer has made a significant investment to make the website a central resource for developing our community and enabling individuals to access important teaching and vision materials as well as up to the minute information about ministries.

If you haven't already made redeemer.com a favorite in your web browser, please do so today (or consider even making it your web browser's default homepage). As Redeemer continues to grow and the multi-site model matures the website will be of greater and greater value to those who make Redeemer their church. In continually trying to improve the access to information

some new features have been added over the past few months.

Newest features include:

- Audio of the best of Tim Keller's Q&A (listen to MP3 files right from the home page)
- A new church calendar accessible from the home page (with information about events from all ministries)
- Online registration for seminars, conferences and mission teams
- Online volunteer applications for most ministries
- A redesigned sermon section in the webstore
- Expanded archives for things like training handouts, study papers, newsletter, videos and free MP3s
- Personal access to update your contact info in Redeemer's database (through a secure connection)
- Register to receive a pdf of the Redeemer Report Newsletter by email
- Electronic Newsletter for Church Planters

Features coming later in 2004

- Fellowship group listings (by cross streets) for each "region" of Manhattan and the other boroughs
- Ministry specific "home" pages
- Online supplemental training
- Video introductions from staff directors and ministry leaders



3RD ANNUAL HOPE FOR NEW YORK CHARITY BIKE RIDE

The Third Annual Hope for New York Charity Bike Ride is scheduled for Saturday, September 18, 2004.

The team will participate in a 100-mile-ride from Grant's Tomb on the Upper West Side to Bear Mountain and back in an effort to raise funds for Hope for New York (HFNY) and support HFNY's mission.

The event is designed to raise funds and awareness for HFNY. Hope for New York mobilizes volunteers and resources across the NY community to support 36 faith-based organizations committed to fighting economic and spiritual poverty.

Riders and drivers will gather the night before the event at one of HFNY's affiliates, St. Paul's House, for a pasta dinner shared with the men residing at St. Paul's. Then, rising before dawn, riders will set out at sunrise the next day for the 100-mile ride. They will stop to enjoy lunch at the halfway point near Bear Mountain, overlooking the Hudson River and Valley and then return to NYC by sunset. Those wishing to ride only 50 miles can ride the Metro North Railroad back to Manhattan from the lunch area. Any rider who wishes to ride less than 50 miles is also welcome. Road crews will be assisting riders for the duration of the trip.

Last year's team enjoyed a fun time of fellowship and made a difference helped make the event a great success for HFNY by raising more than \$13,000 and also raising awareness for the many different volunteer opportunities available through HFNY.

The volunteer HFNY charity bike ride leadership team consists of: Beatrice Lau Kee, Ruta Pakstas, Jeannie Smith, Brian Sumner and Suzy Ulrich. Ruta and Suzy have been involved in the ride since its inception. We are currently looking for riders, drivers and sponsors to help make this year's event a great success!

For more information, subscribe to the Charity Ride yahoo group at annualcharitybikeride-subscribe@yahoogroups.com, or call Suzy Ulrich at (917) 848-7936. For more information about HFNY, or to view a complete list of volunteer opportunities, please visit www.hfny.org