

REDEEMER

R E P O R T

OCTOBER 2004

REDEEMER'S OFFICE LOCATION AND ADDRESS HAVE CHANGED.

We are now at:

1359 Broadway (between W. 36/37th Streets) • Fourth floor • N.Y., N.Y. 10018-7102
The phone number will stay the same: 212-808-4460.

TO BE A NEIGHBOR

BY: JEFF WHITE

Our family moved to the Harlem community in 1998 to begin New Song Community Church. We have learned many things over the years about what it means to be followers of Christ. But at the heart of it all has been the discovery that the highest calling in the Christian life is not pastor, nor missionary, nor volunteer – but that of *neigh-*

bor. And that, of course, is a title that belongs not just to a few of us but to all of us. Jesus, in summarizing what it means to live well before the face of God, says: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. Love your neighbor as yourself.” The call to love our neighbors and therefore to be neighbors is central to what it

means to be fully human.

Think about the term neighbor. It implies mutuality. It is not a relationship in which one person is superior to the other. It is not a relationship in which one person exclusively gives and the other exclusively receives. It refers to people who stand on the same ground and share the same space. Neighbors maintain a pos-

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MAKING TIME: AN INTERVIEW WITH A HFNY VOLUNTEER

BY: EMILY MCWHORTER

Recently, I caught up with Steve Smith after work on his way to lead a worship service at one of HFNY's volunteer ministries and was able to ask him a few questions. Steve has attended Redeemer since 1992.

Redeemer: How did you begin volunteering, and where do you volunteer your time?

Steve: As soon as I got to Redeemer, I started checking out the service opportunities. I felt strongly led as a part of my

spiritual life to be serving. I have been, for the last six years, a volunteer with the Family Camp Mentoring Program, I've volunteered with Angel Tree and I've done various short-term programs with New York City Rescue Mission and St. Paul's House Christmas Dinner. I was on the HFNY board for five years. Now I just serve as an experienced volunteer.

Redeemer: How do you find a balance between working and finding time to volunteer?

Steve: I think too many of us see Redeemer fitting into our lives instead of the other way around. As my faith has grown and as I've seen how being willing to be useful for God can have an effect on other people's lives, I don't think very much any more about how I can fit my faith into my life. I think about how my faith *is* my life. And so it's not a matter of whether I can serve – it's *how much* can I serve.

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ture of mutual humility in which we honor each other as those who bear the image of God. We recognize in our neighbors those who have gifts and strengths from which we can benefit and learn, regardless of the differences in educational backgrounds, race, religious affiliations or socio-economic status. We trust that they will look at us similarly.

Christians have the great gift of the gospel to give their neighbors, but this in no way implies that we are better than others. While few people would explicitly make such a claim, it is often an implicit assumption (in spite of the clear teaching of the Gospel that we are ALL sinners.) .

We still act as if we think our faith makes us superior. However, when you have a firm understanding of yourself as a neighbor with its implied mutuality, then authentic and meaningful connections can take place. Sharing the good news of Christ's life, death and resurrection in such a context is especially fitting.

In its most obvious sense neighbors are those who live in close proximity to one another. Our family's experience in Harlem has allowed us to explore these kinds of neighbor relationships in ways that we had never done before. A deliberate and intentional approach to immerse ourselves in the life of the immediate community uncovered great riches. Our neighbors look after each other and lean on one another. They grieve with each other and they rejoice with each other. They understand that they have claims on one another. They bear one

another's burdens. They demonstrate care for each other's children. "Better to have a neighbor close at hand than a friend far away" goes the saying. The truth and power of that have been very clear to us.

The mobility of our society often leads us to expand our definition of neighbor to include those who don't live within walking distance. Still, we need to recover a sense that the God who "determined the exact places where we should live" (Acts 17:26) has placed on us a special obligation to be neighborly to those who live in our apartment buildings and blocks. Think of what would happen to the quality of life in the city if we took that seriously!

The call to love our neighbors *as ourselves* truly raises the stakes. What you would want for yourself you are to desire for your neighbors and give yourself to that end. At New Song, that has meant developing substantial educational programs so young people are able to excel at their academics in the same way that we want our children to excel. It has meant starting to develop decent affordable housing just as we would want for ourselves. It has meant cultivating a youth ministry that encourages teenagers to develop into all God intends for them to be just as we desire that for our teenagers.

The fact the some of us were born with economic resources and others without them quite apart from anything we have done serves to increase our desire to see the most troubling inequities eliminated. At the same time, we want to avoid

activities that would harm our neighbors or lead to injustice. At its best this desire arises neither from guilt or pity, but from a passion for justice and genuine love. Jesus' genuine love for us manifested on the cross, through which we have complete forgiveness, is that which fuels our ability to engage in costly neighbor love.

In *To Live in Peace*, an important book for all urban Christians, Mark Gornik calls us to the notion of "regional neighboring" - an awareness that our neighborhoods are linked to each others and thus create God-given obligations across the metropolitan area. Redeemer's partnership with New Song and its raising up of volunteers through Hope for New York are great examples of how the church has taken regional neighboring seriously.

Called to be a neighbor. It's a simple idea. But its practice has fallen into grave disrepair. I'm confident that if our churches were to experience a recovery and revival of the call to be a community of neighbors we would increasingly find ourselves making a substantial difference in our cities and as Luke puts it, "enjoying the favor of all the people."

Jeff White, a staff member at Redeemer from 1990 to 1998, is the pastor of New Song Community Church. If you would like to support their efforts or find out more information, contact him at newsongjw@aol.com

REDEEMER REPORT

Kathy Keller
Carl de Prado
Fred Liedtke

The Redeemer Report is a publication of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

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www.redeemer.com

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



Redeemer: What is your experience with His Toy Store, and who is it intended to serve?

Steve: I guess you could say I am sort of a co-captain with the HFNY staff. We are serving low-income families in neighborhoods around the city where we have church relationships and where we can help meet the physical needs of families for clothing, toys, books and other needs for their children. We help draw them into contact with the neighborhood church to potentially draw them into a church family.

Two years ago we felt led to serve more children in more neighborhoods. We saw the impact we were making in Washington Heights and felt led to expand that impact to more neighborhoods in the city. So we did a small-scale pilot effort in 2002 of bringing up toys for families in the Bronx and Brooklyn. That worked well, so last year we expanded our efforts to include a bigger program.

Redeemer: How many toys do you give away each Christmas season?

Steve: Last year we supplied over 1,000 toys, books and needed items between the three sites. That has more than doubled over a two-year span.

Redeemer: How would you describe the parents who come to pick out toys?

Steve: They are almost always women and often single mothers with more than one child who have very little free cash available to get gifts for their children. They are grateful to the point of tears at the opportunity to get these things that their kids needed through the love of other Christians in the city.

Redeemer: What does a typical day of volunteering with His Toy Store look like?

Steve: The evening before the event volunteers help organize the gifts on display tables and set up the wrapping materials. Then the day of the event they serve as hosts for the families, helping the parents pick out appropriate gifts and helping them get it over to the wrapping table, answering any questions and thanking them for coming.

Redeemer: How many volunteers does His Toy Store typically have?

Steve: We have up to 60 volunteers or more, and as we've grown and are now running full-scale at three sites and praying about adding more sites, we always need more help.

Redeemer: Why do you continue to serve there?

Steve: Because I see how people's lives are changed when we are willing to reach out to them and live the gospel by caring for their needs.

Redeemer: Why should others? If you could motivate others to serve in just a few words, what would you say?

Steve: I would just repeat the words of Jesus in John, "*Come and see.*" You will grow in your faith and see what it is like to be a part of a living community of Christ. And you will see how God *will* work through you to bring change and to bring hope to other people's lives.

Redeemer: If someone was interested in volunteering with His Toy Store, what should they do?

Steve: Contact volunteer@hfny.org. We need our church community to do two things: first, we need them to donate toys and other appropriate gifts during November and early December. We also need volunteers the evening before and the day of the event, which is a Saturday in early December.

SCHOOL OF GOSPEL FOUNDATIONS

Tom Jennings is teaching a School of Gospel Foundations class from Sept. 19 through Oct. 19, "The Mystery of Worship" after the East Side morning service from 12:10 to 1:10p.m. in Hunter's West building, Room 505. Center for Faith and Work classes are held each Sunday after the east side and west side morning services.

Please check out the web site for details: www.faihandwork.org.

GOD IS AN ARTIST- AN INTERVIEW WITH TOM JENNINGS.

Redeemer strives to be a welcoming home for artists. Why? Because, as you will see below in the interview with Tom Jennings, it is part of Redeemer's DNA. As a further manifestation of this commitment, Redeemer's Center for Faith and Work (now in its 2nd year) is expanding its efforts to nurture artists and be a catalyst for creative new initiatives by bringing Luann Purcell on as Coordinator of Arts Ministries.

Luann served in the Worship & Arts Department for the last two years, supporting the worship program, Open Forums, and musician fellowship groups. She also began new programs for people working in theatre, film, and television including organizing a book group that read *Hollywood Worldviews* and launching a project, *Threads*, to nurture new stage plays, musicals, and screenplays.

In her new role, she will be supporting artists and arts initiatives encompassing all areas of the arts. In keeping with the Center for Faith and Work's central purpose, they hope to provide support for each other as artists seek to live distinctive Christian lives and also to have an impact on culture through and in their work.

Luann moved to NYC from Atlanta to study the Meisner technique of actor training. In Atlanta, she was a free-lance director and acting instructor for 13 years, and served on the staff of two theater companies and the Atlanta Coalition of Theaters. She also worked in the Music and Arts department at Intown Community Church, where Scot Sherman (one of Redeemer's first Associate Pastors, who planted the Village Church) is now the Senior Pastor.

To give us a better understanding of Redeemer's history in arts ministry, Luann interviewed Tom Jennings, Director of Worship and Arts since 1994.

Luann Purcell: Redeemer has always had a "healthy" view of the arts, artists, and their role in cul-

ture. How did that come about, and how has it been expressed?

Tom Jennings: In 1989, when Redeemer was still in the planning stages, Tim Keller and several musicians who were part of the core group – Chris Hughes, Julie Diesslin, Laurann and Jonathan Gilley – began to discuss how the new church could engage with artists in the city. They recognized that evangelical churches had done a generally poor job of connecting with the arts community. The principles, attitudes and practices they adopted in those early days of the church laid the groundwork for Redeemer to become a magnet for artists.

It was more than a program. They created an environment where artists were treated with dignity. This manifests itself in many ways. From the pulpit, Tim Keller frequently quotes from great secular literature, or draws positive illustrations from the worlds of music and dance. He is more likely to quote Sartre or John Coltrane than Oswald Chambers, and he does so unapologetically, assuming that Christians are, and ought to be, engaged in the cultural life of the city.

It manifests itself in the way we involve artists in worship. We allow them to use their gifts fully, playing Beethoven string quartets, Mozart choral works, and Miles Davis' jazz compositions. We strive to avoid dualism, and celebrate beauty wherever God "causes the rain to fall." We give an honorarium to the artists who participate in worship – not because we want to "buy" excellence or devalue volunteerism, but because we recognize the financial struggle of a life in the arts.

It manifests itself in our scheduling. Most churches build their schedule around the routines of those who work in the business world, holding prayer meetings on Wednesday nights, family outings and fellowship events on Saturdays, and their prime worship time on Sunday morning. Consider how this schedule works for someone playing in the

orchestra for a Broadway show. They are performing during the Wednesday prayer meeting, have two shows on Saturday, and are exhausted on Sunday morning. That is why Redeemer sponsors musician fellowship groups on Tuesday afternoons and parties on Monday nights (the "dark" night for most shows, orchestras and museums). That is also one of the reasons that Redeemer gives its Sunday evening services the same amount of preparation and focus as its morning services.

LP: Can you summarize Redeemer's philosophy concerning the arts?

TJ: I'm always hesitant to say we've nailed down a philosophy of the arts. It implies that we've figured it out, and the one thing I'm certain of after nearly 10 years as the Director of Worship and Arts is that the church is a long way from realizing a coherent understanding of the interplay between arts and faith. Here's what I do feel confident about:

God is an Artist. When he created the world, he could have made it purely functional, but he never missed an opportunity to make it beautiful and surprising. His revelation of himself in Scripture is primarily done in narrative, song, poetry, and parable. God is a creator and we are created in his image (Gen. 1,2). We are his *poema*, or workmanship (Eph. 2:10). Therefore, it is against our very natures to live predictable, unimaginative lives or to ignore creation's beauty. We are instructed in the Scriptures to sing, play instruments and dance, and to do it with excellence. Therefore, there is no shame in being an artist. It is a high calling and a privilege.

LP: How have you seen God use Redeemer in the lives of artists, and to make an impact on the culture?

TJ: The greatest joy I've had at Redeemer has been seeing so

many artists come to faith in Christ, as God turns colleagues into brothers and sisters. In addition, many Christian artists who feared committing to a church or to developing close fellowship with other believers have made steps to become more deeply involved in the life of the church.

When it comes to affecting the culture, the efforts of the evangelical church at large have been highly ineffectual. Most programs have been ill conceived and somewhat triumphalistic. However, I've been encouraged by "small" stories around Redeemer – a musician who quietly buys instruments for a church in a poor neighborhood, a group of dancers and Broadway actors who meet on Wednesday afternoons (between the matinee and evening performances) to pray for their colleagues, opera singers who hold each other accountable when one is on tour, experienced artists mentoring younger artists.

We will only affect the culture when those kinds of stories are multiplied hundreds of times over. To paraphrase Tim Keller: there is no quick fix that can circumvent having scores of growing Christians working with excellence and distinctiveness in their chosen fields.

LP: What are the projects or programs you're most proud of?

TJ: Several of our Open Forums stand out for me – particularly the ones featuring Porgy and Bess and the Bach wedding can-

tas. And I think our fellowship groups for professional musicians are unique in many ways. But mostly, I'm just pleased that God has chosen to make Redeemer a home for so many artists.

LP: In your position here at Redeemer, you've had the opportunity to attend and speak at worship, music, and arts-related conferences and events all around the country. Have you noticed any changes in the last ten years in how churches are viewing the arts and artists?

TJ: There is a growing acknowledgment among churches that they have lost something by being out of touch with the arts and artists. They are beginning to recognize the depth of the chasm between the church and the arts community, and want to do something about it. I haven't seen many working models, but at least many churches and para-church organizations are beginning to make halting efforts to reach out to artists. It's a first step, but we have a long, long way to go.

LP: You've been in New York longer than many of us who attend Redeemer. What brought you here, and what were you doing before you moved into your current position?

TJ: Michelle and I moved to New York in 1989 for me to work on my doctorate, and for her to pursue her teaching career. I first

heard about Redeemer through Jonathan Gilley (who is now the Associate Director for Worship and Arts), when we were playing together on a jazz concert in New Jersey. I was invited to play piano for an evening service in 1990, when Redeemer was meeting at Church of the Advent Hope on East 87th Street. Before long, I became the regular pianist for that service. In 1994, I became the music director for the Village Church, which was Redeemer's first church plant. The next year, I came on staff at Redeemer.

Over the next several months, Luann will be focused on getting to know as many artists in as many different areas as possible, and on supporting the Sunday classes and other ministries of the Center for Faith and Work.

If you are an artist and attend Redeemer, please visit the Center for Faith and Work's website, www.faithandwork.org, where you can request to be added to the contact list for arts ministries involvement. Also, if you are an artist or non-artist and would like to receive information about Redeemer's arts programs and about events involving Redeemer artists, please join our Arts e-Newsletter, by contacting Luann directly at arts@redeemer.com or 212-808-4460 x158.

WE WELCOME THE NEW WORSHIP & ARTS ASSISTANT, CHRISTIE ALLEN!

Christie is originally from Indianapolis, IN. She holds a bachelor's of music from Wheaton College and a masters in opera performance from Boston University. Christie and her cat Isobel moved to New York in January 2003.

You can contact her with questions and needs about worship services and music at christie@redeemer.com or 212-808-4460 x147.

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WHOSE MONEY IS IT?- SEMINAR SATURDAY, OCTOBER 23RD.

The relationship between your heart and your money

Money is a powerful force – driving key decisions in our lives, including where we live, where we work, whom we have as friends, and how we use our time.

This one-day seminar is designed to help you think about your money through a biblical perspective. It includes practical help such as budgeting skills, “Personal Spending Plans,” as well as how to view money in light of God’s kingdom.

Williams Club - (39th b/w Park and Madison), Saturday, October 23, 2004 at 9 AM – 4 PM

Early registration \$20 (Deadline is October 8) Registration after October 8 is \$25

SAVE THE DATE: DIACONATE OPEN HOUSE

When? Friday, November 5, 2004

Time? 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM

Tentative Location? The New Office Space! 1359 Broadway
(between 36 & 37 Streets), fourth floor.

Why? November is Diaconate Officer nomination month. We are in urgent need for new officers to serve on the Diaconate. Come meet some of our Diaconate members and hear what serving as a deacon/deaconess is all about.