

REDEEMER

R E P O R T

AUGUST 2007

PROVOKING OUR COLLECTIVE COMMUNITY IMAGINATION – PART 1

BY MARK ROBINSON

“Hey, we have a fellowship group that meets tonight. We would love it if you could join us.” Nine years ago, those words (or something close to them) ushered me into the world of Redeemer fellowship groups. Today, I participate in overseeing hundreds of groups here at Redeemer as a fellowship group director. That small encounter with a fellowship group leader served a very big purpose in my vocational life.

Why have I become so heavily involved in fellowship groups? I can give an in-depth theological answer of calling, providence, and divine sovereignty. I can also give a straight-forward practical answer: someone asked me to visit their group. An unpretentiously courageous group leader extend-

ed an invitation to an unfamiliar newcomer.

To my surprise, joining that fellowship group challenged and provoked my imagination about Christian community in fresh, exciting, and encouraging ways. That group experience was formative, helping me to think about—and experience—what small group community can be. It also served as a helpful reminder of the prophet Zechariah’s wisdom to ‘not despise small things.’

So, how might others in Redeemer come to participate in a fellowship group and experience robust renewal in gospel community? What could substantially increase church-wide participation in small groups that transforms our big city? One way is to issue cattle calls to join and/

or lead a group. This is a helpful, and needful, thing to do and usually works, but only to a degree.

One of the changes the gospel makes in us is that it **converts our community imagination** and then **challenges** us to live into that renewed vision.

Catching a vision of what can be is always deeply inspiring and motivating. When a person is provoked to imagine new possibilities, to see beyond her present circumstances, she will move confidently in the direction of that new horizon. This is true when a Christian catches a glimpse of what transforming community looks like, gets a taste of thick rich community life. They will seek more of it—and often invite others to do the same.

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NYC ART 101 MINICOURSES LAUNCH NEW INITIATIVE

This summer, Arts Ministries (a department of the Center for Faith & Work) offered four minicourses to introduce Redeemerites to the art being made in New York City. The “NYC Art 101” series, offering minicourses on jazz, visual art, modern dance, and architecture, were sold out and got top reviews.

Tom Jennings taught the jazz

minicourse, and participants capped off the evening with a trip to a jazz club. After their introductory session, Brian Fee took the NYC Art 101: Modern Visual Art and its Influences group on a tour of Chelsea art galleries. The group from the modern dance minicourse, taught by Kimberly Morris, will attend a performance in the fall, as most of the NYC-

based modern dance companies tour during the summer months. Sonja Chen taught on architecture, leading her group on a walking tour of significant contemporary buildings in midtown.

About the architecture minicourse and walking tour, Dorothee Schmid said, “I think it was great walking around in the

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HABITAT SANDTOWN – REBUILDING HOPE

In the 1960s and 70s, urban blight devastated the American inner-city landscape. In Baltimore, the neighborhood of Sandtown was particularly affected as the economy lagged and jobs were lost. Successful and affluent neighbors moved out while drugs and crime moved in. Soon, a once-thriving urban center was full of abandoned, vandalized properties, plagued by increasing poverty and a growing sense of hopelessness. This is where, by God's grace, New Song church was born in 1986. A group of people with a commitment to restoring hope and a vision of a neighborhood revitalized led the way. Today, over 250 formerly-abandoned homes have been renovated by the sweat of volunteers and the finances of generous donors. In partnership with Habitat for Humanity, New Song will complete at least 250 more—500 in total!

Since 1993, Hope for New York has sent a team to Sandtown each June for "Blitz Build Week." This year, 15 volunteers piled into minivans, hammers and speed squares in hand, ready to bring urban renewal to this once-forgotten

neighborhood. The first night was filled with fellowship and fun as the team learned a Maryland tradition—how to break apart and consume steamed crab by the pound! After a good night's sleep on cots and air mattresses, the week of work started at 7:00am Monday morning (we would need every bit of that sleep to prepare us for 9 hour days in 95 degree heat!).

The renovation projects are ongoing, and one can sometimes last for months or years. Fortunately for us, at the end of this week two properties were completed and ready for dedication! Two families would now be able to purchase, interest-free on a thirty-year note, newly redesigned and renovated homes, which just months before were scar tissue on the city's face. In return, these families will invest in the building of other homes in Sandtown with their time and labor—what Habitat likes to call "sweat equity."

Set against the backdrop of the constantly increasing individualism and materialism that marks the American metropolis, Sandtown is a beautiful model of sharing, sacrifice, service, and above all,

love. It is a gospel model. The Apostle Paul once encouraged Timothy regarding the church by saying, "Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life." (1 Tim 6:18-19) It's amazing to see so many people down in Baltimore taking hold of true life.

Sandtown's Blitz Build Week is a beautiful example of the church learning what it means to treasure the kingdom, to treasure the *shalom* of God in our world, to treasure our neighbors. The houses weren't build by experts; they aren't perfect. Neither are our motives for building them. But that's how the Kingdom comes—a bunch of really imperfect people following the leadership of, and receiving grace from, a spectacularly perfect King.

Thanks to all who participate in and support this ministry! For details on how to get involved with HFNY's volunteer opportunities, visit www.hfny.org.

SAVE THE DATE: SEPTEMBER 20, 2007

Wondering more about what Redeemer does in New York and why?

Join us at Manhattan Center Studios in midtown for our fall kick off and ministry fair! It will be a great opportunity to learn more about Redeemer's vision for New York City, personally connect with any of Redeemer's many ministries, or just come to celebrate in worship what God is doing in and through Redeemer. More information will be available in the coming weeks at www.redeemer.com and at Sunday worship services.

REDEEMER REPORT

Cregan Cooke
Heather Klein

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HUNTER COLLEGE AUDITORIUM East 69TH (Between Park & Lexington) services at 10:30AM • 6:00PM	ETHICAL CULTURE West 64TH and CPW service at 9:15AM	FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH Corner of West 79TH and Broadway service at 5:00PM & 7:15PM
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PLUNGED INTO VBS!

Redeemer's first Vacation Bible Study last month (July 9-13) was a huge success! Our theme for the week was "Take the Plunge: Make a Splash with Jesus," and it was designed as a Water Park Adventure. We began and ended each day in Lifespring Lagoon for worship. In between those worship times, the children—divided into Park Crews—all visited Bibleland Bay, Craft Away Cove, Oceans of Motion, Raise the Reef Praises, and the Snack Shack.

On Monday, we plunged into obedience. The children learned from the disciple Peter, who let down his nets to catch two boat loads of fish, that obeying Jesus really pays off. Tuesday found the children plunging into worship as they sang new songs celebrating God's creation, and learned about

his love for the woman at the well. (You haven't really witnessed worship until you see 90+ children all dressed in red tee shirts singing praise to the Lord with all their hearts. What a sight that was!)

In the remaining three days of Vacation Bible School, the kids learned from more stories from the Gospels what it meant to have courage, step out in faith, and plunge into service. The children also enjoyed learning about World Vision's plan to dig wells in Africa. To contribute to that work, they raised \$525 as a missions project.

Children whole-heartedly engaged in the meaningful activities, and parents were happy that their kids were having fun. But for me, the highlight of the week was seeing evidence of God's

BY KATE JOHNSON
Spirit drawing His children closer to Jesus. Many children expressed a renewed interest in the Word of God and in singing His praises. This is what our Children's Ministry is all about at Redeemer: guiding our children to Christ and inspiring them to live gospel-centered lives.

We are grateful to All Angels Church on the Upper West Side for allowing us to use their facility. Their staff welcomed us and let us turn many of their rooms into Water Park Adventure Sites. This week also couldn't have happened without the help of more than 100 volunteers from the Redeemer community who gave their time and talents before, during, and after VBS. Many thanks to all of them!

Now, onto next year's VBS!

NYC ART 101 MINICOURSES

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city, focusing my eyes on so many beautiful buildings and architectural details, which at other times I completely overlook, in my usual New York-ish rush through the city."

Margaret Bigelow attended the visual art introductory session and almost skipped the gallery tour because she didn't know anyone in the class and had other errands and responsibilities on her mind. Nonetheless, she went on the tour and later said "Now I can return without hesitation to Chelsea on my own with friends, and will feel confident navigating the galleries with a fresh perspective." Another participant joked that he was ready to sign up for "NYC Art 102."

The Arts Ministries leaders

often hear non-artists complain that they don't understand or appreciate art—especially modern art. We hope programs like this one will increase understanding of and appreciation for the work of culture shapers in the arts world, especially those artists who attend Redeemer.

This fall, we will launch an "Arts Greenhouse," designed to encourage the creation of new works of art from a gospel-centered worldview. The Greenhouse will also build enthusiasm and support for such art.

The Greenhouse, which has been funded by the 2005 Vision Campaign, will be a home and launching pad for many programs, including a literary magazine and a worship dance initiative. Our

third annual art exhibition (and auction) will open October 5 at the Redeemer offices.

A Greenhouse eNewsletter, designed to deepen readers' understanding of and engagement with the arts in NYC and at Redeemer, will begin distribution in September. As well as articles about the arts, interviews with artists, and reviews of noteworthy arts events, it will contain announcements of upcoming Redeemer arts programs. Subscribe to the e-newsletter, at faithandwork.org/greenhouse.

If you have any questions about or input for the Greenhouse, contact Luann Jennings, Arts Ministries Program Director, at luann@redeemer.com or (212) 808-4460 x158.



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COLLECTIVE COMMUNITY IMAGINATION

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We see this kind of vision-casting, this kind of provocation to community imagination in the Biblical prophets. The Old Testament prophets are commonly understood as a bunch of grumpy, cranky divine spokesmen. They blow into town and—with bony finger outstretched—announce doom and gloom to a community gone wild in sin. They blow in, blow up, then blow out (if they don't get beat up first!).

However, there is another, better way to see what they're doing.

As Walter Brueggeman states, "The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us."

When Israel found itself

crumbling and surrounded by enemies, the prophets would provoke their collective imagination, painting pictures of a time when the community (particularly, the big city—Jerusalem) would flourish and its enemies would flock to it (cf. Isaiah 2).

Wherever there were pockets of darkness, the prophets would inspire repentance by describing an alternative community transformed by the light of the gospel. Their words inspired people who were lacking a vision of what their community could be, giving them a window into the world to come.

This is what a fellowship group can do. When people are fellowshiping together, praising God, studying scripture, praying,

and serving the people in the community around them, they are demonstrating and living out a taste of the world to come. Onlookers get fresh vistas into life in the New City. This is attractive. In the midst of darkness, light always is.

What is needed is not just cattle calls from the pulpit. What is needed is people who will dream together about what life in a gospel-driven group can be, and then pursue that vision by forming (or hosting) fellowship groups. Our city needs people who are willing to undergo a conversion of their community imagination and then challenge others to the same.

INTERESTED IN HOSTING A BETA GROUP?

This fall Redeemer will launch 50 brand new, short term Beta Groups and we need hosts. Do you have an apartment or meeting space that can accommodate a group of 6-12 people? Would you be interested in hosting a 7-week Beta Group starting the last week in September? For more information about hosting a Beta Group, please email BetaGroups@redeemer.com.