

REDEEMER

R E P O R T

OCTOBER 2008

THE DIFFICULTY OF COMMUNITY

BY TIM KELLER

Many things in our culture work against the maintenance of real community. We are conditioned in countless ways to think and act as individuals only, not as members of any body, and even our individual relationships are 'thinned out,' based on images rather than presences. Since this is the opposite of how we are supposed to live as Christians, let's look at how just one cultural reality contributes to this—contemporary communication technologies.

Images and Presences

The electronic media radically 'compress' time and space. Just thirty years ago it was expensive and difficult to make a long distance call to another country. Today we are able to stay closely in touch with others from another continent with little effort or expense. In a highly mobile society, this means that fewer and fewer of our friends and loved ones are actually fully present to us. We get their words and images only, not their embodied selves.

Media can also create the illusion that we have community with people that we don't know at all. TV and film viewers come to see actors and other figures on the screen as friends. Because we

see them, even experience them in one dimension, we get the impression they are in an intimate conversation with us. On-line contact can give us even more of a sense that we are in a real community. But through these media it is easy to project an image that is not real at all. The *NY Times* ran an article recently on a young mother who attracted a loyal following through her unremittingly sunny and celebrative blog about marriage and child rearing. When she was injured in an accident, many readers sent gifts totalling nearly \$100,000 within a couple of weeks. When the *Times* reporter asked some of the donors about their generosity to someone they 'did not know' they responded, with a snort, that they did know her, that they made no distinction between on-line friends and 'physical' ones. And yet the article ended with a kind but honest statement by the blogger's sister, who noted that while her relationship with her husband and her children 'wasn't perfect,' in the blog she chose only to focus on the positive. Her sister knew her in an embodied, fully present (soul *and* body) way. The blog readers had an illusion of intimacy.

As great as it is, God did not simply send us the Bible, a message through the communication medium of writing. If that was all he could do for us, salvation would ultimately be in our hands—it would have been up to us to follow his instructions. But instead, God also came himself, in the flesh, to be fully present to us in Jesus Christ. It is only through his being fully present with us that we could be saved by grace.

In the same way, we must learn to be fully present in community with our neighbors and with our Christian brothers and sisters. It is not enough to simply show up at a church service where you live physically, but then try to maintain all your closest relationships with friends and family members who live far away. God made us embodied beings—the body (though it is weakened by sin) is a great good. God was so positive about bodies that he himself assumed a body in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. If we are going to give and receive grace from each other, we have to get it the way God gave it to us. We have to be involved in accountable friendships and deep relationships with other people where we live.

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KIDS' PHOTOGRAPHY OPENS DOOR

The latest Redeemer Art Exhibition (July 1–August 8) opened doors for aspiring young artists, as well as many in our congregation who came to appreciate their work. The July 18th artist reception, hosted by Redeemer's Center for Faith and Work, celebrated the work of six Washington Heights teenagers enrolled in *Operation Exodus*, an afterschool program (and Hope for New York affiliate) developed to enrich the lives of inner-city kids. Through *Operation Exodus*, freelance photographer Alicia Hansen has created an exceptional arts program called *NYCSalt*.

Through *NYCSalt*, Hansen supplied a digital camera and a computer to each teenage boy, giving him a new way to access the world. For the last three years, Hansen has gone beyond teaching the fundamentals of photography and Photoshop. She has introduced the boys to the range of jobs available in photography through initiating fieldtrips to *Sports Illustrated*, Bloomberg News, *In the Heights* Broadway Musical, Fuel Digital Retouching, and the Photo Expo at the Javits Center, as well as trips out into the city to photograph the community. She has introduced them to professional photographers and they have visited their studios. She has even seeded thoughts of college by traveling

with them to an upstate university photography department. When the program first began, one of the boys aspired to be a tattoo artist after he finished high school. After visiting Syracuse University's Newhouse School of Communication, he hasn't stopped talking about how cool it would be to go to college. (Three of the boys received scholarships to attend a high school photography camp this past July sponsored by Syracuse's Newhouse School.)

Besides utilizing the artistic treasures the city has to offer, Alicia Hansen has also facilitated a strong group dynamic. Watching the boys at the opening it was evident that affectionate bonds exist between them as they easily discussed one another's photography work. It was exciting to hear the boys articulate how the program has given them access to new and foreign spheres of life. One teen proudly declared he now enjoys eating quesadillas! Another talked about how he has learned to approach people and have access to cool events because of the camera. Another said that he thought that taking a picture would be easy, just point and click, but he soon discovered that it's really hard to take a good picture and you have to think about your f-stop and depth of field, color, light, catching a

moment, the composition.... Even more significantly, the show resulted in sales of \$1700 worth of photographs and donations. Commenting on the evening, Hansen said, "You can't even imagine the change in self image that occurred when they realized that people were actually interesting in paying for the work they created. They were blown away!"

NYCSalt is a great example of Christians using art to give others access to more of life. Frank Burch Brown similarly relates how, "Art allows one not only to think more but also to feel more, and that in both of these ways together manage to mean more, possibly even letting one be and become more."¹ As Christians it is part of our fundamental belief that community matters. Collaborative creativity, activated here by Alicia Hansen and *NYCSalt*, became a way God has allowed us to shape culture positively.

Visit www.nycsalt.org to see the boys work.

"Firstfruits," Redeemer's next arts exhibition is showing Oct. 6 to Jan. 4 in the Redeemer Offices. Come to the opening party on Friday, October 10. (www-faithandwork.org/exhibition)

¹Frank Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 92.

REDEEMER REPORT

Kathy Keller
Heather Klein

The Redeemer Report is a publication of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church.
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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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JOIN THE CLUB!

Last April's Arts Month was such a success, we've made it year-round! Join the Greenhouse Culture Club as we attend an arts event together each month. Upcoming trips include the New York Philharmonic, Broadway, and Metropolitan Opera—we're planning winter trips to art museums, dance, and more. Group-priced tickets will be available, and a Redeemer artist will lead a

discussion about each event. It's a great way to learn about the arts and have a new experience! Most events will be appropriate for ages 13 and up.

Be the first to get information about events by joining the Greenhouse eNewsletter at www.faithandwork.org/greenhouse, or get information on the same website. Trips will also be announced in the Redeemer

worship service bulletin.

Redeemer's Arts Greenhouse is a program of the Center for Faith & Work's Arts Ministry. One of the goals of the Greenhouse is to build knowledge about and appreciation of the arts, so that we can better engage with and renew culture. For more information, email arts@redeemer.com or call Luann Jennings at (212) 808-4460 x158.

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Individual and Communal

There is another way that communication technologies affect us. They divide the world into parts that can be easily customized into patterns that fit individual taste. We see this in how our news comes to us. Go to Google News—there is a brief paragraph on a terrible disaster with thousands killed, next is the latest on Paris Hilton, next is a sports scoop. There is nothing to force you to give sustained attention to any one subject. You pick and choose what you as an individual want to know.

In music, you once had to buy full albums but now you choose only the song you want on your iPod. What is the effect of this? Classical musicians have noted a new trend in the last several years. At concerts, many listeners now come late—for the second piece, and leave before the last one. They come for the products they prefer, as if they were selections on an iPod. Before the advent of media, people coming to a concert thought of listening to music as an experience of community. They were paying attention to art as a corporate body. Now we come to concerts thinking of ourselves as

individual consumers.

Communications technology is only one factor among many that had done this to us. Ancient people thought of themselves primarily as members of a family or a clan. They could not imagine prosperity and good for themselves apart from the prosperity and good of their community. Today we can't even think of ourselves as members of an audience. Ancient people thought of their relationships with their family, clan, people, and neighborhood as covenantal—the relationship was more important than their individual needs. We think and act first and foremost as individual consumers. Our needs are most important. If they are not being met, we go elsewhere to have them met.

I recently learned of a man who lives about three hours from NYC. He has not found a church in his area that he likes. So one Sunday a month he takes a train to New York, goes to Redeemer, eats at a restaurant and sees sites, and then goes home. The rest of the Sundays he watches or listens to religious programming. Sound extreme? It's not too distant from the experience living in the city,

but only attending Redeemer services, and not becoming involved in the life of the community—becoming personally accountable and responsible for others.

This is harder for us than it was for our ancestors, because we are conditioned to be deeply afraid of covenantal relationships. And yet the Bible tells us we were built for covenantal relationships. We want and need to have other persons unconditionally, unselfishly committed to us, and we to them. Christian theology tells us we were made in the image of God, and that God is a Trinity. Jesus said he never did anything, said anything, or accomplished anything without his Father. The persons of the Trinity are absolutely one—each person does everything with the others. We were meant to live like that. Sin, of course, makes all human community difficult and at times painful. But it is suicidal to avoid all food just because sometimes some of it can be 'bad' and make you sick.

Shared Experience

I am saying that community is no longer natural or easy under our present cultural conditions. It

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REDEEMER DIACONATE OPEN HOUSE

Friday, November 7 at 7:00PM
Redeemer Offices, 1359 Broadway, 4th Floor

You are cordially invited to meet Redeemer's Diaconate, a ministry that carries out mercy through deeds. Come learn what the Diaconate Ministry does, hear about what it is like to be a deacon/deaconess, and find out how you can be involved.

For more information go to www.redeemer.com/nominations.

CENTER FOR FAITH & WORK OCTOBER CALENDAR OF EVENTS

DATE & TIME	EVENT & LOCATION
Thursday, October 2 at 7:00PM	Law Evening Fellowship, Redeemer Offices
Thursday, October 2 at 7:00PM	PhD Students Fellowship, Redeemer Offices
Saturday, October 4 at 11:00AM	Filmmaker's Monthly Brunch, Redeemer Offices
Sunday, October 5 at 10:30AM	Business Plan Competition Launch
Friday, October 10 at 6:00PM	Opening party/multimedia event, FirstFruits art exhibition, Redeemer Offices
Sunday, October 12 at 12:30PM	Information Session for Business Plan Competition at Hunter (after East Side AM service)
Sunday, October 12 at 6:30PM	Healthcare Dinner (after West Side 5PM service)
Tuesday, October 14 at 7:00PM	Dancer's Fellowship Monthly Meeting, location TBA
Thursday, October 16 at 8:00AM	Law Fellowship Breakfast, Redeemer Offices
Thursday, October 16 at 7:00PM	Information Session for Business Plan Competition at Redeemer
Saturday, October 18 at 10:00AM	Business Plan Competition Workshop: "What Is a Gospel-Centered Venture?"
Sunday, October 19 at 12:30PM	Healthcare Lunch (after East Side AM service)
Monday, October 20 at 7:00PM	Entrepreneurs Fellowship Monthly Meeting
Tuesday, October 21 at 7:00PM	The A.D. Agency, Cooley Studio
Friday, October 24 at 7:30PM	Higher Education, contact dmugglin@duke.poly.edu
Monday, October 27 at 7:00PM	Financial Services Ministry, Redeemer Offices
Tuesday, October 28 at 7:00PM	Actor's Group Monthly Meeting, location TBA
Wednesday, October 29 at 7:00PM	Best in New Fiction Book Group, Redeemer offices

GET TO KNOW YOUR DEACS

The Diaconate, Redeemer's mercy ministry, provides assistance to those in our community with practical, visible needs, while supporting them spiritually. We would like to introduce you to two of our "deacs" (deacons/deaconesses): Kay Bhothinard & Lolita Jackson!

Name of deaconess: **Kay Bhothinard**

Length of time I've attended Redeemer: 8 years

Length of time I've served on the Diaconate: 2 years

The service I attend: 9:15AM West Side

The last book I read was: *The Memory of Old Jack* by Wendell Berry

Most people don't know that I: am a bungee jumping survivor

I grew up in: Oregon, Thailand and Missouri

My New York neighborhood is: the Upper West Side

My favorite way to spend a weekend is: sleeping in, reading, cooking, being outdoors, sharing a meal with good friends

The most unique thing that has happened to me in New York City is: At last, the proverbial pipe under my kitchen sink burst, soaking the kitchen floors in my apartment and all the apartments below it. I live on the fifth floor. This was not a good way to get to know my neighbors.

I love New York because: of its unbounded energy

How the Lord has been preparing me to serve as a deac: He has given me amazing and wise friends who have loved me through lots of my own 'stuff' and persistently pressed the gospel into my head and heart. They are models for me in my work on the Diaconate.

Memorable experiences from my time as a deac: I struggle with how hard the hard stuff really is—a heartbreaking prayer request, immense material need, poor mental health, bad patterns that won't break. These remind me again and again that the Bible is right—we're grimly broken people in need of Jesus' rescue.

Name of deacon: **Lolita Jackson**

Length of time I've attended Redeemer: 13 years

Length of time I've served on the Diaconate: 2 years

The service I attend: 6:00PM East Side Evening

Hobbies: Singing, international travel, charity/volunteering (nonprofits), WATCHING FOOTBALL

The last book I read was: *True North: Discover Your Authentic Leadership* by Bill George

Most people don't know that I: am a football fanatic (!!); am a total Anglophile; am obsessed with penguins (I've seen them in Australia, South Africa, and plan to go to the Galapagos Islands in 2009 to see them)

I grew up in: Somerset, NJ

My New York neighborhood is: the Upper East Side

The most unique thing that has happened to me in New York City is: being in the World Trade Center both in 1993 and on 9/11 and walking out without a scratch.

I love New York because: it's a living, breathing organism, constantly changing.

How the Lord has been preparing me to serve as a deac: I can often empathize with clients due to having similar experiences in the past. I'm able to help them see God's presence in the midst of crisis and suffering.

Memorable experiences from my time as a deac: Praying with a woman and feeling so filled with the Spirit that I truly felt God flowing through me to talk to her, to tell her the message she needed to hear from Him. It moved me to tears.

If you have a financial or other practical need, please call the Diaconate Helpline, (212) 726-1334. To learn more about the Redeemer Diaconate, visit www.redeemer.com/diaconate



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will require an intentionality greater than that required by our ancestors, and uncomfortable to most of us. But building Christian community is not simply a duty. It should not be a distasteful act of the will. Community grows naturally out of shared experience, and the more intense the experience, the more intense the community.

I hope no one sees this article as a broad-brush dismissal of communication technology. My wife Kathy is one of five siblings, none of whom live closer than hundreds of miles from any of the others. Yet they e-mail one another virtually everyday. That's a thoroughly good thing. Nevertheless, the power of their relationships lies not in the current e-mailing and the phone-calling, but from their many years of sharing the same home, beds, room, parents, schools, experiences—all fully present to each other. What makes an aggregation of people into a community is that they are drawn together around some common object. Weaker community can be created by a common interest, such as a hobby, a sports

team, a musical genre. Stronger community comes together around deep beliefs and causes, or powerful common experiences, like going through a flood or battle together—and surviving. There have been countless 'buddy movies' about some group of misfits who are extremely different in all kinds of ways, but then they are thrown together into a life or death situation. When they come through it together, it becomes the basis for a deep, permanent bond, stronger than blood.

When Christians experience Christ's radical grace through repentance and faith, it becomes the most intense, foundational event of our lives. When we meet someone from a sharply different culture, race, or social class but who has experienced the grace of Jesus Christ through the gospel, we don't see the differences first, because we are looking at someone who has been through the same life and death situation as we have, since in Christ we have spiritually died and been raised to new life. (Eph 2:1-6; Rom 6:4-6.) And because of this common

experience of grace—now a deeper identity marker than our family, race, or culture—when we come together, we find we 'fit'! *'As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house'* (1 Peter 2:4-5.) Like stones that already have been perfectly shaped by the mason, the builder simply lays each next to the other and they interlock into a solid and beautiful temple. When we speak to others who know God's grace, we see that their identity is now rooted more in who they are in Christ than in their family or class. As a result we sense a bond that overcomes those things that, outside of Christ, created insurmountable barriers to our relationships. Jesus has knocked them down.

So, hard as it is to build strong community, especially in our time and place, we have tremendous resources. We have many things against us as we try to build Christian community, especially in a place like New York City. But there is no alternative.