



The GUM Letter

Reflections on Congregational Witness in an Urban Context

Winter - Spring 2005 - Volume 3, Issue 1

Being of One Mind

We look back at our January board retreat with much fondness. While some of it has to do with the scrumptious lunch fare and warm hospitality of one of our board members at her lovely home just north of the Golden Gate Bridge, we were also very pleased with the quality and candor of our conversations about congregation and ministry. Joining the board that day were the various GUM program coordinators as well as the pastor of outreach of Grace Fellowship Community Church, Rev. Doug Lee. Together, we took ample time to wrestle together with the kinds of questions that sit at the heart of "ecclesio-centered" ministry: how is the gospel being made visible in our ministry? How is the life of the congregation being built-up (sanctified) as a result of the ministry GUM provides? How is the health (positive or negative) of the flock being manifest in the character and fruit of our neighborhood programs? What are our neighbors experiencing when they enter our doors? Pursuing such questions, we believe, will foster the "one-ness of mind" that will enable GUM to faithfully carry out its mission as a servant of the Church.

Putting PrYSM on Hiatus

One concrete programmatic decision that was made at our retreat was to put our youth job-training program, PrYSM, on hold for at least a year. We seek to re-think how we approach job-training in a way that goes beyond program to foster more relationship with the congregation at-large, particularly in partnership with GFCC's youth ministry, which has also been in a period of reflection regarding approach and philosophy. - CW

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Embodying Life as God Intended

- Craig Wong

"When we talk about the church in 'the fellowship of the Holy Spirit', we are presupposing that the community between people and God, which is the work of the Spirit, reaches out *beyond* the church... The church has no monopoly of the Holy Spirit. Nor is the Spirit under its control. The precise opposite is the case: The Spirit binds the church to itself and has the church under its control. It is concerned about the church... *for the sake of the rebirth of life and the new creation of all things.*"

- Jurgen Moltmann, *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life*

Earlier this year, I was blessed with the opportunity to spend a week with a small group of academics and "urban ministry practitioners" at the *Spring Institute of Lived Theology*, led by Charles Marsh of the University of Virginia. Visiting theologian Jurgen Moltmann, who grew up in Nazi Germany, spoke from life experience about the darkness of humanity lived apart from the Spirit of God. Quoting Vladimir Lenin who said, "Trust is good, control better," Moltmann presented a cautionary word about the evolution of a "security state" whenever a society's government operates out of fear and distrust, particularly of its own citizens. A culture of control prevails, accompanied by mechanisms of total surveillance, leading inevitably to political repression and violence. "Controls spread mistrust, and mistrust turns the truth into lies; but the lie is the power which destroys life," explained Moltmann.

Ultimately, however, his public lecture, "In God We Trust, in Us God Trusts: On Freedom and Security in a Free World," pointed us to the one through whom trust is made possible. Trust, which is "the necessary habitat for freedom," is founded on the loving God of the universe, who endures our sickness, bears our sins, and shares our

grief and sorrows. Moltmann compelled us to marvel in a gracious God that invites sinners into a covenant relationship of mutual trust. He entrusts His Church with the task of manifesting His glory on earth, which is demonstrated when our trust in God, rather than Mammon, produces joyous community where trust and freedom flourishes, and no one is in want. The Spirit of God enables us to pursue such community with confidence, despite our own fallen-ness, through the gifts of confession, forgiveness, and repentance. *Life as God intended* is born anew, and the

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watching world is given a sign of hope.

I could not listen to Moltmann without thinking about our nation’s college-educated, gainfully employed congregations, including our own in San Francisco. Are we embodying life as God intended, to those we reach out to? Or are we simply mirroring the American cultural disposition to control? Is our community life being shaped by the Spirit of God, or by the impulse to secure, by whatever means necessary, our economic well-being, career advancement, retirement accounts, children’s future, materially-equipped homes, physical safety, social standing, or respectable religiosity? Is it evident to others that “in God we trust” or are we merely bearing witness to our ability to work the system to our advantage? Are we simply state-protected,

market beneficiaries clothed with a thin, religious veneer?

Through our neighborhood ministries we, who are accustomed to *being in control*, are becoming increasingly aware of others being adversely affected by *institutions of control*. Such encounters are eye-opening. A pastor advocates for a family inadvertently caught in the middle of an Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) raid. A college student is deported back to South America by the Department of Homeland Security simply because she was short a single credit for the semester. A young woman is forced to return to Central America immediately after being physically assaulted at an increasingly militarized border. Low-income families face aggressive military recruiting among their children at the local high school, due to the student records access provision embedded in *No Child Left Behind*. An aunt grieves how numb to violence her teenage nephew has become, hearing him brag about the shooting and maiming he “got to do” in Iraq. A wife despairs over the angry and detached man her wounded husband has become, after extended National Guard duty.

Fear breeds mistrust, which inflames the need to control. Institutional controls spread further mistrust, turning truths to lies, which ultimately destroy life. The Spirit of God fosters lives of confession, forgiveness and repentance, regenerating human community the way God intended. Moltmann graciously confronts us with an uncomfortable choice. Trust or control. Life or death. Which will it be? What will characterize our collective lives? Are we able to tell the difference, discern the fruit, or read the signs? If so, are we prepared to choose?

The Project on Lived Theology is a research initiative out of the Religious Studies department of the University of Virginia whose purpose is to understand the way theological commitments shape the social patterns and practices of religious communities. At the heart of the Project's mission lies the following concern: to encourage younger theologians and scholars of religion to embrace theological life as a form of public responsibility. For more information, you may go to www.livedtheology.org.

Tutoring: The Big Picture *by Jenelle Denson*

Being Christ's Family to the Children of our After-school Program.

The new faces of neighborhood kids joining us on Sunday mornings and Thursday afternoons are a wonderful surprise from God. God has challenged us to go out into our community and share the gospel. Through Grace Educational Ministries (GEMs), we try to be faithful to this calling.

For the past five years our congregation has been tutoring kids. We have built relationships with them and have come to love and care about them. And through them, our church experiences the joy that is found in loving God's creation. Through the new faces that we see, it is evident that God is using this ministry to share his gospel. And through these kids, God is providing opportunities for us to grow as a family. Jesus calls us to care for the orphans of this world. Just as we were "orphans" before we became part of God's family, so are those children we serve that know not of God's great love for them. It is Christ's desire for all of us to reach out and love these kids, to care for and claim them as family just as we do for each other.

Through GEMs, each kid has someone from our congregation who does for them what a parent would do for his or her own child. They pick them up for worship and bring them home. They supervise them when they are with us. They sit with them during worship and explain what is going on and why. These "surrogate parents" keep in touch with the children's real parents and work to build lasting relationships with them. They are learning what it means to love the orphans and experience God's immense joy during the process.

We can all walk beside these surrogate parents just as we do for other parents in our congregation. We can step in and be there for these kids too. God has given us the opportunity to welcome them into the life of our family. In doing this we can share the joy of loving these kids.

Praise God that the neighborhood children continue to come to our regular structured programs. These are important times for them, but our involvement in their lives should not stop there. While our gifts are all

different and not all of us would be comfortable having one of these kids over for dinner, God does desire us to invite them into our daily lives outside of tutoring sessions and Sundays. This can look like bringing them to a church move where they are able to interact with people in the congregation, or hosting them at an AG barbecue.

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By sharing our everyday lives with them, we help to give them a picture of what it looks like for a family to try to live out the gospel together: How do we work out differences? What does forgiveness look like? How do we help each other when we are in need? How do we celebrate together? What are the values we live by that guide our decision making? We help our own kids work out these questions because they are crucial to their understanding of the gospel. GEMs kids need to be given these same opportunities.

We can all play our part to welcome these kids into our family. Let's not settle for isolating them as neighborhood kids, but instead embrace them as *our* kids. God will do the rest. We will find joy in inviting them into our life together, and can look forward to many more of God's surprises.

Grace Educational Mentors (GEMs) is an after-school tutoring program serving elementary, middle and high school students from the local public schools. The tutors composed primarily of members from the congregation and serve the children in the church sanctuary on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. For more information, you may contact Jenelle Denson at (415) 703-6094 ext 18 or email to gems@gum.org.

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The GUM Letter is a seasonal publication of Grace Urban Ministries (GUM), Inc., an ecclesio-centered 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation serving children, youth and families in San Francisco, seeking to bear witness to the just and compassionate reign of Jesus Christ. GUM works in partnership with the local congregation to serve communities that face significant social and economic adversity. Such service includes after-school tutoring, youth job-training, dental health screening, adult education, technical assistance, and other activities that engage the complex challenges unique to the vulnerable of the San Francisco Bay Area. Whether you wish to get further acquainted, receive our mailings, converse about church-centered ministry, or explore funding or ministry partnership, we hope to hear from you. Contact Craig Wong or Pam Chao at (415) 703-6094, email to inquiries@gum.org, or write to the address above.

*Thank you for your interest in the
ministry of GUM in San Francisco!*

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