



The GUM Letter

Reflections on Congregational Witness in an Urban Context

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Remembering Pastor Bob

On May 6th, Pastor Bob Appleby of Grace Fellowship Community Church (GFCC) passed away, the end of a bout with an aggressive brain tumor that was discovered last November. Before his death, he formally passed on the reins of pastoral leadership to Pastor Sharon Huey, who was ordained just prior to the discovery of Bob's cancer. In Sharon, Bob has left the congregation in very good hands.

In this issue, I include an article that commemorates Bob's life as a truth-teller and a lover of the Church. As is true of Sharon, Bob was my gospel mentor. I have learned the gospel from him. It goes without saying that our ministry in San Francisco would not be what it is without Bob's passion for the gospel, and his tireless commitment to instruct us in the Word. How we understand the work of Grace Urban Ministries simply would not be possible apart from Bob's ministry among us.

Understanding that the Church is how God has chosen to reveal Himself to the world, Bob never ceased to push the ecclesiological question: "What does it mean to be the Church?" To answer this was to take the life of the local congregation seriously. But he also knew that such a question has a context, that is, "What does it mean to be the Church in San Francisco?" Or, how does a congregation embody the gospel in her neighborhood? For Bob, urban ministry was not optional but rather, simply inherent in a congregation's missional identity as Christ's body. As GUM continues forward, we will cherish and remember Bob's faithful life always.

- Craig Wong

The GUM Letter is a seasonal publication of Grace Urban Ministries, a congregation-based nonprofit serving children, youth and families in San Francisco. To receive this letter, or learn more about our ministry, contact Craig Wong, Executive Director, at:

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A Pastor's Gift of Truth - Craig Wong

I have loved you by telling you the truth.

- Pastor Bob Appleby, in a final address to his congregation

While I crave eggs, sausages, and hash browns for breakfast, it is the thought of syrup-drenched French toast and coffee that I will cherish long after the cruel advance of a brain tumor closes the present chapter of life for my beloved pastor, Bob Appleby. We broke egg-battered bread together every Tuesday morning, a precious ritual that Bob generously shared with me for nearly twelve years. We met down the street from our church in a restaurant that changed ownership and ambience thrice a decade, a veritable revolving door of young, tattooed, and nose-ringed waiters. Starch, sugar, and caffeine were the "comfort food" we gathered round weekly, but Bob's passion for the gospel never allowed our conversation to get too comfortable. Bob understood that while the gospel is good news, it is anything but comfortable.

The gospel was indeed discomfoting for a young ministry idealist like myself back in the '80s, fresh off of nine years with a campus parachurch organization that fancied itself "cutting-edge." Having had such an experience, I believed I possessed all the "tools" necessary to succeed in whatever ministry I chose. Equipped with just enough to be dangerous, my ambitious ego was countered only by my cursed insecurities, a perpetual pendulum swing between self-aggrandizement and self-flagellation. My grasp of reality proved inadequate. I needed the truth that Bob selflessly offered me, a gospel that challenged my calcified ideas about church and ministry, and the worldly metrics of a thinly-veiled heroism. Whether I could admit it at the time, I too often made ministry about *me* (a rather enduring tendency, I might add). Through powerful homily or witty sideswipe, Bob constantly reminded me, along and my fellow parishioners, that it's decidedly not about *us*.

If we as congregation members had our way, we would, almost with exception, make the church about us. For young-marrieds, the church would primarily be a place to raise their children with decent morals and free childcare. College grads would simply try to replicate their campus fellowship and "urban-plunge" experiences. The more activist of the flock would use the church to facilitate their pet project of social justice. White-collar professionals →

would engineer participation to fit their schedule while showcasing their respectability and stature through positions of church leadership. For the fragile and less endowed, the congregation would primarily exist as a rich source of emotional coddling in an otherwise harsh and unaffirming world. The ecclesiastically trendy would sign the congregation up at group discount for the next "formula-driven church" conference at the Hilton.



But Bob loved the church too much to allow us to settle for one bound by the limits of our small agendas and corrupted wisdom. More than for fear of congregational mediocrity or a dissatisfying pastoral experience, Bob led with deep awareness that a compromised church denies the world a chance to encounter hope for its lost-ness. He taught us that a congregation shaped by anything less than the gospel never offers more, and usually offers less, than what the world is already capable of on its own.

Because of Bob's unswerving insistence on what is true, he was not given to flowery words or feel-good sentimentality. Some found in his unbending and sometimes abrasive posture a convenient excuse not to hear. But while Bob certainly was not without flaw, the gospel proclaimed with his life simply exacted the kind of violent response that is to be expected from sinners invested in a rebellious world.

God graciously blessed us with a pastor who deemed it far more important to be *truthful* than liked, *prophetic* than popular, *Word-centered* than innovative. We will miss him dearly. But in delivering to a stubborn and resistant lot Christ's whole and unedited *gospel*, Sunday after arduous Sunday, wanting more for us than we wanted for ourselves, he has left us with a calling, the only calling, truly worth losing our lives for. ✚

Family Game Day Brings Parents and Kids Together

Our Family Game Days have gotten off to a good start. It is hard to say what comes to mind more often when I think of the weekly event...great food or great fellowship. Each Wednesday, over 40 people come and bring with them enough food for everyone to eat, not only as an after-school snack, but dinner as well.

It has been encouraging for me to see so many adults spending quality time with our kids and each other. The kids come and have a chance to get their homework done with plenty of helpers around to answer their questions. Then, when they finish, there is an abundance of games to play, and people to play with. Even the youngest have a great time with our big wooden train set, which takes over the entire front of the sanctuary.

As we invite our friends and family to join the fellowship, we can be grateful to God for the life that he has given the congregation to share. I look forward to seeing what God will do with this time, both in and through us.

- Jenelle Denson

Our 1st Congregation-based Health Care Forum

In April, we brought together, for the very first time, community health providers and the pastors of ten congregations together for a forum to discuss congregation-based strategies to address the current health care crisis. Our time began with a presentation about the uninsured by Jessica Rothhaar of Health Access California, a statewide advocacy organization. The conversation was wide-ranging, but some key themes emerged:

- *The Church has a prophetic role in speaking to the injustices of the prevailing health care system*
- *Congregations can learn much from each other and pool together health ministry resources*
- *Local health agencies are eager to bridge their services to congregation-based efforts*
- *Parishes are well-positioned to promote medicine among community constituencies*
- *Congregation-based health fairs can help surface family health problems before they worsen*
- *The Church will bear witness to the gospel by addressing health care in ways distinct from the world*

Pray for us as we move forward on these ideas, and forge new congregational and agency relationships, particularly around our upcoming Fall health fair.

- Craig Wong

Our 10th Anniversary Celebration & Fundraiser!

On Saturday, September 23rd, we shall be celebrating our 10th year as a congregation-based nonprofit ministry. If you would like more information about this event, please contact Craig Wong at (415) 703-6094 ext 16 or send an email to 10years@gum.org