



## THE GUM NEWSLETTER

# Congregational Reflections on Urban Mission

Summer 2009 – Volume 7, Issue 2

### **Learning to lean on one another as congregations**

*It has been our joyous privilege, these past few years, to discover GUM's growing role in connecting congregations together in acts of service. Sometimes such acts of service are ministries or events that GUM has organized. In other cases, they are church-led opportunities that require the assistance of additional folks from other congregations. In any case, the joy comes in seeing brothers and sisters from different churches joining together in ways that foster mutual learning, faith, spiritual encouragement and conversion. Thus, we are grateful for your many prayers for the recent health ministry collaborations, for example, the work of New Hope Community Church among the Burmese refugee community in Oakland, Redeemer Community Church's "Health Day" at Willie Brown Academy, and Grace Fellowship Community Church's dental screening for Holy Family Day Home.*

*Up next, we ask your prayers for the planning of the Mission Street Health Fair, set for Saturday, October 17th at San Francisco Christian Center, and involving over eight local congregations. May the Lord Jesus Christ be glorified in, and through, His Church!*

- Craig Wong

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### ***Our Plans...God's Plans*** - Juliette Chien

There was a plan for how it was supposed to work. Scheduled groups of children, flow monitors, time allotments... but we knew from our previous experience that the Willie Brown Academy *Health Day* would hardly be controllable, predictable, or... comfortable. For the last four years, our church, Redeemer Community Church, has been developing relationship with Willie Brown Academy in our neighborhood, and with their school nurse, Kathy Babcock, in particular. Kathy invited us in the Spring of 2006 to host a day with her where the kids could interact and engage with different health topics. The first *Health Day* was primarily made up of booths manned by folks just from Redeemer Community Church.

For this year's *Health Day*, we asked GUM for assistance because we did not have enough resources to host the event on our own. So GUM referred four congregation members from Grace Fellowship Community Church (GFCC) to join our team. Along with GFCC, we had the joy of hosting alongside the school's Peer Resource class. This widened our relationship at Willie Brown beyond the school nurse to embrace more students and faculty. As we set up a few booths alongside some student presenters, our hope was that they could experience and see they are created in the image of God. The place was bustling with eager children visiting booths on dental hygiene, healthy breakfast foods, vegetable tasting, heart health, reading food labels, body image, and sugar content. At one booth, the children drank a solution that dyed all the places on their teeth where they had missed brushing. At another booth kids pretended to be blood cells running through a clean artery and a clogged artery.

God's plan goes beyond our plans. It's a bit intimidating for our small congregation to help host hundreds of bouncy, excited 4th and 5th graders and cool, trying-to-be-tough middle schoolers. It feels vulnerable to welcome and love a wide range of kids with all their energy, charm, and occasional abrasive candor. Certainly following Jesus into this under-resourced school is outside our usual experiences of being in control. We needed help and God led us to depend more on others as partners.

In Eastertide we had been hearing how those who vulnerably put themselves before Jesus and one another (like Thomas and Mary Magdalene) are answered and met by Jesus, and how the early church was free to transparently love one another, to give and receive from one another. Four years ago we asked for friendships in our neighborhood and God answered with wide open arms at Willie Brown. We asked for growing partnership with GUM & GFCC and here we were working side by side with them.

Praise God for the sharing of gifts and common hearts and minds among partners! Praise God for delivering us from the need to be capable and self-sufficient! Praise God for young students excitedly brushing their teeth, tasting different vegetables (even jicama!) and learning about how hearts pump blood! Praise God for the joy of simply jumping in and seeing the kids' many smiles! Praise God for the blessing of working alongside old friends in the gospel, on one hand, and young new friends on the other! Praise God for his uncontrollable, good plans! ✚

*Juliette Chien is an ordained elder of Redeemer Community Church, in San Francisco's Bayview.*

## A “Ministry of Nothing” (Until it Depends on God) - Galen Hong

For a long time, the portrait of ministry in my mind included people who have a passionate desire to make a difference amid the world’s brokenness, who are gifted with initiative and abilities to engage and serve others, who dedicate their lives to God’s work on earth, and whose work show visible signs of God’s kingdom breaking in. That’s not a bad picture. However, I don’t see myself in that picture. I want to serve the Lord, but my passion is questionable. I’m socially challenged, my life is divided in many ways, and the signs of the kingdom breaking in are inseparable from signs to the contrary. What of any significance could I contribute to the Church’s ministry?

This perception has been, and often still is, an obstacle to my participation in the Church’s service or outreach. Yet, I am grateful for the Lord’s kindness and grace in gradually revealing to me a new picture of ministry. This new picture includes abandoning our strengths and resources and bringing ourselves fully, with all our weakness and failings, to see what Christ would do with us. My journey with *Grace Learning Partners/Kaleo*, a ministry fostered through GUM at Grace Fellowship Community Church, has been particularly helpful in revealing this new picture.

*Grace Learning Partners (GLP)* began in the late ‘90s and was a ministry for adults and parents to find, as the name implies, partners to help learn new skills and be better able to adapt to life in the city. Initially, we offered assistance with English, computers, and citizenship, and occasionally other individual support. This seemed like something we were quite able to do. I knew a thing or two about computers, and I was comfortable sharing this knowledge. Over time, I developed a series of training presentations introducing computers, became more confident teaching the subject matter, and even received some nice compliments along the way. I believed at that point I had something to contribute to the Church’s ministry.

*GLP’s* attendance, however, began to decline over time. While some were able to come consistently, others frequently faced conflicting work and family schedules. Some felt guilty about not coming regularly, forgetting what was previously taught, or falling behind in the training. *GLP* in some ways had become a place of burden rather than a place of welcome.

To underscore Christ’s invitation and welcome, *GLP* was reshaped to form *Kaleo*—pronounced kal-eh'-o, taken from the Greek word meaning to call, or invite, or to call by name. While *Kaleo* still offered education and training assistance, it had become a ministry of hospitality. Informality and “hanging out” replaced careful plans and structures, sharing a meal and relationships became more important than sharing expertise or solving any problems, and participants were welcomed more as the people they were than the needs they represented.

These were good changes, but they produced challenges for us. We could no longer plan and prepare the ways we were comfortable, we were dependent on whom and what God would bring on the days we met, and we were dependent on Him to provide what we needed to join our participants where they were. It was also more difficult to explain what we did in *Kaleo*. Some of us even joked that it was “a ministry about nothing”, since we couldn’t necessarily plan or explain what God would have us do from one gathering to the next.

The changes were also very challenging for me personally. I generally don’t do well in informal social settings. I’m not much of a conversationalist, and, when you throw in the differences of language and culture we often have in *Kaleo*, my end of the conversation often comes to a halt. My confidence was replaced with unnerving vulnerability, and what I thought I could contribute to the ministry I could no longer bring. Nevertheless, I have come week after week with a mix of fear and curiosity to see what God would do with us and with me. And what I’ve seen is that God does not despise our weakness, but is gracious to include us in His plans. More people have come, and I believe they have felt welcomed, but more importantly, many have continued to come for reasons that can only be explained by something God is doing.

I have seen people and families being known and cared for and extended dignity in a way the world cannot. I have seen participants find a safe place where they can relax and receive help, whether it’s with a particular life need or simply with childcare so they can find a moment of rest. They have found companionship beyond the gathered times. I have seen people come to *Kaleo* with sometimes overwhelming need and burden and somehow met in a profound way by God through His people.

I have seen fellow *Kaleo* staff find their hearts broken for those they care for, feel and know their own inadequacy, call out to God for help, and find company and God’s provision in their midst. God knows us and our failings and yet calls us to serve with whatever we have. He does not disqualify us. We’ve been humbled to know we can’t solve anything, but we’ve been given His grace and reminded of His faithfulness. Our part is just that: a part in need of other parts, and in need of God to use them as He will to bring about what He will. Our conversion is wrapped up with each other, both staff and participants. This is the new picture of ministry unfolding for me. I am able to see and know God working in our weakness—this is grace. This is the Lord’s doing. Thanks be to God. ❖

*Galen Hong is an elder of Grace Fellowship Community Church in San Francisco’s Mission District.*

# On Being the Church

## Our Witness of Undividedness

“Be ye undivided, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is undivided”

- Paraphrase of Matthew 5:48, Jack Bernard, *How to Become a Saint*, 2007

A fellow congregant and I recently found ourselves in the midst of a furor at our children’s middle school where, as parents, we serve on the “site council,” the committee ostensibly responsible for overseeing the school’s academic priorities and budget. Without warning or solicitation of community input, the district announced that a charter high school was going to be co-located at our facility, wresting away the entire third floor. “This is an outrage!” cried the school community, my friend and I among the throng.

We soon learned that this closed-door decision stemmed from California’s Prop 39, a statewide ballot initiative that was promoted and bankrolled by Netflix founder, Reed Hastings, an ardent evangelist of the then-fledgling charter school movement. Not only did Prop 39 pass in 2000, but Hastings was also appointed to head the State Board of Education that same year. This confluence resulted in an educational reform policy that gave charter schools a huge legal boost: the power to demand and procure available building space within public school districts. In predictable fashion, this flawed policy pits charter schools against traditional schools in divisive fights for space.

Like all forms of sin and violence, dividedness leads to dividedness and a spirit of “us” versus “them” manifested itself in a variety of directions at our school. For many, it was easy to vilify the district administrators as cowards for kowtowing to demands of Prop 39, written or not, for fear of lawsuit. For others, disdain arose for a principal who could have done more to defend his school. Between the two schools, reticence fostered an air of mutual suspicion. Kids viewed the high-schoolers as invaders. And district officials dismissed the parents as fearful, territorial or small-minded. This last judgment, of course, was particularly offensive to those of us who, *in the name of social justice*, brought the fight directly to the local board of education.

In all our pushing and striving, even when well intended, we become aware of the dividedness within ourselves, that is, our duplicitous faith. As Christians, when in the middle of such “battles” as the one at my child’s school, examining our motives serves to reveal the source of our hope. Once, in moment of advocacy fatigue, I remember asking my late pastor Bob Appleby, “How do I know if I’m investing more time and energy than is fruitful?” He very pastorally responded, “Well, are you hoping to bear witness...or to *win*?” This humbling question, which I remember finding difficult to answer at the time, required that I come to grips with the fact that I could be worshipping Christ with my lips while taking matters into my own hands. Lord have mercy upon this divided heart!

Receiving God’s mercy, in fact, sat at the heart of my church’s recent “season of Jubilee,” a significant moment in our history that provided an important alternative picture to the one that had played out at the school. Our pastors recognized that while, after 25 years of life together, there was much to celebrate, there were also debts to be forgiven, liens to be cancelled, accounts to be wiped clean. There were patterns of relating that had become lifeless or indeed destructive, whether between leaders and the general congregation, members with one another, pastors among themselves. There was a subtle yet real divide exposed, during a time of corporate confession, between those in the congregation who largely stood in judgment of others...and those who had long went into hiding *for fear of judgment*. There were also ways that we had come to pigeon-hole each other, or indeed our selves, in a way that squelched the wealth of gifts and testimonies we could offer to one another. Perhaps most importantly, we recognized ways we had become too certain about ourselves, the gospel, or what it means to be the Church, which not only foster division within our ranks, but with those who sit outside as well. We had to re-ignite our first love, say yes to *Jesus* once again, and re-learn what it means to be children in his presence...and in the world.

Such seasons of renewal remind us that a hopelessly divided world will remain without hope if we, the Church, remain divided as well. Indeed, engagement in the world, as it is in the Church, is more often than not, messy and unpredictable. Nonetheless, despite our sin and flaws, we are called by Christ to be in these places. Set apart for His purposes, trusting only in Him, we are given grace to live miraculously undivided for a world yearning for sanity. ◆

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This article first appears in *PRISM Magazine*, the publication of Philadelphia-based *Evangelicals for Social Action* (ESA), for whom Craig Wong writes a regular column called *On Being the Church*. ESA’s archive of this column can be accessed at [www.gum.org/onbeingthechurch](http://www.gum.org/onbeingthechurch)

## Welcoming the Burmese Community

SF Congregants Assist a Church Outreach in Oakland.

- Joan Jeung

For decades, ethnic minorities and pro-democracy activists in Myanmar (Burma) have faced oppression from one of the most brutal military dictatorships in the world. Since the UN began its resettlement program for refugees from Burma several years ago, many have resettled to the United States, and hundreds to the San Francisco Bay area. On May 2nd, my husband Russell and I helped to organize a health fair and needs assessment for refugees from Burma living in the Bay area. The event was held at the Oakland Burmese Mission Baptist Church alongside a food fair and workshop series for newly arrived refugees, both organized by the Burmese church. The workshops addressed various health-related topics, ranging from the importance of health insurance to domestic violence prevention. Over 50 adult participants and their children, mostly newly arrived refugees from Burma, were bused in from all around the Bay Area.

GUM sent volunteer physicians, nurses, and interpreters from Grace Fellowship Community Church (GFCC) and Redeemer Community Church (RCC) to help staff the fair. They joined volunteer pediatricians and staff from *Kerry's Kids*, a local non-profit that provides free health care to homeless and other underserved children in the east Bay. Many students from Russell's public policy class at San Francisco State University also volunteered conducting needs assessment surveys, running games and activities for children, and also taking heights, weights, and calculating body mass index for the health fair. A public health nurse from Alameda County, Kathy Ahoy, assisted me in running the health component.

From GFCC, nurses Lisa Balzer, Beverly Low, and Theda Wong screened blood pressures for health care participants. Pauline Chau also from GFCC, measured blood sugar levels for those with higher BMI's. Myo Than, from GUM's *Kaleo* ministry, and his daughter helped provide Burmese interpretation. RCC doctors, Ann Kim and Daniela Kim, saw several adult patients, including two who had to be sent immediately to the emergency room. As a pediatrician, I was grateful that adult medical providers were present to assess ill adults, especially those with urgent needs. The whole team did a wonderful job providing care with a smile in crowded quarters and make-shift clinic space in offices and Sunday school classrooms. The Burmese church leaders were quite pleased and thankful for the health fair volunteers and the excellent care they provided for the newly arrived refugees.

It was a privilege to partner with the local Burmese church in reaching out to this remarkable refugee community that has endured so much. Our heartfelt thanks goes to GUM and the congregational volunteers from GFCC and RCC who joined in this partnership that day. ✠

*Joan Jeung, and her husband Russell, are members of New Hope Covenant Church in Oakland's Lower San Antonio District.*

## Burmese Outreach *Scrapbook*



*Three nurses, a dietician and two Burmese translators prepare to join a congregation-based refugee services and health outreach in Oakland, California.*

*Burmese families from around the Bay Area travel to the Oakland to access health screenings and community resources.*



*Physicians and other health professionals from three different congregations join forces to provide free medical consultations.*



## Willie Brown "Health Day" *Scrapbook*

*Redeemer Community Church hosts a "Health Day" for students at Willie Brown Academy in San Francisco's Bayview*



*Congregation members from Grace Fellowship Community Church help conduct a nutrition activity at the Willie Brown health event.*



*Congregation members partner with the school nurse, along with students from Willie Brown's Peer Resource Center, to host the Health Day*

