



The GUM Letter

Reflections on Congregational Witness in an Urban Context

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Joining arms to seek the welfare of our city.

We are grateful for your prayers and support in a particularly fruitful year of partnership-building among a growing set of congregations. In what has clearly been a cutting edge for Grace Urban Ministries, we are learning valuable lessons about what it means to seek common vision and foster relationships among congregations possessing very diverse backgrounds, ecclesial traditions, and ways of doing things. Collaborative work can be challenging, and we are being regularly humbled by our mistakes. But we are also deeply invigorated by the possibilities, and encouraged by the stories we are hearing from our partners.

We hope you will be encouraged as you read about our summer field trips to historic churches in the city, the theological reflection gained from our pastoral convening on immigration, and the congregational formation that is being made possible through the Mission Street Health Fair. And we are also deeply grateful for the growing partnership with local agencies and coalitions as we together seek the welfare of our city, particularly in the areas of health care and immigration.

May the Advent season and the new year ahead be filled with the presence and peace of Christ for you and your family.

- Craig Wong

The GUM Letter is a publication of Grace Urban Ministries, a church-centered nonprofit serving youth and families in San Francisco. For more information, contact Craig Wong at:

Grace Urban Ministries
3265 16th Street
San Francisco, CA 94103-3323
(415) 703-6094 ext 16 (voice) (415) 864-5830 (fax)
cwong@gum.org

www.gum.org

Exploring the Church's Story in the City -Brian Lee

“Urban Adventures: Field Trips to Discover God’s Unfolding Story Through His Church in the City!” reads the title in the summer brochure that announced the places we would visit, explore, and strengthen solidarity with other congregations in our city. Through Urban Adventures, we are learning to make it a priority to meet and get to know other church leaders as a way to build the kind of mutually encouraging partnership needed for ministry in the city for the long haul.



Kids meet Elder Tony of the Tenderloin District's "Hot Dog Church"

As we begin our first Urban Adventures day, we gathered at a nearby neighborhood park to fellowship and enjoy lunch before visiting the church. On a very sunny Friday, we met at Mission Dolores Park before heading off to Cornerstone Church located at 17th & Valencia Streets. As one of our closest neighbors, Cornerstone has been ministering in the neighborhood since 1954. Terry Brisbane is the Senior Pastor of the church that was formed by his father. Pastor Kyung Kim, Ministry Director, gave us a tour of their church that was converted from a playhouse theater. From the Sunday School rooms to the coffee bar, every inch of the building is used for their weekend ministries that include Bible study groups and musical productions. Their ministry reaches out to creative artist, both visual and musical to →

Urban Adventures field trips, continued

share in their expression of Jesus Christ. Our next Urban Adventures brought us to the Tenderloin neighborhood, stopping first at the very busy and active Tenderloin Recreation Center before heading off to the Providence Christian Church, also known as the "Hot Dog Church." Unlike Dolores Park, the cramped asphalt recreation center was filled with dozens of happy children being cared for by day care workers and youth directors. This inner-city playground is very small with limited play structures; however this very busy and happy place is a protected and safe haven for children and families. We met with Pastor Eric Gabourel and Brother Tony who greeted us warmly and showed us their store front sanctuary multi-purpose area. They not only minister to the homeless and needy but are increasingly expanding their ministries to include the many families and children who live in the area. The explanation of the "Hot Dog Church" is simple: For many years, they serve hot dogs at the end of their Sunday worship. However, they recently decided to change the focus of the hot dog ministry and, rather than duplicating food services with a nearby soup kitchen on Sundays, they shifted the hot dog giveaway to Wednesdays and are now serving more children and families...while gathering for their evening worship. Children fill and occupy the Church school and youth ministry rooms located in the basement. The "Hot Dog Church" is an island of God's shalom in the midst of the Tenderloin. The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ, and God is calling and forming the church through many different expressions: the forms of outreach we saw was as varied as the people being touched and cared for. We want to continue to celebrate and appreciate the breadth of God's church in our City and to join hands with our fellow Christian brothers and sisters as we care for those He loves. We are reminded that amidst much diversity in the body, we share in the ministry of sharing the Gospel for others to experience God's love. †

*Do not mistreat an alien
or oppress them, for
you were once aliens
in the land of Egypt.*

Exodus 22:21

**A pastor reflects on our May convening on
Immigration: Through an Ecclesiological Lens**

- Rev. Sharon Huey

At our May convening, we had Mike Budde, professor of Political Science from De Paul, speak to us on the immigration issue. He gave us such a different starting place than the usual liberal vs. conservative ones which leave us in the same rancorous place. Instead, he argued that Christians, to engage well and faithfully, must always ask the questions, "Who are we, and Whose are we?"



Michael Budde provides the morning's instruction

Knowing deeply that our primary allegiance is to God and His present-tense Kingdom (rather than any nation), and to the trans-national family that He's made us a part of (one which transcends every border) puts us in the place to live as a signal of the coming Kingdom. That's the only way our congregational life has any integrity...not when we're "doing church for ourselves", but when we're embodying together God's shalom and making a place for others who may be labeled "undocumented" by some, but who are, according to God, His children, and thus our brothers and sisters.



Revs. Elias Loera, Sharon Huey & Alexia Salvatierre respond

We have begun to have this calling tested as we live in our particular neighborhood in the Mission District in San Francisco and as we get to know the challenges of particular families who are undocumented. The stories are heartbreaking, but we feel privileged to hear them and bear them with these folks whom God has brought to us. That the Spirit seems to be changing us as we join ourselves to their suffering and stay true to Whose we are, is a wonderful gift. †

Sharon Huey is the pastor of Grace Fellowship Community Church, San Francisco

On Being the Church

Border Policy, God & Mammon - Craig Wong

When human beings refuse to use God's gift of money responsibly, they are handing their power to Mammon, and he will take control. And when powers take over, human beings get crushed.

- N.T. Wright, Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship

I thoroughly hate the barbarians because they do not respect justice. They continually promulgate harsh laws to show off their prowess. They oppress [our people] and also violate treaties. They examine for bookworms and practice hundreds of despotic acts.

- Chinese detainee at the Angel Island Immigrant Detention Center, San Francisco, 1920s

My grandmother, at least in one early period of her life, contemplated suicide. Such an impulse was not uncommon among the female peers with whom she shared several months of harsh and humiliating detainment. Held on an island just a few short miles off the longed-for mainland, as many as 500 detainees at a time occupied barracks characterized by unsanitary conditions, poor diet, and cramped living space. Perhaps greater than the physical hardship, however, was the loneliness of separation from loved ones, combined with the despair of repeated failure to satisfy stringent interrogatories for their release. The inability to recall the minutest of details (“How many steps were there to the front door of your house?”) or the presence of treatable parasites could instantly terminate one’s arduous quest of becoming an American citizen.

Throughout the history of U.S. immigration, the promulgation of harsh laws and barbaric treatment was not confined to processes of entry. Foreigners suffered the imposition of exorbitant mining taxes during the Gold Rush, costly regulations regarding housing rentals, laws that prohibited harmless cultural practices, enforcement dragnets to expel the undocumented and draconian measures like the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Japanese Internment and California’s Proposition 187 aimed at Latino immigrants. Legislation was accompanied by informal oppression of all kinds, including ridicule, exploitation and violence. Such social subjugation is exemplified by the experience of the mass famine-related immigration of the Irish in the 19th century. Upon arrival, they quickly fell victim to unscrupulous landlords and employers, forced into squalid shanty-towns, scammed of personal assets, and relegated to the most undesirable jobs.

One can describe America’s heightened anti-immigrant episodes in terms of bigotry and racism, but it is economic self-preservation, that is, the fear of losing “the American way of life,” that ultimately sits at the heart of each of them. Throughout our history, and without exception, immigrants have been branded the scapegoat in times of economic downturn and national insecurity. This merely flows from the fact that we define “well-being” almost solely in terms of material wealth or possessions. Sociologically speaking, Americans put their trust in the rewards and “virtues” of the free-market. Biblically speaking, to place one’s trust in anyone, or anything, other than God is idolatry.

The inability to recognize our economic idolatry is evident in the immigration policy debate. We American Christians appear far attuned to what is *legal* than what is biblically *just* or *compassionate*. We’ve reduced human beings to economic commodities that are deemed either threats or “assets” to our economy. While we might affirm the notion of “earned pathways to naturalization” we passively accept, or actively encourage, the harsh and often-indiscriminate raids, detainment and deportation of tens of thousands of immigrants by Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) within our borders today.

Meanwhile, we fail to ask the question of *why* so many immigrants cross our increasingly-militarized borders without papers at great risk to their lives. Might it be related to a “way of life” that depends on an under-paid (and uncomplaining) labor force? Are we, through our profit-driven trade policies, creating the very economic conditions that force families to emigrate from their homeland? If this is true, should we not examine the log in our own eye before we so quickly condemn those who “don’t play by our rules” regardless of the direness of their circumstances?

As we increasingly hear of ICE agents, in our own neighborhood, with guns drawn, forcibly entering apartments, cuffing children, and carting their parents off as if felons, we the Church are forced to confront our reticence. Are we willing to ask what is at the heart of our silence? As the people of God, regardless of one’s partisan leaning, let us be willing to engage the immigration crisis with the truth of the gospel, lest we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord...while kneeling at the altar of Mammon. ✚

The *Mission Street Health Fair* and Our Congregation's Growing Vision

- Pastor Bill Betts, San Francisco Christian Center

Our church began as “San Francisco Revival Center” during a wave of growth in the Pentecostal movement in the mid-1950’s. Now, however sympathetic one’s associations may be with the zealous seven-days-a-week revival meetings and the immature Pentecostal theology of that era, it still requires a real stretch of the imagination to understand how such a background could prepare our church to meaningfully engage in a ministry effort that stems from a congregation-based, parish-focused, whole-person, social justice value base. The story of how this actually came about in the Mission Street Health Fair forms a richly textured fabric that merits a fuller telling by a more adept master weaver of narratives than myself but as a prelude or perhaps an enticement to listen to that story let me share a few of the highlights of ways our participation in the Mission Street Health Fair has impacted our life together.

We have gained a **greater vision for outreach in our community** by hosting and co-sponsoring an event that is intentionally focused on practical felt needs and works hard at being inclusive of all who live in the area, especially those of different language groups and income levels. We have witnessed **a tremendous response from our congregation** to this hands-on opportunity to build relationships with members of other churches, employ their own gifts, abilities and training in coordinated teamwork, and willingly serve in cheerful, humble ways. And we have **experienced the richness and power of unity in the greater Body of Christ** through our ministry partnerships with Grace Urban Ministries, Redeemer Community Church, Cumberland Presbyterian Church Chinatown – Daly City campus, Grace Fellowship Community Church and others from Ministerios Cosecha, St. John of God, and Cornerstone. The *koinoinia* of this unity has happened in ways great and small; through meetings in homes and churches, conversations between individuals, and side-by-side activities as lofty and mundane as passing out flyers, cooking meals, blowing up balloons, taking blood pressure and smiling the welcome of hospitality in Jesus’ name.

Several years ago our senior pastor, Bishop Donald E. Green repented before our congregation for having failed to pursue the multi-cultural, multi-racial diversity that he felt had always been God’s calling for our church. In an effort to recast this vision and help us move from being a predominantly African-American church to a congregation that better reflects the diversity of heaven, he declared that our new church motto would be, “A Church for All People”. We have had no five-year goals nor programmatic designs to create greater diversity – it has become a value, a consistent priority in prayer, a deep concern. But through the initiative and partnership with Grace Urban Ministries, the Mission Street Health Fair has become our most significant, tangible signpost that the vision for our church and community is not a passing conviction but surely the leading edge of a God-given kingdom vision that by His grace is gradually being established in our midst so that one day the small Pentecostal church on mission street will eventually reflect something of that first church on the Day of Pentecost – “A Church for All People.” ☩

Mission Street Health Fair Scrapbook



The health fair was hosted by San Francisco Christian Center and the representatives of several other local congregations (see article to the left)

California Pacific Medical Center provided free flu shots, and information on Hepatitis B.



Teams, like the Community Health Access Project, and the San Mateo & San Francisco Health Plan, helped bridge the uninsured to need services in the city.

The Hospital Council of the Bay Area offered free prostate cancer Screening



UC Berkeley's School of Optometry provided over 15 students to conduct vision examinations.

Diabetes, nutrition, cancer, and other health education was provided by SF Dept. of Health, and other agencies & nonprofits. See www.gum.org/healthfair for complete listing.

