



The GUM Letter

Reflections on Congregational Witness in an Urban Context

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Our growing ecclesial and community partnerships

As we head into 2008, we praise God for the growing partnerships that we have to build on. The past year was one that was particularly characterized by expanding, and deepening relationships as we seek to build the Church's gospel presence and prophetic witness in the city. An African-American Pentecostal congregation reaches its neighborhood through a health fair; four major hospitals join them in providing valuable health services, a Latino Lutheran church and a small "intentional community" co-host a neighborhood congregational forum on earthquake preparedness; the city's disaster response agency invites GUM to appear on a television panel to discuss the challenges that face SF's most vulnerable communities; two Asian & Anglo Presbyterian churches join together to write letters to their state senators, advocating for health care for the under- and un-insured in California; GUM is given opportunity to represent the churches at legislative visits and health care reform rallies in the city's civic center.

Such growing partnerships mean more than simply increased opportunities. More importantly, each partner provides a unique lens through which to better understand the gospel and God's undying love for His city. Please continue to pray for God's work in, and through His Church, and the community partners he has blessed us with. - C. 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:

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Preparing to Serve Amidst Disaster - Teri Creeger

Recently I heard a story told by Kyle Childress, a Baptist pastor in West Texas. A powerful hurricane hit and left most of his town without electricity. It happened that the church was one of the only places to have power. The folks from Kyle's fellowship brought all their thawing food from useless freezers and refrigerators and cooked it up for their neighborhood. People from all around camped out, enjoyed sumptuous feasts, played games and just kept each other company until they could go back home. In stark contrast, Kyle had only to set out to a local gas station to experience what it is like in an emergency to be estranged from a caring community. He saw a couple in a SUV stocking up on gas. For protection, the grim woman waved a shotgun from the side door, while her equally stoic husband filled, not only their tank, but also four 25-gallon containers and some smaller cans. They evidently felt that they were totally on their own in a hostile world.

Jesus calls the church to be ready to sacrifice and share, and in so doing provide *hopeful* community for those who are struck by disaster. There are many who, out of fear of earthquake, hoard food and water while obsessing about not having enough for their own; that is not the way of the church. If we try to ready ourselves for the future in the way the world often does, we will be governed by fear and scarcity mentality. But if we prepare as Christians, we'll be hospitable to the stranger.

As a member of Church of the Sojourners, I was delighted to be able to collaborate with GUM to coordinate the Congregation-based Earthquake Preparedness & Awareness (CEPA) Project this past year. Craig Wong and I partnered with a small cohort of Mission district churches to learn how to be a presence in the community in the event of an earthquake. Along with Grace Fellowship Community Church and Sojourners, were representatives from Mission Presbyterian, St. Mary & Martha Lutheran and Dolores Park Church. We have also had dialogue with secular agencies such as Red Cross and SF CARD (Community Agencies Responding to Disaster).

Questions we asked ourselves were, "What is unique about a *Christian* presence during a disaster? What do we have to offer that agencies don't?" As we talked about it, we realized we have spiritual gifts at our disposal, not the least of which are love and hope. We have the knowledge that Jesus is with us, even when the earth shakes and the mountains give way (Psalm 41). In a nation that is obsessed by fear, we can go beyond self preservation and hoarding, to reach out (especially to the most vulnerable and forgotten among us). That is why our CEPA motto has become *preparing to serve*.

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Besides material provisions, we in churches have another great gift to offer...our prayers. The fruit of our petitions will never spoil; it will be available for use in any setting at any time. And so, we've been praying together as a cohort. We pray that our preparations (that can never be enough) will be multiplied and put to use by those who need them at the right time. We pray for ourselves, that we will keep centered on Christ, in spite of fear. And that we'll be willing to serve others. We beg God for mercy for our neighbors and pray that they will be ready to hear from God when a disaster comes. We ask God not to overlook the poor and weak. And so we plan and we pray, knowing that our plans won't save us but maybe God will take our offerings and make something good come out of them.

The CEPA project, as funded by the San Francisco Foundation, culminated with an earthquake preparedness event called *Esperanza Despues del Sismo* ("Hope after the Big One") in September at St. Mary and Martha Lutheran Church. The morning was blessed with a sermon from Tim Otto, congregational response, and a time of worship followed by earthquake preparedness workshops for the churches and the community-at-large. We were also blessed by our partnership with SF CARD (Community Agencies Responding to Disasters), the Red Cross, the SF Fire Department's NERT (Neighborhood Emergency Response Team), Manos Unidas, and the Good Samaritan Family Resource Center.

The grant period is over, but one of the best things that has come from it is the developing partnerships among our churches, and with these community agencies. That will not end. We are still realizing the implications of all that we have done. My hope is that our cohort will keep in touch and continue to encourage one another to be *prepared to serve* in the years ahead. †

*My soul finds rest in God alone;
my salvation comes from him.
He alone is my rock and my
salvation; He is my fortress,
I will never be shaken.*

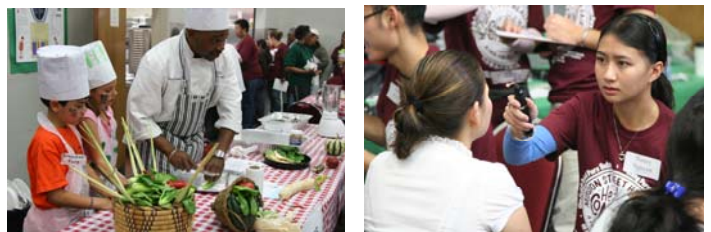
Psalm 62:1-2

The Mission Street Health Fair at San Francisco Christian Center (SFCC)

Consistent with his life-long vision of raising a "church for all peoples," Reverend Bishop Don Green, of SFCC, requested GUM's organizational leadership for their first multi-congregational, neighborhood health fair, providing free medical screening to the largely Latino, Asian-Pacific Islander, and African-American community, serving residents in both San Francisco and Daly City, as well as many visitors from the East Bay area.



SFCC was joined by Redeemer Community Church, a congregation that serves in the Bayview/Hunters Point district, along with Ministerios Cosecha, Chinese Cumberland Presbyterian Church of Daly City, Mission Presbyterian Church, and Grace Fellowship Community Church. Together, we served over 500 individuals, providing body-mass-indexing, blood pressure checks, and screening for cholesterol level, dental health, and vision (thanks to UC Berkeley Optometry). As in our previous fairs, SF General Hospital provided diabetes education and the Immune Enhancement Project gave acupuncture & massage treatments.



New this year, we established a partnership with California Pacific Medical Center who administered 210 free flu-shots, and the SF Hospital Council (with St. Mary's and St. Francis Hospitals), who provided 35 prostate cancer examinations. In addition to these, we were blessed with too-many-to-name agencies and nonprofits that offered valuable resources and information for all who came. We praise God for every one of these precious partners. More to come in 2008!

