



The GUM Letter

Reflections on Congregational Witness in an Urban Context

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A pastoral convening on immigration. God's will be done!

On Saturday, May 3rd, we are convening about 100 pastors and congregational leaders around "Immigration: Through an Ecclesiological Lens." Together with Michael Budde, a professor of ecclesiology and political science at De Paul University, we shall seek to discern what it means for the Church to live out of its allegiance to Christ in the midst of the contentious political climate and proliferation of harsh policies that are adversely affecting the immigrant community in our nation today.

We praise God for the diversity of Christian churches and traditions represented at this gathering: Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, and Catholic, along with those representing organizations and networks such as the Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights, the Clergy & Laity United for Economic Justice, the Archdiocese of San Francisco, the Mennonite Central Committee, and many other affiliations. Also represented are folks from the central valley, the north coast, southern California, and Arizona.

I ask your prayers for this event, and the seeds that are planted from it, that God's will would be done in, and through, His beloved Church in this tumultuous time.

- 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

Dental Screening & the Good Shepherd -Cindi Fong

During the Lent and Eastertide seasons, I often reflect on John 10 and Luke 15, Jesus our Good Shepherd. I have often taught children these texts during Lent and Easter as a way to see our Lord's great love for them. He knows them by name, he protects them, he calls them out one by one, he makes sure they are all with him and all safe. He knows them and they know Him. He will lay down his very life for them. Thinking about our Good Shepherd instructs how I care for kids in our church, as well as kids in the neighborhood where God has called our congregation.

Since Redeemer Community Church moved to the edge of the Bayview Hunters Point Neighborhood in San Francisco, we have been exploring possible partnerships with our neighbors. We have been impressed and even surprised with how God has welcomed us into the neighborhood as our neighbors have welcomed us with open arms. One of these neighbors is Willie L. Brown Jr. Academy College Preparatory School. When we first moved to the neighborhood in the fall of 2005, we visited and met with their principal, Terryton Russ and their school nurse, Kathy Babcock. This was the beginning of a genuine partnership that has given our congregation an opportunity to learn what it might look like to bring our Good Shepherd's care to kids in our neighborhood.

In talking with Mr. Russ and Kathy we have repeatedly heard that what their kids need most is simply positive attention from adults. In other words, they need good shepherds. So we looked for ways we, as the church, could be the arms and feet of our Good Shepherd. Over the past few years, a few folks from our congregation have served in classrooms and played games with kids at lunch. We gave Christmas gifts to some families and classrooms, and we helped put on a Health Day, where we had booths and children could interact with different aspects of their health. One of our booths was a dental booth and this led to a conversation about the possibility of a dental screening. Many of the kids at Willie Brown have inadequate or no dental care. Redeemer has done dental screenings with Grace Urban Ministries (GUM) and we thought this could be a way we could serve the school.

Last fall we had our first dental screening at Willie Brown. Margie Chiang with GUM helped us with many of the logistics and Kathy was able to steer us as to what would actually serve the kids at Willie Brown. We screened the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades and 2 special day classes. We tried to think through ways each child could be shepherded with dignity and love by several adults. Schools often ➤

Dental Screening & the Good Shepherd, continued

have vision or dental screenings, but they often feel more like being run through a machine than getting health care. Students may have to stand in long lines and after a long wait, they get only a few minutes with a doctor. Kathy had alerted us that for the kids, simply having a positive experience with a doctor could serve them.

We followed the model we had done with GUM before and had eight adults come from our congregation to provide plenty of opportunity for the kids to be loved. We welcomed the kids and taught them in a hands-on way about dental hygiene. We called them by twos into the next room to see one of the dentists. We made sure they were greeted by name and escorted with care to the dentist and that the dentists were free to take their time with each student. After they were examined, they each received a bag with a toothbrush, dental floss, and a card telling what kinds of dental care they needed. As they were escorted to a third room, many poured over their cards were very excited to have had a dentist consult just with them. While they waited for the rest of their class to be screened they played dental bingo and won prizes. Throughout, they had many opportunities for several adults to call them by name, welcome them in Christ's name, and care for them with His care.

Jesus says whenever you welcome a child in His name, you welcome him and we very much experienced the welcome of our Lord at Willie Brown. We were very grateful that people in our congregation were able to have a good experience with kids in our neighborhood and to find Jesus not only being a Good Shepherd to the kids, but being a Good Shepherd to us. As well. The dental screening at Willie Brown, and especially our partnership with Kathy, has been one of the ways we have seen our good Lord shepherd us into this neighborhood and join Him in his good work here. †

*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

Celebrating 10 Years of GEMs Tutoring in the Mission

- Jenelle Denson, Program Director

As our congregation, Grace Fellowship Community Church, celebrates its tenth year of GEMs, a tutoring and mentoring program for students in grades 1 to 12 and under the oversight of GUM, we are grateful that God has invited us on this journey. A number of us from this congregation help kids do their homework twice a week, and we get to experience first hand what it means to be the hands and feet of Christ to this city. We get to travel with them as they navigate their way through school, learning the academic and social skills that will help them into adulthood. We get to show kids that what makes them valuable as people is not how well they measure up in the school system, but the fact that they are loved and cherished by God, their creator.

One of the joys of tutoring is getting to know our students' families. Our congregation gets together to eat every Thursday night before we gather for a bible study. As the years go by, we are seeing more and more of the kids we tutor and their families staying to eat with us and we are becoming friends. Many kids are a regular part of the youth activities in our church. Parents are coming to worship with us on Sunday Mornings. We no longer want to make the distinction between kids of our congregation and neighborhood kids, as many are both. One of the students who came to our program for nine years and graduated last year has become a full part of our congregation and his brother and mother as well. What started with tutoring and eating, has become friendship and partnership in the Gospel.

We have had more congregation members join the tutoring team this year and we are looking forward to the ways in which God will use even more of us to spread his love and generosity to this city. Through tutoring kids and sharing our lives with them, we are learning to see this city, not as something out there, but as a place full of people with faces and names right here. We are learning to love and care for this city, with the eyes that God has given us to see it with; a city full of friends and deeply loved by God. †