



## THE GUM NEWSLETTER

# Congregational Reflections on Urban Mission

Spring 2009 – Volume 7, Issue 1

### **“Connection, Conversation and Conversion”**

These are the three words that one of our board members, Galen Hong, used to summarize the resounding chords we heard at our recent board retreat. We want to be about building connections - connections between worship and ministry, congregation and community, and one to another. We want learn to have better conversations, ones that open ourselves to what God might be saying, that trust that the Spirit is at work wherever two or more are gathered, and that stir the gospel imagination in ways that lead to faithful expressions of witness in the city and world that Jesus so loves. Lastly, we want to more deeply embrace the truth that authentic witness flows out of conversion, that is, lives that are constantly being shaped, challenged and graciously upended by the cross of Christ.

Previously called “The GUM Letter,” we want this publication to reflect these three words and for it to be more regular, helpful, and available to you, our many partners. We welcome your feedback always!

**An e-Newsletter version is launched!**  
**GO GREEN** by requesting an electronic version of this newsletter. Sign up through our website at [www.gum.org/signup](http://www.gum.org/signup) or feel free to contact me directly (see below).

- Craig Wong, Executive Director

The GUM Newsletter 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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### ***Learning by Doing: A Journey of Faith - Jensa Woo***

In recent months, I have gone to meetings of the San Francisco Interfaith Coalition on Immigration (SFICI) which take place monthly in our church building. While the impetus for going was to learn about the current situation regarding immigration, I have a growing awareness of stories about families and individuals whose lives are affected by our country’s immigration policy. Although I have no expertise or training in matters related to immigration, it is nonetheless heartbreaking to read or learn about the harshness or outright cruelty with which undocumented folks are treated.

SFICI is comprised of folks from local congregations of Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish traditions, and also from various agencies ranging from the Irish Immigration Pastoral Center to Nueva Vida Ministries. We have met with and heard from representatives from the mayor’s office and the like, and I have learned about San Francisco’s sanctuary city ordinance, ICE raids, how juveniles under arrest are regarded, and more. I am grateful for those in our group who have had long-standing concern and involvement in these matters and, together, we learn to bear witness to God’s concern for the poor and vulnerable in our midst. Through participation in an interfaith convening held earlier this year, I have become aware of work that also goes on at the regional and national levels. Is there not a place to advocate for laws that are just and reflect the character of God our Maker?

I am learning to lean in and not shy away from listening to stories of our inhumanity toward those who are foreigners in our country. I desire to follow our Lord’s example: God in Christ Jesus leans in towards us who once were aliens to Him. Through the example, too, of folks in our congregation, I learn to pray and long for God’s just reign to come and transform hearts and minds on both sides of the immigration reform debate. I am learning to follow Jesus at the intersection of Eucharist and capital, to show up in person and simply be present, to stand with the vulnerable and powerless, and be identified with the people of God. ✚

*Jensa Woo is an ordained elder of Grace Fellowship Community Church. GUM provides support and leadership to the SFICI as a way to help connect partner congregations to ongoing immigration concerns in our city and nation.*

# Why I Tutor Kids After Work

- Mike Peterson

There are so many different strands to any decision—like looking for a job. You present your education and experience to an employer, and also consider the job's location, and who the manager is. When that all fits together in some kind of agreeable way, you accept it, or if you're like me you take just about everything that anyone offers to you! Regardless, not long ago I was thinking about how I came to the decision to participate in the GEMs after-school tutoring program and realized there were numerous strands.

I wish I could tell you my first and most conspicuous strand was something noble and high-minded. Truthfully, I was between jobs and getting frustrated with how long it was taking people to make up their minds about me. I decided I would stop sitting around staring at the phone and do something. My frustration, together with a GEMs announcement from Jenelle got me moving. So, I talked with Amy and Jenelle (A & J) and said, "I could be employed anytime now, but while I'm waiting, would you be willing to let me help with tutoring?" Their enthusiastic, if not immediate replies were very encouraging to me. They told me that if it was an either/or situation, they'd prefer I was employed, but "yes, come and join us on Tuesdays and Thursdays and if you get employed that's great too."

That fall I was in GEMs twice a week, tutoring, waiting, tutoring, waiting - you get the idea. In my mind I never imagined what God was setting up for me. Does anyone ever get the best of both worlds? Yes, sometimes. From God I did with the job He gave me.

My boss is very cool. She's a human being first, before being a manager. (In fact, while you're reading this, please stop and ask God to bless her!) Where I work they put two contractors in one cube, so very compassionately she allows her contractors to work from home a couple days a week as a way to reduce the strain of that. And I could pick the days I worked from home. I asked A & J if it would be okay to work and keep tutoring on Thursdays. You can already guess their response. Along the way I was talking to my boss and was surprised to learn that she also participates in an after-school program at Fort Mason twice a week...also on the days she works from home.

I tutor 3rd and 4th graders. Some of them are from our church family and some from the community. The easiest thing to do is try to manage their after-school behavior and make my life easy with good crowd-control techniques. The harder and better thing is to look at them and try to see what's going on in their lives. Try to not be one more overbearing voice in their lives telling them what or what not to do. Is it too presumptuous to imagine that "the least of these," this gaggle of eight and nine-year-olds is service to Jesus? If one thing got me into GEMs another thing keeps me there - a chance to serve...another strand.

Do I think I'm making a lasting impression in the lives of these kids? No, but I do think I can contribute to them having a few moments in their day when someone loves them and takes them seriously; not to mention, also tries to have a little fun! I can do that because a well of good stuff has already been poured into me by God's Spirit. Are they real kids who have bad days? Of course, and I too can get short-tempered with their antics. Fortunately, I have some great partners who want the same thing. This shared "wanting" helps me if I'm stressed from work or if I'm almost falling asleep from doing sevens in the multiplication table for the 18th time.

I'm going to tread lightly here. I hope this doesn't sound overly pious, but I also love that this service goes completely under the radar. No one of importance will ever see it and the kids may remember little of it. No one, except the One that really matters. He sees it. This is the strand that keeps me going. †

*Mike Peterson is an ordained elder at Grace Fellowship Community Church.*

*...When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

*Matthew 6:3-4*

# On Being the Church

## Eschatological Spending Habits - Craig Wong

*America's abundance was created not by public sacrifices to the common good, but by the productive genius of free men who pursued their own personal interests and the making of their own private fortunes.*

- Ayn Rand, *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, 1966

*The disciples said, 'Send the crowd away...we have no more than five loaves & two fishes!'...Taking the five loaves & the two fish and looking up to heaven, Jesus gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to set before the people. They all ate and were satisfied.*

- Luke 9:16-17

As parents of four young children, we get to observe the human proclivity for self-serving, immediate gratification on a regular basis. Left to their raw instincts, our little ones ask, "How do I get mine and get it now?" and with ruthless efficiency. Whether it's commandeering the computer, consuming the last slice of pie, or appropriating their "Video game privileges" before doing their homework, the wheels of ingenuity churn in attempt to hoodwink or otherwise manipulate mommy and daddy into giving them what they want. I don't think I want to know how often they succeed.

If our biblical theology is correct, however, such behavior should be of no surprise to the Christian who believes that because of the Fall, our sinful condition commenced at birth. Children inherently begin as morally-deficient creatures who, while initially dependent on their parents, have yet to discover their ultimate dependence on a Creator. Apart from this discovery, one is left to fend for themselves in a ruthlessly competitive world of finite resources. In other words, in a godless world, he who hesitates is lost.

Thus, I've been intrigued lately by the teachings of the late Ayn Rand, the 20th century championess of the free market and vehement polemicist against the welfare state. Her unabashed defense for the pursuit of one's self-interest as the highest human virtue produced best-selling books, and captured the attention the business elites (e.g. Alan Greenspan) of rising post-war global capitalism. Her bold views, however, drew scathing criticism and compelled many to temper their association with her school of thought which, for them, uncomfortably bordered the veneration of greed.

It is difficult to know what Rand would think about CEOs being awarded an aggregate 18.4 billion in bonuses (at taxpayers expense) in the throes of a recession, but one can assume that she would applaud the "productive genius" of those who can amass wealth in the midst of economic chaos. Like eschatologically-misguided evangelicals that justify consuming the world's resources without restraint because "it's all going to burn up in the end anyway," the well-resourced exercise their liberty and prowess to get theirs and get it now. Such supply-side habits go far to explain the post-9/11 rush to seize Persian oil fields, privatize the military, and disguise, bundle, and peddle doomed mortgages to an unsuspecting, international bond market. The house is crumbling. Pity the unfortunate. Take the money and run.

I didn't have to study Ayn Rand, however, to develop opportunistic impulses that reinforce the delusion that I am self-made and self-determined. Although I am in "Christian ministry," I've been confronted recently by my loving wife and pastors who have helped to surface my unhealthy insistence on being the master of my own economy. I want to be in control of my "investment portfolio" and parlay my gifts and resources in ways that end up serving my own ends over that of the congregation...or of my family.

The feeding of the 5,000, therefore, serves as a humbling corrective. The disciples have strong opinions about what they think is the best course of action for the hungry masses, especially given their limited resources. Their vision is small, confined by the need to serve out their own strength. It is when they yield themselves, and their meager resources, in obedience to Christ that they are able to taste, and enter into a Kingdom that shatters the confines of a fallen world. When Jesus stands at the center of ministry, the triumphal hope of the eschaton is made visible now.

As the Obama administration attempts to further deficit-spend (albeit at both ends of the ladder) our way out of economic malaise, it behooves American congregations to embody and proclaim an entirely different reality...a Christ-fed community where no one is in want. This being our vision, the small things suddenly matter: the cooking of meals, the sharing of belongings, tending to the sick, and availing one's gifts, and frailties, to the whole. Spending ourselves in Christ, in each other, and in His world, we can demonstrate to beggar and banker alike that another world is possible.

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)

# Ministry Shaped by 1st Peter

- Margie Chiang

As a congregation, Grace Fellowship Community Church, we have been reading Peter's first epistle, which has challenged how we see our identity as God's Church in our life together, and in our world. According to Apostle Peter, "God's elect, a chosen people, a royal priesthood" is called out of darkness into light to live as exiles in the world to proclaim that "by His great mercy He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading" (vs 1:4). Because Christ suffered for us, and healed us by His wounds, we can follow in His footsteps and enter into the suffering that living for righteousness (and dying to our sin) will produce.

These words have shaped the way I lead, and enter into, our congregation's dental screening ministry at Sanchez Elementary School. As the coordinator, God has graciously given me a place to practice dying to myself and my abilities. I am learning that it is not about running a successful charity program but leading others in ministry that is best understood as a journey of following Jesus' footsteps to the cross. We learn to put our agendas aside and surrender ourselves to whatever He would have for us in our work with the kids, dental partners, and school staff, trusting that He is at work in all those unexpected moments and relationships. I am learning that loving the brothers and sisters who serve at the screening means letting go of trying to create a "positive experience" for them and, instead, invite them to experience God's blessed provision and purposes as they serve...no matter what surprises (or chaos) might arise.

While chatting with a fourth grade boy who was waiting to be screened I asked him if he was at all nervous about seeing the dentist. He said he was OK, and that he had seen a dentist before. I asked when he had last seen the dentist and he replied, "Well, it was last year when you came to Sanchez." While I was grateful that he had good memories from our last visit, I was saddened that he, like so many others, lacked a regular dentist and so probably many other services that I take for granted. Also, although we could identify his dental problems, we were limited in what we could do to alleviate them. And yet, we could heed Jesus' call to love him, walk with him, and suffer with him because Christ has gone before us and suffered on our behalf. As we join in Christ's deep love for these children, we ourselves are broken, humbled, blessed and converted.

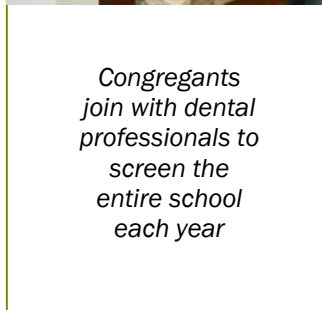
*"After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you" - 1 Peter 5:10*

## Sanchez Dental Screening

# Scrapbook



Coordinator Margie Chiang greets the next classroom of kids at Sanchez Elementary



Congregants join with dental professionals to screen the entire school each year



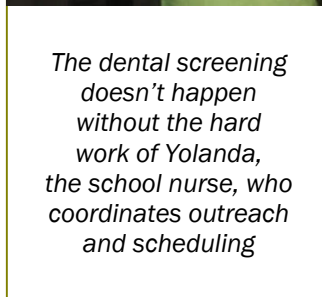
We are joined by partners from the SF Dental Society and the SF Department of Public Health



Congregants lead interactive games about dental care & hygiene in the cafeteria



CARECEN, the Central American Resource Center, Provides a dental team with whom GUM has partnered for several years



The dental screening doesn't happen without the hard work of Yolanda, the school nurse, who coordinates outreach and scheduling

