



God's Place, God's Space

Holy Listening: Message from Bishop
Margaret Payne

Youth Participate in Northeastern
Pennsylvania Synod Assembly

Sea Container Filled with
Supplies for Tanzania

Bosco's Provides Vital Support for Sea
Container Project

It's a Circus Spectacular!

God's Place, God's Space



by Lily R. Wu

(This article is reprinted from the Multicultural Mission Resource Center pages on the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia Web site at www.ltsp.edu/mmrc)

Anyone who lives, works or visits New York City knows that space is a precious commodity. Community organizations, church groups that don't have facilities and programs of all kinds need to ask "Where will we meet (where we can afford the rent)?"

Redeemer Lutheran Church in Queens Village, New York, is a spirit-filled example of how a church is not meant to exist for itself, but for Christ and others, seven days a week. They found ways to use their building for outreach, as opposed to just collecting fees. And this has led to a vibrant, thriving, ongoing ministry with the neighbors of this now predominantly Hindu and Muslim neighborhood.

Outreach = Relationships, Not Rentals

"We don't rent the space," Pastor Peggy Wuertele explains. "We take donations. The people know we need money, and they give. In short, you can sell your space, or you can build relationships, by being present."

At the start of the school year, for example, when parents drop their youngsters off at Redeemer's nursery, Pastor Wuertele is there to greet them. "I'll talk with them about their first day at school," she adds. "They can see we are



church, and that's so important."

The YMCA afterschool program at the church is another opportunity to build relationships. "It's a community, and everybody here is a part of it," she says. "There's no separation between 'church members' and 'non church members.' In Jesus Christ, God crossed every barrier, and we're called to do that too, to experience a glimpse of the kingdom."

With the Alcoholics Anonymous group that meets five nights a week at Redeemer, Pastor Wuertele and church members have sought to be welcoming and respectful. As a result, the group has invited the pastor to say opening prayers at their anniversary celebrations and even lead a Bible study.

Redeemer also offers free legal counseling once a week, as a community service, for clients referred by local politicians. NY1 and Newsday covered the story of the opening of this new program in February 2005.

The church is also the worship site for a local Korean Evangelical Church congregation that was looking for a place to gather.

Word and Sacrament Care

Strong outreach does not mean that Lutheran Word and Sacrament ministry is neglected at Redeemer. In fact, outreach is an expression of that strong faith. As Pastor Wuertele describes it, "Word and Sacrament is the heart and soul of who we are, and what this congregation has been about for 81 years!"

Redeemer is a multi-ethnic church that reflects both the neighborhood's diversity and God's broad definition of family. Members come not only from Christian but also from Hindu, Muslim and Jewish backgrounds; and the largest ethnic group of church membership is Guyanese. Teenagers whose parents are not church members as well as young adults in their 20s are among the worshipers. In fact, 20% of the congregation is 25 years old or younger, and "they are highly active in all aspects of our ministry," their pastor says.

