

# Redeemer Community Partnership Building Better Neighborhoods

South Central Los Angeles

Winter 2009-2010

Dear Friends,

This Fall was a joy-filled, challenging and fruitful season in our ministries!

**“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them.” Mark 10:14**



On December 3<sup>rd</sup>, Adventures Ahead wrapped up another semester of literacy development. At our closing program a roomful of proud parents applauded our students for their accomplishments. Each child received a certificate recognizing a specific achievement, talent or character strength. Each family also received a handbook comparing test results at the 9 elementary schools, 6 middle schools and 7 high schools closest to our center. **Currently, all three of the regular elementary schools serving our community are in probationary status for low student achievement.** So we are working harder than ever to educate families about charters, magnets and other special programs. Our kids desperately need schools that will nurture, not hinder, the curiosity, eagerness and abilities God has given them!

**“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.” John 1:5**

These words popped out in bold font from about 100 gold t-shirts the night of October 31<sup>st</sup>. RCP partnered with Church of the Redeemer and residents of Raymond and Kenwood Avenues to host LIGHT THE NIGHT, our 7<sup>th</sup> Harvest-themed block party. Headcounts are impossible, but at the end of the night we had sold 400 plates of food. Kids posed for pictures on a straw bale pyramid, which later became mulch for the Raymond Ave. community garden. Two neighbors from Kenwood oversaw production of 1000 tostadas. Another young man on Kenwood lined up musical guests, including a Christian rap band. An Adventures Ahead family on Raymond set out to sell snow cones, and ended up giving them away to wide-eyed little princesses and superheroes. A



team of teenage guys from our youth group took turns sitting in the dunk tank. And block club hosts Rich and Ellen offered their home as commercial kitchen, public restroom and mission control center for the evening. **On a night that celebrates darkness, God's love shone brightly through the hospitality of his people.**

On our raffle entry forms 20 people expressed interest in joining Bible studies. Church of the Redeemer has invited these seekers into two individual studies and one small group study in Spanish. Six people asked for information about our block clubs, 10 about tutoring for their children, and 8 about youth group activities. It has been a joy to visit with each of these people and we hope to look back on the night as the starting point for many new friendships.



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**“I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” Matthew 25:40**



Wheelchair users in our neighborhood have a rough go. The sidewalks are full of bumps and gaps and upheavals that make them impossible to roll over. As a result, people have been forced into the streets, wheeling perilously between traffic and parked vehicles. We have seen neighbors endure painful injuries falling out of their chairs, and at times have rescued people whose chairs became stuck. In response, RCP has organized a sidewalk repair campaign. Over the past six months, 30 members of Church of the Redeemer completed a detailed survey of the local sidewalks, collected 300 petition signatures, created a photo essay and began compiling personal narratives from our neighbors who use wheelchairs. The “Take a Walk Campaign” team gathered in November to pray and share stories. Many of them are new to our neighborhood, or just recently moved to a new street. They shared with excitement about new friendships they were building as a result of this project, and ways it has helped them start feeling “at home” on their blocks. **In an early sign of God’s answer to prayer, the City’s Community Redevelopment Agency just made a \$300,000 commitment to begin repairs.**



**“God has chosen to make known...the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Colossians 1:27**

At the end of August, Streetlamp Studio performed their first full-length play titled “Next Door.” Based on real events and experiences in our neighborhood, it told the story of three families living on one South LA block. The five characters come from vastly different life experiences...different generations, races, cultures, educational and economic backgrounds. A series of crises knits their lives together, authentic friendships are born, and each character finds courage to face a particular challenge life has handed them.



One of the cast members was a student leader in our youth group who has faced some tremendous hardship and instability. At this time last year his family’s moves between temporary housing facilities made it almost impossible for him to stay enrolled in school. Jenny, the play’s author, invited Damio’n to come live with her own family and recruited Church of the Redeemer members to drive him to school each day for a period of time. Eventually he settled into a routine and returned to his own home. Over his summer break, Damio’n put in long hours memorizing lines, rehearsing, editing the script and even writing rap lyrics for his character’s journal entries. His performance was stellar in every way, and left him glowing with a well-earned sense of accomplishment.

The play closes with a female character dancing alone in her apartment, celebrating a major breakthrough in her personal life. The music that plays is “Golden” by Jill Scott, and the refrain is “Living my life like its golden.” The lyric captures something deeply true, and often overlooked, about our lives. Whatever our circumstances, the life that God entrusts to us is PRECIOUS and GOOD and full of potential for BLESSING. The characters in Next Door take hold of this truth as they venture across social barriers into each others’ lives. Jenny, Dami’on, Dami’on’s mother, the Streetlamp cast and crew, the Church of the Redeemer youth group and other members of our community are sharing a similar journey together. **For each of you who participate in that journey, through prayer and gifts and service, we pray that God will bring you into 2010 living YOUR life like its golden!**

Merry Christmas!  
Richard Parks, Executive Director