

Redeemer Community Partnership Building Better Neighborhoods

South Central Los Angeles

Winter 2010

FILL...SUBDUE...RULE

By Anna Parks

*God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; **fill** the earth and **subdue** it. **Rule** over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Genesis 1:28*

For many years this mandate struck me as a little overstated. Here was God, settling the first human beings into his completely untainted creation. And his command is for them to SUBDUE and RULE. Such militant words for a young couple walking naked through a garden!

But the day came when Richard and I stood (fully clothed) in the backyard of our first home, surveying the piece of earth we had come to own. In that moment, the words "subdue" and "rule" perfectly described the desire of our hearts. In a neighborhood tainted by lawlessness and neglect we intended to impose a foreign regime on our little patch of dirt. Asphalt was replaced with fruit trees and vegetable gardens. Lead, termites, asbestos and the deadbolts on every bedroom door were removed. The prostitutes using space under our steps were asked to move on. More significantly, we purposed that worship, prayer, reconciliation and mercy would fill every nook and cranny of the space we'd been given charge of. Alongside children, toys and stray Cheerios, of course.

A word that describes this mentality is **occupation**, defined as "taking possession or control of a place, as by military invasion." In the case of our 1906 fixer-upper, making it the home we wanted sometimes felt like a military invasion. It took years of filling, subduing and ruling before it became the welcoming space we hoped for. And I believe that God is pleased to see a small patch of earth being ruled, however imperfectly, with a vision for his kingdom in mind.

Redeemer Community Partnership grew out of an experiment in Christian community that parallels our family's first home purchase. Eighteen years ago, four young college graduates made this community their home and committed to seek its blessing together. Over time, they came to practice a theology of occupation, an urban application of the Genesis mandate: **Fill, Subdue and Rule.**

Like Adam and Eve, this group did steadily increase in number. The local church they helped to plant now has 75 active members living in a two square mile area. Eighteen years of living here gave our founders time to recruit friends and neighbors into their life together. It allowed time for junior high Bible study members to become respected community leaders. So while we don't fill this neighborhood by a long shot, we are now sprinkled liberally throughout it. Eighteen years also gave this group time to develop skills in listening, organizing, advocacy, and mentoring. Strategic community development efforts followed: tutoring, parent education, community-based theater and active neighborhood associations.

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As the sun went down on October 31st, 400 people gathered on Raymond Avenue for the annual Light the Night Block Party. Under bright floodlights, children, dressed as princesses and power rangers, stood in line for carnival games, jumpers, and face painting. Families petted bunnies at the petting zoo. Hungry participants stood in line at the taco truck. Teens chucked baseballs at a target to dunk their peers in a pool of water. Neighbors chatted with one another, as the youth from a local church showcased their musical talent.



In the midst of the festivities, people filled out survey cards that asked about their interest in knowing God, being part of a Bible Study, and reconnecting with a church. Of the 85 participants who filled out surveys, 36 expressed interest in Bible studies, 50 in children and youth programs, and 35 in joining the local neighborhood association!



What a beautiful taste of the kingdom!

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Eighteen years later, we are STILL learning how to rule and subdue our little section of the earth. The creatures have not yet bowed to us...rodents, ants and pitbulls still do as they please. But God has enabled us to restrain the impact of other urban predators: irresponsible liquor store owners, hazardous drivers, prostitution and drug rings, neglectful absentee landlords, bureaucracies that drain resources away from poor communities. Like Adam and Eve in the garden, we occupy the land by being present in it, knowing its contours, institutions and people. We exercise our rule by being vigilant to danger and bringing people together who were divided by language, class and culture. We inform, train, educate, report graffiti, hold meetings, write letters, tutor children, mentor youth, pray and pray some more.

We believe that God loves not just the people of this neighborhood, but the very land it is built on. That God has a specific redemptive purpose for this two square mile patch of his earth. And what greater joy could we find than to watch that plan unfold beneath our feet?

Whatever role **you** play in subduing this piece of earth, we thank God for the partnership he has given us. We are blessed to do our work in the company of many great and generous saints. As you reflect on God's blessings this season, we hope you will find that the love you share with our community brings grace into your own life as well!

“the light
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