

# Redeemer Community Partnership

# UPDATE

South Central Los Angeles

December 2007

## A Time to Keep

Richard Parks, President

The attorney, a former City council member, rose to speak for the defendant. His clients were the owners of an illegal recycling center operating without permits in our neighborhood. He claimed the center generated \$1 million in annual revenues; cash that fueled crime throughout our community.

Gang members circling the recycling center on bikes wait to sell drugs to the addicted patrons. Prostitutes line the street hoping to get some of the recycling cash. Thieves vandalize cars and burglarize homes looking for anything to sell for a few dollars for their next high. Earlier this year, a man had lost his life at the recycling center's doorstep.

Following two years of work to inform and mobilize neighbors, write letters, and testify at numerous public hearings, we had arrived at the owners' final municipal appeal. Now in the face of strong community opposition their attorney was asking for a continuance—a delay.

As I sat listening to the proceedings unfold, I began to pray, "Lord, what would you have me say?" A court experience from several years ago came to mind.

*Two teenagers had entered our backyard, jumped the fence and then broken into our neighbor's house. Frank was at work. His wife Mary had crossed the street to visit briefly with a neighbor. Their 10-year old son was home alone. Under threat of violence the two teens forced Frank and Mary's son to lead them around the house revealing all the family valuables.*

*For the next several months these young men and their friends made several appearances at their house, asking in menacing tones, "What did you see, man? What did you see?" Terrified and fearing for their son's life, Frank and Mary began making plans to sell their home and leave the community.*

*We knew that if we could not rally around our neighbors in the face of this threat, then the day would come when another family, possibly our own, would face the wolves alone. Members of our church and trusted neighbors rallied to Frank and Mary's side. We identified the culprits, found out where they lived, and recovered stolen property from behind the suspect's home. Still the L.A.P.D. Sr. Lead Officer for our area refused to investigate the matter. In fact, he went to the youths' home, told their grandparents what he had heard from the community and asked them to stop by my house to discuss the matter I was incredulous when he*

*continued on back*

## Adventures Ahead

### Fall Semester Update



Looking back on our Fall semester, we have so much to be thankful for. Many of our students this year are significantly behind in school and struggling academically. But where there is great need, God has great provision...

...An incredible 27 volunteer Reading Buddies came weekly to read with one of these students!



We are extremely blessed by these partnerships, and we're looking forward to next year. Thank God for his abundant provision!

*continued from front*

*told me this, knowing that he had probably put my life in danger.*

*When the police still refused to investigate the matter we held a private accountability session in our home with the Sr. Lead Officer and two dozen trusted neighbors. We made it clear that we wanted a search warrant issued and a thorough investigation of the youths' apartment within two weeks or we would escalate the matter. Immediately following the meeting—but two months after the crime—the officer obtained a search warrant and recovered all of the stolen property. The two teenagers were arrested, but the real intimidation was about to begin.*

*The two youths were quickly released from juvenile detention. As we waited for the court date they began walking back and forth in front of Frank and Mary's house, raising a finger to their mouth in the "Shh" sign. It was a clear warning not to go to court and not to testify.*

*Our day in court arrived. Courageously, Frank, Mary and their son steeled themselves to testify. It was a costly decision to face a grave danger not to mention the mental torment and lost wages from losing a day of work. But it was the only way that accountability would be served. We went to court with them. It was important for the family to know that others, particularly their Christian neighbors, would face the danger with them and it was important for the two youths to see that they were not up against one family, but an entire community. The attorney for the two teenagers immediately asked for a continuance. It was to be the first of four continuance requests. Each continuance granted was a painful delay involving more time off work, mental anguish and discouragement.*

*Finally, we appeared in court for the fourth time. The attorney for the defendants again asked for a continuance. This time the judge refused and ordered the youth to enter their pleas. "Guilty" came their responses. The boys' attorney had no argument, no case as long as witnesses from the community testified. The continuance requests were but a cruel, cynical strategy to wear down our resolve.*

Now, I listened as the attorney for the recycling center asked for a continuance. The commissioners clearly were inclined to grant the request. What would be lost in taking the matter up at their next meeting? However, for community members who had taken the day off work to testify, delay was costly.

I told the commission here was another attorney, this time for a rogue business, attempting to wear our community down. Thankfully, the commission came to see it that way too. The commissioners heard the case and rejected the appeal on all accounts. Appeals exhausted, the owners will now sue the city. Our tenacious work will go on.

Businesses like the recycling center have operated with impunity in South LA for years. However, they are increasingly encountering community opposition. Courageous neighbors are bringing much needed accountability and transformation locally and systemically. Men and women of faith are in the vanguard of this effort developing new leadership capacities in the community and forging redemptive friendships among neighbors in the process.

Behind each of these victories lays an invisible army of volunteers, donors, prayers and angels watching over our efforts. You are part of this redeeming partnership and we are so grateful. In this season of Advent as we eagerly anticipate the coming of Christ, please keep our street-corners and our children in your prayers as you contemplate the mystery of Christmas.

*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned...For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Is. 9:2 and 6).*

