

Centeno Ministry Update

January 2009



AMERICAN MISSIONARY FELLOWSHIP

672 Conestoga Road, PO Box 370, Villanova, PA 19085

www.americanmissionary.org



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To our dear friends,
our partners in the faith,

May the fullness of God's amazing grace be yours! As we read that old blessed story of the gospel of our wonderful Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we as believers are greatly encouraged in the faith. We have a story to tell to the nations - right here in Philadelphia! We live among a mosaic of diverse peoples, actively sharing the good news that Jesus is the hope of eternal life.

We cannot thank the Lord enough for all of you who continue to pray for us and financially support us as we minister the word of the Lord in the inner city of Philadelphia for these past 30 years.

The blessed challenges and opportunities of ministry here at Wyoming Ave. Baptist Church continue. Hopefully this newsletter can provide a glimpse into our lives in the city. As always, feel free to write, call, or get involved!



"He will save his people from their sins." reflections on the virgin birth

As we look back at Christmas, we reflect on the miracles surrounding the birth of our Savior. The angel announced that Jesus would save his people from their sin. As we understand it, sin is the greatest enemy of the human race. Yet through the atoning death of Jesus and the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, those who turn to him will be set free from the guilt and slavery of sin, as Romans 6 and 8 speak about.

We also consider the virgin birth. Many would say that there's nothing particularly important about this doctrine, that it may or may not be true, and Muslims deny it directly. But the importance of the virgin birth cannot be over-emphasized. In order for our redeemer to qualify to pay for our sins and bring salvation, he must be one person, fully human and sinless, as well as fully divine, as Hebrews 7:25-26 says. The virgin birth satisfies all three of these requirements.

The only way Jesus could be born a human being was to be born of a woman; the only way that he could be sinless was to be conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:20; Hebrews 4:15). The only way he could be divine was to have God as his father. As a result, his conception was by supernatural, not natural, means. "The holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

So here we have, clearly, Jesus Christ being the only way, the only truth, and the only life, as John 14:6 tells us. Jesus is therefore revealed to us as one divine person with two natures: divine, and sinless human.



In living and suffering as a human, Jesus sympathizes with our weakness (Hebrews 4:15-16). As the divine son of God, he has power to deliver us from sin and the bondage of Satan's power (Acts 26:18, Colossians 2:15). As both divine and human, he qualifies to serve as a sacrifice for sin for every person, and as high priest to intercede for all who come to God (Hebrews 1:9-18, Hebrews 5:1-19, Hebrews 7:24-28, Hebrews 10:4-12).

This is the true Christ of Christmas. And he's not a baby any longer! May the risen Lord bless you as you share this old story that is ever reborn in the hearts of those who trust him. And may those around you experience this wonderful birth in their own lives.

Discipleship Ministry



Men's Fellowship

The Second Mile Men Bible study has slowly gone through some faith-testing times as individuals and as a group – physically, emotionally, and especially spiritually. And even though our numbers have decreased, I am very encouraged for those who have been faithful in going forward and developing character. They are seeing evidence of spiritual growth in their faith and walk with the Lord, even though they are in the midst of a spiritual battle. We praise the Lord that the men had opportunity to go to Whosoever Gospel Mission and spend time putting beds together. Our men's retreat was another blessing when we participated together and heard a challenging word from God through our friend Doug Logan. We're looking forward to two more retreats – men in May, women in June.

Women's Fellowship

(Elsie:) Ladies of Virtue Bible Study is held at our home Tuesday nights from 7 to 9. This year we had ladies from other fellowships such as In the Light Ministries come and share with us. It was exciting to hear what God is doing for them and through them. Then we had some of our own ladies lead the study, they shared on what God was teaching them at that particular time in their life. It has been a blessing to hear such wonderful testimonies of God's redeeming love.

We had about 20 ladies at our retreat in May, called "Healing for Wounded Hearts." Thankfully, AMF was able to help some ladies who couldn't otherwise afford to come. The weekend was a great blessing.

The women have also been active in our ministry, helping with many of the events that take place in the church.





Leadership Training

When we see one of our trainees becoming one of the trainers, we give God the glory. Yes, Jesus is raising up men for himself. Jason Martinez has just taken the prospective leaders group through a CCEF course on anger management (“How to be Good and Angry”), which was good not just for the leaders but for anyone who joined us to sit in. Jason and his wife Ojilvia have been very active in service in the church, and we see others beginning to rise up to serve the Lord in his church. We are all leaders in one way or another, for better or for worse. May we be the kind of leaders that seek the glory and honor of the Lord, building up the church of which Jesus Christ is the head. Let us be servant leaders in building the Kingdom, his body, and for reaching out to the lost.

Family Life

We are constantly involved in the great struggle to build and preserve families. In 2008, we were able to hold two Family Life Seminars in collaboration with The Place of Refuge, an inner-city counseling ministry. These times have helped those who attended to come to a deeper understanding of the matters which affect our families, and how to respond biblically. May God give us wisdom as we look for more opportunities to strengthen families in the city. We thank him for Refuge and other dedicated volunteers who come alongside the church to invest in families. In particular, we are blessed to have Dave and Glenna Deem, a couple from a church on the Main Line, who have made a long-term commitment to counsel and mentor couples at Wyoming Ave. Baptist.

FELLOWSHIP



Community Outreach



FAMILY FALL FESTIVAL 2008

This is the second year we've held our "Halloween-alternative" outside, with the city's permission to close off the entire block. With 1,500 to 2,000 people passing through, we needed the space! Supporters provided food, snacks, games, and loads of candy. The local cancer treatment center provided money for inflatable rides and prizes, and Walmart gave us a great discount on bikes (and two free ones!). We had two evangelism booths, one for kids and one for adults, that were well-visited. Pastor Lou led some games and presented the gospel to the gathered crowd.



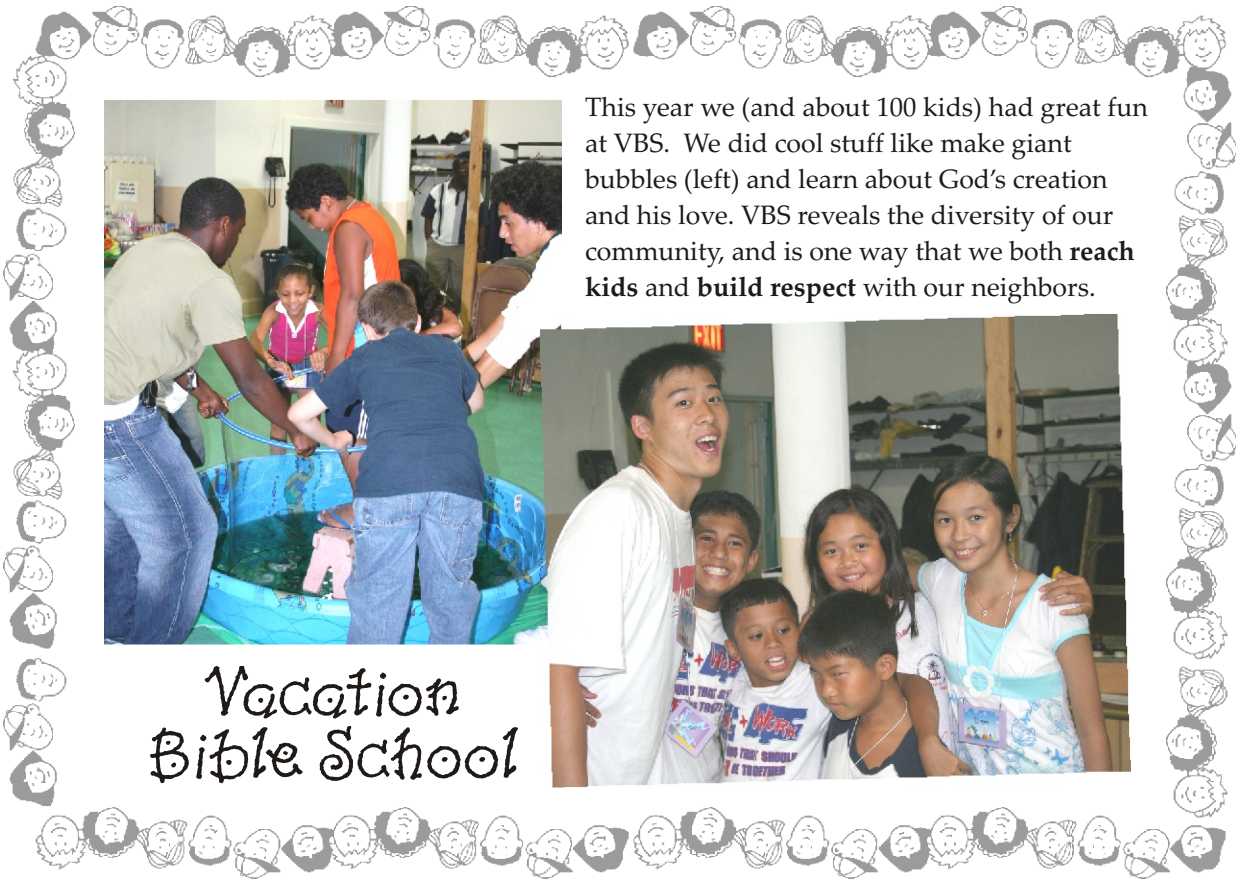
Open Air Meetings – In 2008, we held 6 or 7 evangelistic meetings in the neighborhood. Residents offer us electricity and space, and we bring the good news. We've seen a particular impact among those who have drifted from the church and are brought back by this outreach to the community.



Christmas Toy Sale



Thanks to generous donations, we were able to serve 45 families and 116 children. We were also able to bless other ministries who had seen significant drops in donations because of the economy. Helping parents provide toys for their children out of their own money helps restore dignity to the family.



This year we (and about 100 kids) had great fun at VBS. We did cool stuff like make giant bubbles (left) and learn about God's creation and his love. VBS reveals the diversity of our community, and is one way that we both **reach kids** and **build respect** with our neighbors.



Vacation Bible School

Police Ministry

Each year, we hold a special ceremony to honor and celebrate the men and women who have dedicated their lives to keeping our city safe. During National Police Week, we are able to reach out to 160 officers with recognition and encouragement. This was a huge event for many officers, who were moved that we were willing to embrace and love them. We continue to get response even many months after the event.

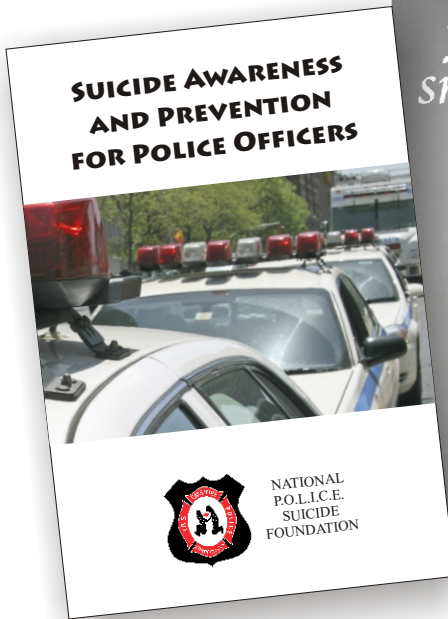


Police officers in Philadelphia face constant danger. Just a week before the ceremony, on May 3, 2008, Sgt. Stephen Liczbinski, an officer in the 24th District, was killed in the line of duty while pursuing fleeing bank robbers. Since then, three more officers have been killed, including Sgt. Liczbinski's former partner, Sgt. Timothy Simpson.



I am also involved with the Spanish American Law Enforcement Association, helping lead a support group for Christians. We were privileged to have officers participate in a worship service at Wyoming, bringing special music and preaching from the Bible.

We put together a booklet for officers that I use in regular training sessions. Simple images and sayings help remind officers to **think** and **act**.



Robert Douglas, executive director of the National P.O.L.I.C.E. Suicide Foundation, and a retired officer, was the speaker at our National Police Week ceremony

My every-Friday roll-call chapel at the police district continues to be a great opportunity to share encouragement, support, and the gospel to these men and women who are just like you and me - but with one difference. They are exposed to a level of evil, violence, and crime in ways that we never fully understand. The deaths of eight officers this past year have certainly been difficult and challenging. Never has there been this type of death among law enforcement in one year. Two of the officers who were killed were from the 24th district, who I knew personally. One was from the 15th district, and I knew him

personally. I had personally known the fiancée of yet another of the officers. These connections provided critical opportunities to provide grief counseling and comfort.

Another way that I serve in the police department is by providing suicide prevention training. One of the sessions that I held at the 24th district was attended by Charles Ramsey, the new police commissioner. He was encouraged and wants us to do it for higher-ranking officers. Pray with us as we continue to work with these men and women in law enforcement.

Ministry Partnerships

We were blessed to have visits from church youth (and adult) groups to help with repairs in our building, with Vacation Bible School, and with reaching out to our community. This was an incredible blessing to our fellowship, and to these brethren as well.

- **Central Wesleyan Church**, Holland, MI
- **Covenant Presbyterian Church**, Doylestown, Pennsylvania
- **Grace Bible Church**, Dunmore, Penna.
- **Chinese Bible Church** of Maryland

We look forward to other groups coming this year to continue the work that Jesus has given us to do. God has allowed these brethren to come and be a blessing to us.

I was glad to see how our partnership with the **Whosoever Gospel Mission** has continued to grow. The mission volunteers its staff to run a weekly after-school club at the church. Their work and service for our children has been an encouragement and a blessing to our church. We were glad to see the many families who took part in the Christmas party here. We are happy not only to be able to support their work with men, but also to have them work here with children.

Another partnership to pray for is **The Place of Refuge**. Elizabeth Hernandez, the executive director, and Diane Langberg, one of the founders of Refuge, have done several

seminars here that we have benefitted from. Refuge is fresh, cool water to the soul and the heart, as people receive balanced counseling from the word of God. This past year, they asked me to be the chairman of Refuge's board. Continue to pray as we partner and as I lead this group, that God would give me wisdom and discernment.

After many years as a general hospital, the property next to our house re-opened as a regional site of the **Cancer Treatment Centers of America**. CTCA integrates spirituality as part of the concept of holistic care, so my services of counseling, gospel witness, and prayer have been most welcome. (They gave me a pager, and I'm often on-call.) I've used my presence at CTCA to encourage their involvement in the community, getting them to contribute to National Police Week, the Family Fall Festival, and the Christmas Toy Sale. I've also arranged meetings between CTCA and local police commanders (below).



Family Updates

This year has been very interesting, with various battles with health – stomach, high blood pressure, clogged tear ducts, allergies, and most recently my battle with kidney stones. Thankfully, all of our children are enjoying good health. They are all busy – with school, careers, and young families.

We as grandparents greatly enjoy our grandchildren, and in seeing their parents raise them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We pray that each of them would grow up to become godly young men and women who would have a passion for the lost in their communities. We pray that the Lord would grant each of them to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might as we look forward to these next years.



*Introducing the youngest members of the extended family: **Bella** (in the carrier, right) with **Charis**, and **Jordan** (with Luis at top). **Brandon** and **Amanda** have a great time making a big splash!*



Ministry Needs and Prayer

For more pictures and information about the ministry, please visit www.wabcp Philly.org

PRAISE THE LORD!

- Praise for the 18 individuals who trusted Jesus as Savior at the Family Fall Festival
- Praise for the many groups that came to partner with us in ministry.
- Praise for the opportunity to lead people to Christ at the cancer center.
- Praise for police officers who have committed their lives to Christ.
- Praise for the open-air meetings and partnership with Children's Safe Harbor (a local children's ministry and choir).
- Praise for David and Glenna Deem to partner in our counseling responsibilities.
- Praise for other church workers that are here in the ministry, working with young people, children, and behind the scenes.

PLEASE PRAY FOR...

- Pray for Elsie and I that the Lord may continue to strengthen us emotionally, physically, and spiritually, and for God's strength against the enemy, who tries to wear us out.
- Pray for the spiritual needs of our children's families as they raise their children.
- Pray for our financial support that has gone down. We need to raise about \$15,000 more per year to meet our family and ministry needs.
- Pray for the growth of the church we serve, in discipleship and evangelism, in prayer and unity, as we minister to the nations here in Philadelphia.

- Pray that God would provide faithful laborers to go into the harvest.
- Pray for the families in our church that are struggling in their relationships, that God may deliver them and strengthen their families and children.

MINISTRY NEEDS

- The **laptop** that I use for police training and presentations is just about dead. We could really use a new one.
- Without a **secretary** it becomes difficult to do a lot of the phone calls and letters that support ministry. We'd love a church to "lend" us a secretary one day a week, or even a committed, skilled volunteer who could work from home.
- This isn't a full list. We'd love a phone call or a note asking how you can help out!

Once again, thank you for your faithfulness to the Lord and your prayers and support for our ministry. May you be encouraged in your walk with the Lord, and may he continue to demonstrate his good grace to you.

In the love of Christ,

Rev. Luis and Elsie Centeno

Contact Information:

Rev. Luis Centeno – (267) 307-6756
Wyoming Ave. Baptist Church
123 E. Wyoming Ave., Phila., PA 19120
Email Elsie at eccenteno@yahoo.com