



Philadelphia
Lutheran
Ministries

Proclaiming Liberty in Christ in the City

NEWSLETTER | CHRISTMAS 2024

Prison Ministry

By Rob Kieselowsky, Executive Director



When we first moved the family into Philadelphia, we joked with our children that we lived next to a castle. It seemed more exciting than saying we lived near an old prison.

The rough-hewn stone walls of this intimidating fortress enclose an entire city block, each of its corners fitted with towers and surrounded by beautifully tended gardens (*right*). Eastern State Penitentiary, a fascinating historical site, ceased to be an active jail in the late 1970s and was almost torn down to build a shopping mall. Instead, it has been preserved to teach the public the history of incarceration in our country.



Eastern State Penitentiary was the only prison in all of eastern Pennsylvania when it opened in 1829, and it sought to reform inmates by placing them in solitary confinement for the length of their stay, typically between three and five years. Standards in U.S. prisons have changed drastically over the years and solitary confinement is now reserved for extreme punishment. At the time, however, the authorities viewed solitary confinement as a means of reform. The cells were built to establish isolation for the incarcerated so that even when they went out for their thirty minutes of exercise, they could not speak to other prisoners (*right*).

Authorities believed that the penitentiary's policy of isolating men would inspire true regret for their actions so they could reform. In other words, they sought repentance.

My relationship to the Philadelphia prison Bible studies dates back to 2002 when Allison and I were first married and living in Philly. When we moved back to the area, I was able to get plugged back in as one of the very few ordained ministers with access to the facility. The city is a transient place, and its prison population often reflect that as prisoners are transferred in and out for hearings, trials, sentencing and appeals. I recently had one man attend a Bible study who recalled my studies back in 2018. He had been sent to a different facility to serve his sentence but was back in Philly for an appeal hearing.

It is such a blessing that after a lengthy COVID hiatus, I have been allowed back into the prison to lead Bible study and prayer meetings. I kept being asked to come in for training with the hope that the prison would open again for visitors. It kept getting pushed off. Finally, in February I was informed that I could resume my visits.

(continued on page 3)



Pastor Kieselowsky Appointed Regional VP of English District

When a vacancy for vice president in the district opened, Pastor Kieselowsky was asked to serve in that capacity for the remainder of the term.

The English District has generously supported the work of PLM for many years, and Pastor was honored to accept the position.

He was officially installed as Regional Vice President in November in Mechanicsburg, PA (*right*).

He was joined by his wife and daughters for the installation service (*below*).



Prison Ministry (*continued from page 1*)

The lengthy pause in my visits made me appreciate the unique opportunity it is to visit and share the hope of Christ. These men may be incarcerated, but they are still very human and desperately need to hear about Christ. They need a connection with His church.

Employees who work in religious services in the jail have to look out for sixteen different religious groups, and they have a great deal of mundane administrative work that needs to be done. They are often short staffed and end up just trying to do their best to keep from dealing with lawsuits. I, however, am completely free to visit the inmates with the glorious good news of Jesus Christ.

To a constantly changing population I have the privilege to proclaim that all of their sin, guilt, and shame has been taken away by the blood of Christ. Being incarcerated, they have time to reflect on their life. I tell them that the Lord has not lost track of them; He has sent his spokesman to announce that the Heavenly Father has only good things for them. It is truly remarkable to see my hearers nod their heads in agreement that being incarcerated is, in fact, God's good will to get their attention. One man actually said to the group that it was indeed the best thing that ever happened to him. The Lord had his attention.

In light of eternity, newfound trust in Christ is the only thing that matters.

Christ says, "Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10). True repentance cannot be brought about by jail designs or government programs but only by the word of God.

Because of your partnership, Christ's word even goes forth in some of the hardest to reach corners of the city.

Thanks be to God!

Vicarage Notes

By Vicar Adam Thiel



Being about a quarter of the way through my vicarage has allowed me to meditate on the role of the vicarage in pastoral formation outside of what the seminary presents to the students and the congregations that support them.

All pastors are unworthy servants of our Lord, and it is essential to recognize that reality. However, if that unworthiness is at the forefront of your mind, it will negatively affect your ministry. Therefore, part of the vicarage is to build confidence in the abilities and education God has provided.

Confidence, not pride.

The Proverbs warn that “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (16:18). Pride makes you your own god and takes your eyes off the true God, our Lord Jesus Christ. It brings you down a path of spiritual destruction, and for a pastor, that could mean taking along many in the congregation. But confidence in your studies and God-given abilities opens the doors to proclaim salvation to a world that will only grow more hostile to the word of the cross (1 Corinthians 1:18).

While confidence in your education is important, the benefits of vicarage for students go beyond the classroom. It offers the opportunity to walk closely in the footsteps of an experienced pastor who is there to guide you. He is not there to make a carbon copy but to make you a pastor in your own right. Vicarage allows the education you have received over the previous two years to be seated in the reality of an actual congregation and the real world rather than in theory.

Despite these things, vicarage is often a big concern when talking to those who consider the ministry. This is mainly because vicarage is the second and third instance

of uprooting your family in the pastoral formation process. Although uprooting is difficult, it is worth it both for the education at the seminary and the experience of vicarage, especially since it is consistent with our Lord’s teaching to those who desire to follow him and are tasked with proclaiming the kingdom of God. Luke records, “He [Jesus] said, ‘Follow me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God’” (9:59–60).

Finally, my vicarage has also made me reflect on how God has prepared me in unique ways for this year. As a pastor’s kid, I am following in the footsteps of not only my supervisor but also my father, who has demonstrated faithful service to our Lord through good times and bad for as long as I can remember. Even when he needed surgery and could not get ready for service without assistance, he faithfully served his flock. I could only follow Aaron’s example and hold up the prophet’s hands (Exodus 17). For some time, I had to hold up my father’s hands physically, but his example will hold up my hands for the entirety of my future ministry. So in a very real way, my current vicarage was a long time in the making and will only serve to make me a better pastor to those with whom our Lord will choose to entrust me.

Social Activities

Vicar Thiel and his wife Jessie have continued planning weekly gatherings for those interested in discussing theology in informal settings. They also shared their collection of board games during a game night (*right*).





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NEWSLETTER | REFORMATION 2024

Preaching the Narrow Way on Broad Street

By Rob Kieselowsky, Executive Director



Broad Street, the longest continuous street in America, is a big deal in Philadelphia. With three lanes running in each direction, it serves as a hub of city life, steering cars, motorcycles, bikes and pedestrians from North Philadelphia around City Hall down to the major sports stadiums.

Our chapel at Logos Lutheran sits on Broad Street, about five blocks from City Hall. During services, we hear the vehicles revving their engines and the voices of pedestrians as they move up and down the street, reminding us of the sea of humanity that tunes out the call of Christ's Word each day.

Broad is the way that leads to ruin.

Jesus warned of the danger of the broad path: "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." (Matt 7:13-14) Those who find themselves on the broad street theologically may choose lanes of disbelief and cynicism or may find themselves in messy religious mixtures that warp the true teaching of Scripture.

A few months ago, an international visitor suggested to me that Jesus is an avatar, just one of many expressions of God. He had embraced a form of worldly wisdom that says humans can find God in many forms of religion, an idea that can easily find its way into everyone's thinking, including ours. I pointed him to the exclusive claims of Christ and a vigorous discussion ensued.

The visitor gave me a hug after attending service. I told him that I pray the Lord will use the visit to grab his attention and draw him to the truth.

Even those in the church, sadly, may walk the same broad path. The Archbishop of Philadelphia of the Roman Catholic Church issued a letter to the Jewish community at Passover wishing them hope, peace and blessings. On the surface, this sounds very neighborly. But it is neither loving nor right for the archbishop to encourage his Jewish neighbors to continue in their darkness as they walk the broad way to ruin.

Christ said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matt 7:21-23) Pastors and bishops should guide people to the narrow gate that leads to life.



A few do indeed find that narrow way. This year, a young man, born in Vietnam to a Buddhist family, sat with me two dozen times for instruction in the Christian faith from scratch. He studied, read the Scriptures, and over time expressed his desire to be baptized at Pentecost (*left*). Thanks be to God!

Continue to pray for our work in Philadelphia on Broad Street that Christ would bring more through the narrow gate into a life of faith.

Meet Vicar Adam Thiel



Adam Thiel, born in Saginaw, MI, has spent most of life living in the northern lower peninsula of Michigan surrounded by forests and rivers.

He married his beautiful bride, Jessica, in August 2018 before they moved to Canton, MI for him to study business at Concordia University (Ann Arbor). While earning a bachelor's in business, Adam also took several theology classes in preparation for possible seminary studies. During this time, he also worked as a project manager for North Point Fisheries Management where he led a crew building new and restoring old trout habitat throughout several branches of the AuSable and Manistee rivers.

He began his theological studies in earnest at Concordia Theological Seminary (Fort Wayne) where his father had graduated thirty years earlier. Through the seminary's placement process, he has been given the honor of being the vicar for Philadelphia Lutheran Ministries.

In his spare time, Adam enjoys working on fine arts and photography, collecting and playing board games, and exploring nature. He and his wife hope to get a good start on learning the German language together during their year in Philly.

Adam is excited to explore Philadelphia, especially its art and history, and to explore a new way of life in the big city. However, he is most looking forward to growing and learning from his time serving the people of St John and Logos Lutheran under Pastor Kieselowsky.

Reading Revelation

By Vicar Adam Thiel

We have begun studying the Book of Revelation at Logos Lutheran, and as we do so, we must remember that this is “the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:1). Those five words keep us from wandering away from what is important: our Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation is not meant to be secret knowledge that we can use to determine when our Lord will return. We can't know; our Lord says in the Gospel of Matthew, “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only” (24:36). Instead, Revelation is meant to be a reassurance that our Lord will return, so we must be prepared at all times for his return. Revelation, therefore, is a book illustrating the hope of the saints both here and in heaven.

Heaven is often thought to be the final destination, yet those saints who have gone before us in the faith know that their hope is still incomplete. The souls of the saints cry out for the final judgment: “They cried out with a loud voice, ‘O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’” (Rev. 6:10) They cry out for the day of judgment because on that day they will be raised from the dead and receive their glorified bodies. Their desire is for “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev.21:1), which will be the dwelling place of God with man (Rev. 21:3), and “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

Our hope as the saints on this side of heaven is to know that the Lord will return, whether to take us to himself or on the day of judgment. Our hope does not preclude trials and tribulations; in fact, our hope and faith make trial and tribulation all but inevitable. If it were easy, our Lord would not have to call his church to repentance in the seven introductions to this letter for churches. Seven represents completeness; this letter is for the whole church. *(continued on next page)*

Life in Philadelphia

When spring arrives in Philadelphia, the Kieselowsky family fills four softball bags with gear for games with both recreational leagues and local public school teams. Last season, two Kieselowsky sisters had the fun experience of playing in the city-wide softball championship (*below*) on a field in the shadows of Citizens Bank Park, home of the Philadelphia Phillies.

Summer brought visits from friends and family, including a highlight when Pastor Jeremy Swem (*below*) brought his family to Philly. Their visit included a tour of Independence Hall (*right*), the Liberty Bell and swamped city sidewalks during a torrential downpour.



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Reading Revelation (*continued from page 2*)

We are all called to be faithful witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ; if it were easy, we would not also be called conquerors for being faithful to death. To be a saint on this side of heaven is to know that the work of Christ continues on earth even through trial and tribulation. And to the faithful witnesses, the conquerors, our Lord gives seven promises to take us to be with him in his kingdom. But until that final hour comes, the church on earth and her mission will remain until Christ returns to claim her.



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Please Pray For . . .

- **The people of Philadelphia**
- **Logos Lutheran** members, leaders, and university students
- **Incarcerated men** in the city who attend Bible Study
- **Vicar Adam Thiel** and his wife
- **Pastor Kieselowsky** and his family



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NEWSLETTER | EASTER 2024

The First Fruit and Sower

By Rob Kieselowsky, Executive Director



“But Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.”
I Cor 15:20

Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed!
Alleluia!

As we celebrate the resurrection in the city, we are mindful that our Lord’s death was for everyone, including for those who would reject him and mock him as he was dying on the cross. It’s God’s very nature to be lavish and indiscriminate with his love. His first miracle at Cana foreshadowed the reality of his death on behalf of everyone. At the wedding, Jesus lavishly gave the most excellent wine to party goers who did not deserve it and could not appreciate it.

In the same way, God generously sends this message of the death and resurrection of our Lord to all people, as he has taught in his parable of the Sower and the seed (Matt 13:1-23). Our Lord is not calculated as he distributes his powerful Word but scatters the seed over rocky, shallow, scorched, thorny landscapes as well as the good soil. He sends the Word out to everyone.

Our Lord’s parable encourages us to keep going and to keep praying. In his ministry, Christ, the Sower of the seed, sent out his word to everyone. In his resurrection, Christ became the first fruit of the harvest.

I’m not convinced that human hearts in the city are all that different than in the countryside or in the suburbs. The forces aligned against God’s Word are the same everywhere. And so as you pray for the work in Philadelphia, pray specifically that the work of the devil would be thwarted. That the Word of God would take root in the hearts of those who hear, and that they would be able to withstand times of testing. And pray that riches and cares and pleasures of life would be seen from God’s perspective and would not choke the Word of God in the hearts of those who hear.

When I visit churches, and I do like to visit churches to look at things from a wider perspective, I like to work through this parable. It reminds us that for God all things are possible and that his Word is mighty and fruitful beyond all measure.

Our Lord will accomplish his purposes, but he has included you in this work. We thank God that you see value in what we are doing in an area that churches have abandoned. We appreciate your support and your prayers.

“As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty” (Matt 13:23).



Kieselowsky sisters help on the family farm (above).

Heights, Depths, Breadth, Width

By Vicar Alexander Ogden

So often in our modern age we are bombarded with thoughts of anything but of the divine. We are constantly torn away from our bridegroom with useless cares and concerns. However, the end of Romans chapter eight



reminds us that nothing can take us away from him. Paul lays out a list of things that cannot take us away from our Savior's pierced hands.

His list is at first glance seems obtuse and difficult to understand, but what Paul is referring to is the demonic, the anti-Christian, and the like. He says that neither death, life, angels, rulers, things present nor things to come, powers, heights, depths, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-9). As a vicar in Philadelphia, there is so much to distract, from the city itself to all it has to offer to the cars driving past my apartment at night. Yet with all the background noise, there is one noise that appears to me in the silence, it is like the still small whisper that Elijah experiences in the cave (I Kings 19:11-13). Elijah is likewise bombarded with a gale-force wind, an earthquake, and a fiery inferno, and yet God is not in any of these events. Instead, God appears in the still, small voice. This voice is the voice of God. And while we Christians may not experience the same series of terrestrial events rocking and shaking our world, we do have Scripture.

And what does Scripture tell us time and time again? It tells us that the Lord is near to the broken hearted, the downtrodden, the crestfallen, the humble and weak. It is in turning to Scripture that I remember when the world's voice sounds like a tornado, when my world is shaking and crumbling around me like an earthquake, when my sinful passions try to burn me down that God is still there with me. In his tender mercy, he whispers to me that he loves me and that this divine love has been made manifest through the life, death, and resurrection of his Son for me.

In this revelation, through and in the Bible, I am reminded that Christ conquered the heights, depths, breadth, and width as he was extended on the cross for all to see. Reminded that the powers and principalities of the evil one were utterly crushed at the foot of the cross. And in my moments of doubt, or fear, or anxious worry, I let go of my sorrowful groaning and know that nothing can separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

For it was love that brought Christ to the cross. And it was in love that he breathed out his last breath that I might have eternal life, salvation, and the forgiveness of my sins. And because of Christ I am not longer regarded as a sheep to be slaughtered, for the sacrificial lamb died for me.

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Christmas at the Prison

Part of PLM's dedication to proclaiming Christ to the city of Philadelphia includes visiting the poor and incarcerated. Christ emphasizes the connection between serving him and serving the sick and those in prison (Matt 25:37-39), and this remains a priority for Pastor Kieselowsky.

In December, the chaplain of the detention center asked Pastor conduct a Christmas service which gave him an opportunity to share the good news of Christ's birth with a group of men.

Since then, the prison has allowed a small number of Bible study leaders back into the facility to hold Bible studies and prayer groups. After a four year covid related stoppage, pastor has been going regularly since the beginning of February. Thanks be to God!

"Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you are also in the body" (Hebrews 13:1-3).



When a couple from Logos Lutheran moved to New York City and no longer would be using their car (above), they graciously donated it to a person in need of transportation. We praise God for the kindness demonstrated regularly by the members of the congregation as they live and work in Philadelphia.



Christmas in the city (above) included a cookie-making party at the Kieselowsky home.



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