

Centeno Ministry Update

*Prepare Ye,
for the Way of
the Lord*



American Missionary Fellowship

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

www.americanmissionary.org

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To all of you who are called by His name, and are faithful unto the calling of service and blessing and prayers that you have engaged in your walk with Him – wishing you and yours the best Merry Christmas and the blessings of a new year in 2008.

Jesus, and the sacrifice He would make, is God's greatest love gift to humanity. "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). The reality of the heavenly Father sending Jesus Christ at just the right time has made all the difference in the world and the universe. As Paul tells us in Galatians 4:4-7,



*But when the time had fully come,
God sent his Son, born of a woman, born
under law, to redeem those under law, that
we might receive the full rights of sons.
Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of
his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls
out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a
slave, but a son; and since you are a son,
God has made you also an heir.*

Oh, this blessed truth cannot be kept from mankind, and we trust and pray that you are busy letting others know about Him who is eternal, and has come as he said he would, to save us (John 3:16, Acts 4:12). What an awesome reminder through this Christmas season, that He who is deity, Christ, would be our "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power" (Colossians 2:9). Hallelujah! What a Savior!



The men's fellowship at the church has grown significantly – not particularly in number, but rather in maturity and commitment. This is a picture from our first men's retreat.



An open-air meeting at our local recreation center.



Our daughter Kristie and our grandchildren at the Family Fall Festival.



We had about 100 kids at this year's Vacation Bible School, where kids learned that "God is Strong!"

You may have wondered and thought that I was missing in action, as I have not written for a while. No, I was over my head in ministry! My faith, and my family's, has been tried and tested these past four years. I did not know if we would make it through alive (figuratively speaking). I am here to tell you that God is faithful to his Word and to the ministry He has privileged us to do and has entrusted us with. By his grace and mercy, He has surely strengthened us. We are giving all the praise to Him, for He has blessed us with physical, spiritual, and emotional strength. Who ever said that making fruitful, faithful followers of Jesus Christ was going to be easy or cheap? Yet that is the command of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that we make disciples. That is what we are busy about in the ministry.

The ministry to our church and community and the city is a never-ending challenge – until Jesus comes again and makes all things new, that is. Hallelujah, what a Savior! The transition of methods and philosophy in our church still demands a lot of energy, but praise God who is in control. He continues to help us make the adjustments with the older members and the new as well.

The various outreach ministries that we have towards our community demand a lot, as you can well imagine. We are excited as we are continually moving in the ways in which God will use us as we make ourselves obediently available to him. Earning the right to be heard and to speak into people's lives is not always easy. But we have many open doors.



Our 2007 "Family Fall Festival" was a huge success – the key word being huge! We got the city's permission to block off the main street in front of the church, and filled it with games, a band, candy, and about 1,500 people!

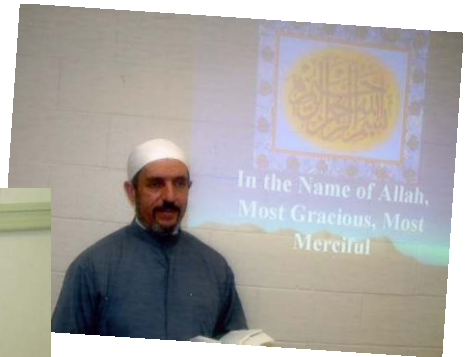
Open air meetings allow us to meet with the unsaved and the wandering in our community. Our regular food distribution and special baskets at Thanksgiving and Christmas, in which many of you have participated, allow us to witness to our neighbors the goodness of the Lord. We serve about 50 families a month through our food cupboard. This past year's "Family Fall Festival" gave us the opportunity to witness to about 1,500 children and parents.

There are so many other blessings – our Holy Week and Christmas dramas, our men's and women's support groups, the Christmas toy ministry, one-on-one discipleship, counseling and chaplaincy with police officers, building

and maintaining relationships with Muslims, partnering with distant churches who come to minister with us. We partner with the Whosoever Gospel Mission for a weekly after-school program, and are considering a partnership with Children's Safe Harbor for a music and discipleship program. I also minister to patients in the cancer center that is right next door to my home – bringing hope and the gospel to many who seem to have no hope. And this is just a small list of the ongoing ministry that keeps us busy!

With so much opportunity, and so few "workers for the harvest," we continue to pray that God would raise up servant leaders among

We continue to build relationships with Muslims in our community. This is Sultan, a local store owner and a friend of the church, with his parents who were visiting. Praise God for the ability to openly build friendships.



I had the opportunity to present the Muslim point of view (fully in character) at a church missions conference. It was amazing to see how people responded to me.



his people here. We are beginning to train a next generation of leaders through a prospective leadership course, studying Warren Wiersbe's book, "On Being a Servant of God." We are actively employing members in ministry to one another, visiting in homes, praying together. All this is by the grace of God, for we can do nothing apart from Him. We praise God that you have taken a vested interest through your prayers, and some of you have partnered with us by visiting and working with us as we reach out to our community. We thank God who has made all this possible.



Our son Jamie and his wife Virgy, who have planted a church in our old North Phila. neighborhood.

Let me share a little about the home front. Elsie and I have had our physical concerns, things that we are continually going to the doctors about – nothing major at this point in time, but we continue to seek your prayers as we are challenged from time to time.

Here are quick updates on our children:

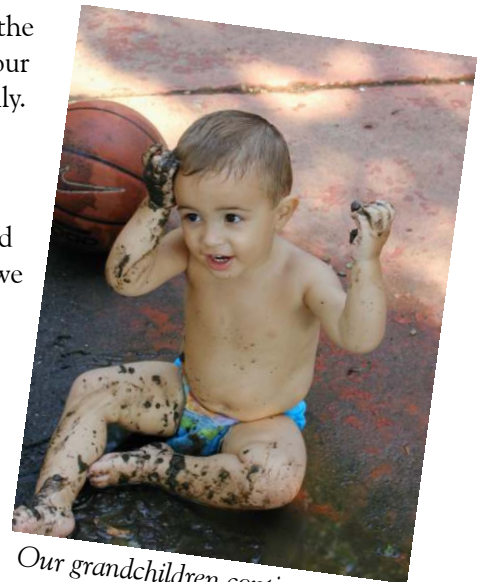
- ☞ Our oldest child, Jason, and his lovely wife and grandchild continue to do well. Jason has become a successful fireman and budding philanthropist. He is visiting Bethel Fellowship in N.E. Philly.
- ☞ Jeremy, who moved down to Florida, continues educating young inner-city kids there. We ask your continued prayers for his walk with the Lord.
- ☞ Jamie and his wife Virgy have planted a church in our old North Philadelphia neighborhood where he grew up. They are presenting the gospel, and building a team to reach that community.
- ☞ Kristie and Bill continue to be passionate about ministering and encouraging discipleship. They are soon to add a fifth child to their family.
- ☞ Jonathan is working at a program called “Aspira,” training and mentoring youth.
- ☞ Josiah, our youngest boy, and Marlena are about to add another baby to the family. Josiah is very involved with Jamie in his church plant.

- ☞ Kara is in college, and continues to work hard in her studies. We enjoyed having her return for the holidays.

In addition, we have the added blessings of our adopted children, Andy, Brandon, and Amanda. They are attending Community Academy of Philadelphia and are doing well in their studies. Elsie did try to home-school them for a year, but she almost went crazy! Community Academy is not a Christian school, and they can see the difference, but it is a good school – no nonsense and respected in the city.

We also have two new puppies. Our pit bull Storm had a litter of nine. She lost five, but we were able to nurse the other four back to health. Two of those have found good homes elsewhere – and two are here to stay.

Well that's the update on our “little” family. May God continue to give us strength and wisdom as we minister to our children.



Our grandchildren continue to be a great joy – even if a little messy!

Philadelphia has experienced the trauma of a wave of violence and death that has left everyone scarred. Police officers and children, lives taken for the most petty of reasons. As we honored police officers at a national police week ceremony, we remembered one who had fallen...



Officer Skerski died just around the corner from my house. But his wasn't the only death that hit "close to home." We buried my nephew Manny, as well as Omar, a young man who had been involved with the church. Please pray that the hope of the gospel – LIFE – would replace the culture of death in our city.

Please Pray...

- For our family finances, which are not where they should be, especially support-wise.
- For emotional, spiritual, and physical health for me and Elsie to be able to meet the demands of ministry.
- For our children and their spiritual walks with the Lord.
- For the biblical balance we need as a family in ministry – and the same for our children's families who are involved in ministry.
- For the wisdom I need to be the kind of husband, father, pastor, missionary, and community leader that would bring glory and honor to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
- For all of the outreach ministries mentioned above, that we would, by His grace, see the fruitful saving of the lost in our community.
- For church and ministry finances, which are in great need.
- For our present and future leaders in the life of our church community.

Thank you again my faithful friends in the Lord. May you continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus. May His anointing and blessing be present with you throughout this New Year. May all that pertains to godliness be yours in full measure as you continue to experience the favor of the Lord. May His joy be your full strength every day.

Your brother and sister in Christ,

Luis and Elsie Centeno

SEE MORE!

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

SEE MORE!

Contact Information:

Rev. Luis Centeno
Wyoming Ave. Baptist Church
123 E. Wyoming Ave., Phila., PA 19120

Church: (215) 329-8295
Home: (215) 533-1299
Cell: (267) 307-6756