



Prince of Peace
Plymouth Meeting
August 8, 2010



University Lutheran
West Philadelphia
August 15, 2010



Bethany
Roxborough
August 22, 2010



St. John
Morrisville
September 12, 2010



Holy Trinity
Abington
September 19, 2010



Old Zion
Philadelphia
October 10, 2010



Atonement
Fishtown
October 17, 2010



Good Shepherd
King of Prussia
Reformation
Sunday, 2010



Trinity, Germantown
November 14, 2010



St. Mark
Conshohocken
November 21, 2010

Zion, Flourtown
January 9, 2011
Cold and gusty
NO PHOTO

Faith, Woodhaven Road
June 26, 2011
Wrong worship time
posted on web.
NO PHOTO



Christ
Philadelphia
November 28, 2010



St. John
Melrose Park
December 19, 2010



St. Timothy
Fox Chase
January 16, 2011



Zion, Olney
February 20, 2011



Grace, Norristown
March 13, 2011



Grace, Drexel Hill
March 20, 2011



St. Peter, West Oak Lane
April 17, 2011



Prince of Peace, Lawncrest
May 8, 2011



Grace, Mantua
June 19, 2011



Immanuel, Burholme
July 24, 2011



St. John's, Folcroft
July 31, 2011



Evangelical Lutheran Church
at Hartwick Seminary, New York
August 14, 2011



liberti presbyterian, Fairmount
May 15, 2011

Holy Communion
Philadelphia
August 14, 2011
NO PHOTO

Vacation schedules inspired the Ambassadors to break into groups. One group visited this Center City Church. Sitting in front of them was none other than the bishop. Could have made for a very interesting passing of the peace!

On invitation, we made our first non-Lutheran Ambassador trip. This new congregation had some 200 young people between the ages of 25 and 35 and a group of children, all under 8. Their ministry plan was very much like the plan Redeemer was following with success. While Lutherans are locking East Falls Christians out of the church, this group is sponsoring two house churches in our backyard.

Report of the Redeemer Ambassadors August 16, 2011

More than one year of Church Visits!

Redeemer Ambassadors

(A Project of the Church without a Home)

On Sunday morning, September 27, 2009, SEPA Synod changed the locks of Redeemer Lutheran Church, evicting the congregation and all community groups using the property, including four AA meetings and a Day Care Center scheduled to open in October. They told the court and the community they would reopen the church in six months, but 23 months later the doors remain locked to all. Nevertheless, Redeemer's ministry continues. As we teach our children: The church is not a building; it is the people.

Redeemer members, left with no church home, absentee trustees, no invitations from other churches and very few offers of help, began meeting weekly in member homes. Come summer, a secular community group helped Redeemer raise funds and offered rent-free worship space once a month. After our first public worship in ten months, a member commented, "I just don't understand why they [SEPA] want a church without us in it." That sparked an idea. "Let's ask!" We determined to end the isolation imposed on us and began visiting other Lutheran churches.

We set guidelines before our first visit. We go to worship, learn and share. We talk about ourselves only if asked. Before our first visit, on impulse (Spirit?), we drafted a letter to place in the offering plate. We could tell our story without being intrusive and churches could do as they wish with the information.

We follow no particular plan. We choose a church at random the day before our visit. We read newsletters online and look up TREND reports. That is all we know when we walk through their doors.

Each week is a new adventure. Without exception, our visits have been pleasant and illuminating.

We began to learn a lot about our brothers and sisters, but admit there is much more we could learn. We've condensed our findings here. They are not scientific. They represent only one morning in a church's life. Some were visited in summer and some on church holidays which undoubtedly skews statistics—but then Redeemer was declared closed, with no worship visits, no discussion about closing, and abandoned by SEPA leadership.

We have found that there are many churches with statistics very similar to Redeemer's. We cannot help but wonder—Are they, too, in danger of being bullied into closing? We propose that if this is to be a continuing mission strategy for SEPA Lutherans that they conduct a thorough study of what happens to the members of churches when their congregations are bullied into closure. We do not think it advances any Godly cause. It erodes the foundation of mission and ministry and is devastating to individuals and communities.

Here is a sampling of our observations. (*More detailed Redeemer Ambassador Reports will soon be on the web.*)



EASTER UPDATE: For the second year, Redeemer members gathered on the sidewalk in front of the locked church for worship on Easter morning. We were 11 in number, three more than last year and once again we attracted two visitors. (Not all are pictured.) People passing by waved in greeting. One woman, on her way to another church, crossed the street and told us she was so glad to see we were "open" and asked to join us. We gave flowers to our visitors and well-wishers and left more flowers on the steps. A neighbor reported to us that she stopped on Monday, planning to plant them, and they were already in the ground. We are glad of that. After worship we shared breakfast together at a member's home nearby.

- + Lutheran sanctuaries are beautiful. Six of the congregations we visited were not using their sanctuaries.
- + More than half of the churches we visited have no parking lot. Bishop Burkat told Redeemer, “Churches without parking lots have no chance of survival.” Four of the churches we visited with the largest attendance had no parking lot. The church with the lowest attendance had a beautiful lot. Ours was the only car parked in it!
- + We have encountered only six worship services with more than 50 in attendance. One of them was calling a pastor that morning and its sanctuary was filled. Another had 70 including the families of five children being baptized and our four ambassadors. Two had just over 50. Of the rest, 3 had about 40 and all the rest had under 30 in attendance, some well under. Some had more than one service. So did Redeemer.
- + Despite boasts of Synod diversity, most of the churches we visited have been fairly homogenous. Only two congregations had racial diversity similar to Redeemer. One other was bi-lingual. Redeemer is multi-lingual.
- + A surprising number of the churches we visit are or recently have been under some form of Synod-monitored leadership (mission developer, interim, or bridge.) Two, like Redeemer, relied entirely on lay leadership for worship and both did well.
- + Overall, there are very few children attending worship, some had none—yet day schools are a favorite ministry. Almost all dismiss children before the sermon. Teens and young adults are rare, although we witnessed one nice confirmation ceremony. We have taken part in seven baptisms. Many of the congregations have many seniors. Redeemer is the opposite with many children and young adults and few seniors. Children at Redeemer are an active part of the entire worship experience.
- + Less than a third had choirs. We heard our first children’s choir at our 20th visit. As for hymnals, most used the LBW and With One Voice. One used the CSBH. A few use the ELW. Only one used a liturgy from the ELW. Many are printing everything in the bulletins and not requiring worshipers to open a hymnal. We found this to be the most welcoming. (Redeemer regularly referenced eight English hymnals and two Swahili hymnals, so it was a necessity for us.)
- + Most churches are not using technology to full potential. Most websites are static and often dated. Only one asked for email info in their guest book. Three that we visited had not posted a change in worship time on their web site and so we missed part or all of the services.
- + Sunday fellowship varies greatly. Some have none, some have coffee and treats, some serve meals, and one congregation used fellowship time as a fundraiser.
- + Four had altar calls for laying on of healing hands.
- + One church recited its mission statement as part of the liturgy.
- + Most were not planning to offer a Summer VBS. According to TREND reports, about 36 ELCA congregations within 15 miles of Redeemer have no VBS. Redeemer had a multi-week summer program. This prompted us to start a program (vbsaid.com)
- + It seems the larger the congregation the less likely it is to have anyone greet us more than to say hello or welcome. Only about a third asked any questions. Pastors rarely asked more than our names. Some pastors made no attempt to greet us as visitors.
- + One congregation responded to the letter we placed in the offering plate and invited us to come back and speak to them. Another asked us to send the information in larger print. One forwarded the information to the bishop. Others commented when we returned. (We have made several return visits.)
- + Of those that inquired about Redeemer, most seemed to be unaware of the aggressive legal tactics used by Synod against lay members. Some responded to us with empathy, but characteristically added “We just want to stay off their radar.” The most frequent, almost universal, answer to the question why they supported the taking of Redeemer’s property is “We didn’t know.”
- + Members from two congregations attended our fundraisers.
- + We witnessed the dedication of many lay people, who are working hard at ministry. We offered help and are involved in spearheading several programs.

We plan to continue our Ambassadors Program and perhaps we can recruit some ambassadors from other congregations to visit churches and learn the challenges facing the Church as a whole. We envision a group that can visit with just one question: “How can we help?” and see what happens. We are creating a web forum for all churches, but especially small churches, to share challenges and ideas for ministry and to ask for help. Clergy and lay Christians are invited to be part of the dialog.

2x2virtualchurch.com

Redeemer is not closed; we are locked out of God’s House by SEPA Synod.