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An Assessment of Our Neighborhood

By Kate Nicely

Students, faculty, church leaders and North Philadelphia residents gathered Wednesday, May 7 to discuss the findings of a neighborhood assessment that may help Berean Presbyterian Church create new ministries.

Dr. Timothy Peterson, Professor of Urban Studies at Messiah College Philadelphia Campus, and students in his course Urban-Eco Footprints collected publicly accessible data on North Philadelphia, the neighborhood surrounding the church and MCPC, and presented it at the church. The data included information about the economic, social and structural characteristics of the neighborhood.

"This will be an instrument to use to motivate this congregation to get involved," said Pastor Michael Evans, pastor of Berean. "I know (the information) because I've seen it. Now they know it in raw facts. Now we can truly know it and do something about it."

Church members responded loudly to a map that displayed the percentages of males and females without a high school diploma. In the four closest zip codes, an average 48 percent of people 25 years and older have less than a 12th grade education. This compares to almost 30 percent for the entire city. These statistics encouraged some people to move forward with plans to start a tutoring program.

"We need to let young people know they can get some help," one church member said to the crowd. "There's a new outlook that could happen when you start talking to them about where we come from."

Data described as material capital also



Dr. Peterson in Action. Photograph by Debi Peterson.

made an impact on the crowd. The percentage of occupied housing units in the local zip codes is lower than the Philadelphia average. The number of vacant housing units is significantly higher. Owner-occupied housing units are significantly lower while renter-occupied housing units are higher. Local residents spend more than half their income on mortgages.

"The material fabric of our neighborhood has changed and it will continue to change," Dr. Peterson said. "The question is, how do we change it to reflect God's shalom?"

The data on household configurations showed that few children live in the North Philadelphia neighborhood. About 33 percent of local households have a child.

"We have fewer families living close to us," Dr. Peterson explained. "This may help us understand our Sunday school program. It means that it's not us doing something wrong, it's that the demographics have changed."

When discussing action strategies, many agreed that a stronger relationship must be formed with Temple

A Reflection on the Semester through a Justice Perspective

By Douglas Yeisley

I have lived near Philadelphia my whole life, but I have never lived within city limits until my time at MCPC. I suppose my experience is similar to that of many other Pennsylvania residents: I might have known Philadelphia, but I never truly understood Philadelphia.

What probably struck me the most was the poverty of the city. Whenever I popped in for a quick visit, it was mainly in the affluent Center City area. It is not that I am a stranger to poverty, or even inner city poverty, but I never realized the extent to which it was in my own backyard. I could see for my own eyes the results of structural racism such as redlining. A socioeconomic map of the city today is practically the same map that was used to determine federal loan allocations. It transformed from some vague injustice I studied in a classroom setting to an entity that continues to plague real people and real families.

On my way to my internship in Manayunk, I would pass through areas that by our standards are simply destitute. As the only "outsider" on the bus, I sat with mothers, grandmothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters who were going from one minimum wage job to another just to support their loved ones. After Philadelphia, nothing is an abstract concept. Like the commercial on the Discovery channel, it is the human element.

Perhaps the biggest shock for me was the lack of food for inner city residents. Isolated from quality grocery stores, these fellow humans had no access to proper nutrition. We preach equality in the United States; in fact, it is written into our most precious documents. And

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Community

Assessment

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University. Dr. Peterson called out the importance of activating neighbors and described Temple as a neighbor.

Pastor Evans agreed. "I believe Temple University has to be called to task gently," he said. "I had breakfast with Mayor (Michael) Nutter this morning and he is on the same page. We need to be more connected. I think the church can be the bridge that brings the community and the university together."

Dr. Peterson ended his presentation by stressing the importance of relationships.

"This research really is a reflection of our relationship with you," Dr. Peterson said. "What kinds of relationships are you going to embellish that are healthy and good?"

Talented: A Poem on the MCPC Talent Show

By Diana Ecker

It began with fifteen minutes of fame.
One fish, two fish, red fish, blue fish, got it?
A runner too tired to rap, gave the audience a song to overlap
Other songs, in other languages.
Yo ho, yo ho a Pirate's life is fine for some,
While others prefer picking paper flowers,
And hopefully not coughing up green phlegm.
Or going to rehab.
So bye, bye Dr. P and N. Ry.
The talent show was nice, we didn't even cry.



A loving shout-out to embattled pop star Amy Winehouse by none other than Mel McKrell and Dr. Peterson. Photograph by Debi Peterson



The Flyers are still in the hunt for the Stanley Cup. Image Courtesy of Google Images.

Philadelphia Sports Recap: the Flyers, 76ers, the Phillies, and the Eagles

By Douglas Yeisley

For those of us migrating from Philadelphia to other parts of the globe at the semester's end, this is our last chance to experience Philly sports culture. My suggestion:

soak it all in; bask in its petulant glory. Where to start, you ask? Look no further than the Philadelphia Flyers. Last season, the Flyers were one of the worst teams in the National Hockey League. This year, thanks to some inspired play and a generous heaping of good fortune, the Flyers not only made the playoffs, they managed to advance to the Eastern Conference Finals. This meant beating the Washington Capitals and Montreal Canadiens, both heavily favored teams. Basically, this is Philadelphia's version of 1980's "Miracle on Ice." Who would have thought that the lowly Flyers could be a mere four games away from playing for the Stanley Cup (the NHL's championship)?

The Eastern Conference Finals begin Friday, May 9th, and feature a clash between the Flyers and in-state rivals the Pittsburgh Penguins. Admittedly, the Penguins have more star power as evidenced by the fact that at midseason, I could probably name just as many Penguins players as Flyers. However, the Flyers have proven that they thrive in the underdog role.

So begins our civil war on ice; the battle for statewide dominance. If the primary did not prove divisive enough, this is the physical manifestation of any Pittsburgh and Philadelphia resentment. I will be rooting for the Flyers, of course. I

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Culture



Photograph by Douglas Yeisley

Farmer's Markets and Urban Farming: Local Answers to Rising Food Costs

By Douglas Yeisley

The repercussions of rising fuel prices have been felt in almost every sector of commerce. Machines to produce goods are costlier to run. It is no longer affordable to transport goods by truck, as evidenced by the amount of truckers going bankrupt. Consequently, prices for goods have been also skyrocketing, with the most disturbing example being food costs. Worldwide, we are seeing what amounts to be a food crisis with costs jumping up 50%. Nationally, costs have not reached that level; however, the pain can still be felt here, especially by the poorer sectors. A few bulk food stores like Sam's Club have even resorted to placing limits on rice purchases and the number of people on food stamps has reached an all-time high.

What can be done about it? In the United States, since a good portion of the rising costs of food has to do with transportation, the answer is locally grown foods. Not only does it make food cheaper by eliminating the need for transcontinental transportation, it benefits small, locally owned farms and the environment by reducing the carbon footprint of each piece of produce.

Locally grown produce

Restaurant Review: Su Xing House

By Emily Yoder

You've probably walked by it a hundred times without noticing. Hidden away amidst the bright awnings of narrow Sansom Street, Su Xing House can be easy to miss. However, with its rich, memorably seasoned vegetarian Chinese fare at staggeringly low prices for Center City, it's time to take notice of this hidden gem.

Ignore the off-putting décor of golden table tops and colored Christmas lights. You may feel that you're in the duck-chopping Christmas dinner scene of "A Christmas Story," but you won't be getting any General Tso's Chicken that's mostly breading, or overly salty, MSG-ridden mystery meat.

The appetizers offer tasty teasers to the gigantic dinner portions. The dumplings, overstuffed with a savory, well-balanced combination of garlic, cabbage and tofu, can be somewhat sticky. I recommend the delicate, subtle scallion pancakes. Fluffy, not greasy, they provide a substantial complement to any vegetable meal.

Su Xing House has found a perfect tofu preparation method. In both the tofu in black bean sauce, and sesame tofu, the tofu was perfectly crunchy on the outside,

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Continued on Page 4 Image Courtesy of www.suxinghouse.com

Justice

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yet, it can seem far and between. Nevertheless, I envision urban gardens stretching from Center City all the way up through North Philadelphia. Can it be done? I think so.

The picture is not entirely bleak, though. There is always hope that someday the switch will be turned and our nation will work towards the common good. However, until then, there is much to be done on the local level. This is the biggest lesson Philadelphia taught me. Instead of griping about international justice issues, we have much work to do right here and right now. There are plenty of opportunities: church ministries, urban gardens, non-profit organizations, and tutoring, just to name a few. If we patch things back together neighborhood by neighborhood, the task at hand does not seem quite so daunting.

As I write this, I know that it sounds idealistic. Injustice runs deep, but it needs to be rooted out. Just look at the example of Christ and the apostles, laboring for the good of the needy. The experiences I had with the children of the neighborhood, such as throwing dirt clods in the Uber Street garden and a bike race on Diamond Street makes me want to try even harder. It just takes some work on the local level. You just need a pair of heavy gloves and a shovel.

Urban Living

Sports

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did dress up as a Flyers player for Halloween one year, after all. Nevertheless, I harbor no resentment for my brethren on the other side of the Susquehanna. Well, I won't after this series is over, I promise.

The Flyers might be grabbing all of the headlines, but Philly still has three other sports teams. Currently, the Philadelphia Phillies is the only team playing, and their season is still in its infancy. On paper, it seems like the Phillies should be struggling. Slugger Ryan Howard has been mired in an awful, well-publicized batting slump. Reigning National League MVP Jimmy Rollins has been injured thus far, and is only returning now. Despite all this, the Phillies somehow put together their first winning April in a long time. Famous for their slow starts, the Phillies are actually in the running for the division lead. One can only be optimistic that as Rollins recovers from injuries and Howard and certain members of the pitching staff start doing what they are paid to do, this season can be as magical as the last.

Our basketball team, the Philadelphia 76ers, just began their offseason after being eliminated in the first round of the NBA playoffs. Normally, I would be at least somewhat upset about such a thing, but the fact that 76ers even made the playoffs was exciting enough. On top of that, they won two games against a much better, battle tested Detroit Pistons team. This summer, the Sixers have a first round draft pick and \$11 million to spend on acquiring a much needed power forward through free agency to bolster a young team that has already shown promise. Again, things are looking up.

Finally, the Eagles just participated in the NFL draft, but that is being overshadowed by the so-called cornerback-gate. In short form, the Eagles signed a premier cornerback, but did not trade their current pro-bowl cornerback. Only time will tell how this will boil over. On the plus side, the Eagles do not have to face any major injuries to their primary players. So, are things looking up for the Eagles? I do not know, but in the spirit of optimism, then yes.



Photograph by Lacey Ward

Gardening

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is clearly necessary to maintain food production. Getting access to this food is not as hard as it would seem. Philadelphia is a city of farmer's markets, with such markets as Second Street Farmers' Market, Clark Park Farmers'

Market, the Italian Market, Reading Terminal Market, and so on. Each place purveys fresh and unique produce that is extremely affordable, especially compared to the going rates of food. Farmers' Markets are not limited to big cities anymore, either. Small towns, such as my hometown Easton, can boast well-stocked farmers' markets. As more people purchase their groceries from such venues, more people will farm locally, which will help drive down prices even more.

The poorest individuals, though, still do not have access to these markets. The key to reaching them is the use of urban gardens and farms. Philadelphia is full of empty lots that are just begging to be planted, and with little initial cost, can be turned into viable food production locations. Inner city nutrition is woefully lacking in fresh produce and the nutrients that come from it, but urban gardening can address this cheaply and sustainably.

Urban gardening is necessary in wealthier areas, too. It brings together communities, and has the same environmental benefits of local farming. The more food that is present in the overall market, the cheaper food prices will be across the board. On top of that, fresh fruits and vegetables are simply more delicious than tomatoes picked in California and shipped thousands of miles. So, get gardening! I can say without exaggeration that our future depends on it.

Restaurant

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If you would like to visit the Su Xing House:
(215)564-1419
1508 Sansom St.
www.suxinghouse.com

Hours:

Mon.-Thurs.: 11:00 am - 10:30 am.

Fri. & Sat.: 11:00 am - 11:00 am.

Sunday: 12:00 am - 10:00 pm.

but soft on the inside. The sesame tofu, on a bed of fresh, crispy broccoli, was a stand-out. The Singapore Noodles arrived in a hearty portion, with a variety of fresh vegetables and a slight spicy kick.

While the straight vegetable dishes lack the complexity of the tofu and noodles dishes, they are perfectly prepared in thoughtful sauces. Prepared in a subtle garlic sauce, the fresh, crispy string beans would provide a perfect complement to any rice or noodles meal, although the portion is hearty enough that they could be a meal by themselves.

The slush drinks avoid the common pitfall of overly sweet or chemical flavors. They are ideal alongside a spicy meal, or as a refreshingly cool dessert. All in all, well worth braving the harsh décor.