

# LIBERTI CHURCH

## of the River Wards

### What's Up in 2022

Find out what our ministry teams are up to in the new year!

#### Food Pantry

Our food pantry is open every **1st and 3rd weekend of the month.**

- We *pack* meals on Fri. at 5pm; we consistently need 12 volunteers!
- We *deliver* meals on Sat. at 9am; we consistently need 18 drivers!
- For more info, contact our coordinator Jonathan Downs at [lcmlvolunteers@liberti.org](mailto:lcmlvolunteers@liberti.org)

#### Home Meetings, Prayer Groups

Three new small groups began in January 2022: an **East Kensington Home Meeting** on Wednesday nights, a **Women's Bible Study** on Sunday nights (in E. Kensington), and a **Men's Bible Study** on Tuesday nights – in addition to the other existing small groups. Visit [libertiriverwards.org/home-meetings](http://libertiriverwards.org/home-meetings)

Also, Men's Prayer continues every Thursday morning at 5:30 am at the church. Plenty of coffee!



Pastor Jose Carerra translates for Pastor John at the Liberti Church + Urban Worship Center combined Christmas Eve Service on 12/24/21.

### Dear Liberti Friends and Family:

At the beginning of each calendar year, I try to summarize the year behind us — the retreats, the outreach efforts, the sermon series, the milestones, etc. — followed by some things to anticipate in the year ahead. This year is no different, though I will keep most of those usual summaries in the margins. (Literally. There's a lot in the margins. Read them!) My main reflections focus on two related themes that have both blessed and pained many of us throughout the past year: **home and family.**

We spent the first third of 2021 preparing to move. After eleven years at 2424 Studios, we moved seven blocks northwest to 2038 E. Cumberland Street, holding our first worship service there on 5/2.

A church building is like a house; it's not the brick, mortar,



Liberti Kids Club, a group for elementary-aged kids, meets every Thursday at 6:00pm at Urban Worship Center (2038 E. Cumberland Street). Grades K-3 meet for games, crafts, and Bible lessons; the 4-6th graders are in the midst of **catechism** instruction, preparing them for communion and church membership later in 2022. All kids are welcome!

Contact [swood@liberti.org](mailto:swood@liberti.org) for more info. Background-checked volunteers are always needed!

### Beautiful Community Team

The "Beautiful Community Team" was created to further discussions on race, class, and the Gospel, and to discuss the PCA's recent recommendations on Racial Reconciliation.

The Beautiful Community Team has recommended two books for congregational reading: *Reading While Black* by Esau McCaulley and *The African Memory of Mark* by Thomas Oden.

All are welcome to meet on **Sunday 2/27** after the service to discuss.

and shingles that make it a home. The people who gather, the rhythms they enact, the rest they provide — **these things turn a house into a home.** Of course, this building at Cumberland & Coral Streets was already the longtime home of Urban Worship Center, who welcomed us to share it with them. Now, after nearly nine months of gathering here — for weekly worship services, food pantry ministry, Liberti Kids Club gatherings, early morning men's prayer meetings, late night ministry team meetings, and work days — it feels like *our* home as well. We thank you, Urban Worship Center, for sharing it with us.

Some of the sweetest moments of 2021 were the "**shared home**" moments between our two congregations, when we joined together for combined services and outreaches. We served alongside UWC for their annual Vacation Bible School in August, and no one involved will soon forget it! In September Pastor Jose and I swapped pulpits, in December we held a combined bilingual Christmas Eve service, and you can read in the margins about future collaborative outreaches in 2022.

Along the way, we were grateful to welcome new members into the Liberti family: 13 new adult members joined the church, and two were baptized. We also had the joy of baptizing nine infant children! And have you noticed the college students filing in on the west side of the sanctuary? Thanks to the ongoing ministry of Cru at Temple University and the work of our Outreach Director Larry Walker, we are regularly ministering to new neighbors in our region.

**So. A new home! New family members! Another worshipping family that we've joined forces with! 2021 was a "housewarming" year.**

**But it also included many goodbyes.**

There have always been many hellos and goodbyes in the Liberti River Wards community. Neighborhoods are changing quickly, some members are here for college or medical school and then move on, etc. Cities can always be transient places. But city churches really felt it this year. The violence in our streets increased, and the pandemic kept many families cramped inside smaller-than-ideal houses, leading them to ask, "**Is this house, this city, this church really the home I am called to?**"

## Women's Ministry Team

The Women's Ministry Team is keeping the flame of community alive for Liberti Women during the challenging years of the pandemic. In 2021 we facilitated several book studies, a Friendsgiving, a Pool Day, and more, in addition to our annual retreat. We also recently initiated a sexual purity group for women. All are welcome to our next gathering on **Saturday 2/26** to again discuss the book *Gentle and Lowly* (Ortlund) together, and we look forward to our annual retreat this spring at Harvey Cedars in NJ!

To get in contact, email [emaileliz@gmail.com](mailto:emaileliz@gmail.com).

## Liberti Network Update

The [Liberti Network](#) continues to plant and strengthen churches in the Philadelphia region, but our newest plant is a *little* further away – in Tampa, FL! Jon Robinson, former assistant pastor at Liberti Harrisburg has moved to his hometown of Tampa to plant a church, and he has asked to remain in the network!

Our annual **Network Sunday** is happening on **Sun. 1/30**, and we'll hear from Network Director Steve Huber.

The fact is that God has called many families to move away in recent months, some after five, ten, or fifteen years of calling Liberti “home”. At our congregational meeting a few weeks ago, one family asked, “How do we handle these goodbyes in a healthy way?” I don’t remember all that I said in reply — it was probably something trite that made it sound easy to do. The truth is that after two decades in Philadelphia, I have experienced four or five waves of saying goodbye to whole clusters of “chosen family.” It doesn’t get easier. Something is probably wrong if it does. **What would easy goodbyes have to say about the nature of our “family”?**

This much I know: the Bible has a very thick “theology of moving”. God called Abram to move from a comfortable home to an unknown place, so that God could bless the world through him (Genesis 12:1-3). The Son of God made his dwelling among us (John 1:14), and after his resurrection said, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you (John 20:21).” After Stephen was martyred, the Church was scattered everywhere through persecution (Acts 8:1). Later, the church in Antioch prayed, fasted, and scattered their leaders on purpose (Acts 13:1-3). Whether it’s because of economics, persecution, or because the Word needs to be proclaimed somewhere new, God’s people are regularly on the move. But how do you discern whether *your* family should move or stay? And how should those who stay handle these waves of goodbyes when they come?

### **Here are a few words if you are considering a move:**

Do you need to move? If it seems economically, occupationally, or relationally vital to do so, pray about it, talk about it with others in the church, and when it’s time for you to go, we will bless you as leave. What else could we do?

If you are *restless* but don’t necessarily *need* to move, I would add something. In addition to praying and talking about it, ask, “Will I just leave, or will I go somewhere on purpose?” There may be other related questions to explore, as well:

What does God’s love for you have to do with this move?

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What does the spiritual flourishing of your family (and of the world around you) have to do with this move?

Where do your unique gifts and callings fit into the decision? Is the dream of a move all glory and no cross?

Even if the answers don't come quickly, these questions can help determine whether you are going somewhere "on purpose" or wrestling with a desire to escape.

**Here are a few words for those who stay:**

Be grateful for your departing family. They were and are God's gift to you (James 1:17).

Stay in touch after they move — the first couple of years in a new place can be lonely.

Remember that staying is a beautiful calling. The idea of "sending" implies that someone stays! So ask, "What might it look like for me to *stay on purpose* this year?" What spiritual seeds could I plant? What invisible person — in the next pew, at the playground, in the streets — could I begin to love, to speak to, or to serve? Who else might be family?

As I write this here at the church I'm watching our "simple sexton" Jared Etherton help a cold neighbor experiencing homelessness settle into our fellowship hall for some conversation, a meal, and maybe an afternoon nap.

Family. Home. In a broken world, both will always be complicated. Thank God for loving us through His one Church, comprised of many churches scattered among the different stations of this life, keeping us in a home until we are Home.

Love,  
Rev. John Alexander

P.S. On behalf of our elders and finance team, I want to thank you for your generosity in 2021. Half way through the fiscal year we are meeting our budget. We also raised an additional \$10,000 to replenish Care Team funds for neighbors in need, and another \$10,000 for a tutoring ministry partnership with UWC!

**LIBERTI COMMUNITY MINISTRIES**

We recently reestablished an existing 501c3 non-profit called "Liberti Community Ministries". The elders and deacons decided that this faith-based non-profit is the best means to oversee and fundraise for some new ministries we've helped begin, including the food pantry and related job creation and mentoring work.

**The first board meeting**, chaired by Liberti member Jay Barbieri, **took place on Monday, 1/24**. Deacon-in-training Michael Black is completing the administrative groundwork. To learn more, contact [michael@liberti.org](mailto:michael@liberti.org)!

**YOUTH BASKETBALL FRIDAYS**

Liberti and UWC are hosting recreation nights at Kensington Health Science Academy's gymnasium (Emerald & Letterly Streets) for middle and high school students, monthly on Fridays. We hope to offer students in the area a safe space to play basketball and volleyball. The first gathering is on **Friday, February 25th, at 7:30pm**. Please contact [Phillip Stoltzfus](#) for more information. Spread the word!

**INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS TEAM**

Louisa D. will return to Southeast Asia to serve the Rohingya as soon as COVID restrictions loosen! She will continue teaching English and working in community development.

Paul Cary is approximately 70% funded to move to Romania, where he will work on a team serving in the city of Cluj. [Find out more here!](#) **We will commission Paul on Sunday 3/27 at our worship service.**

IMT meetings happen monthly — contact Liz Spiegler at [elizabeth.spiegler@interversity.org](mailto:elizabeth.spiegler@interversity.org)