

President's Newsletter

Road to 1717

June 28, 2019

Dear Friends of Cristo Rey Philadelphia High School,

Today was Cristo Rey's last day at 5218 North Broad Street, our home since the opening of the school in 2012. This morning, a small group of Cristo Rey people closed the doors at 5218 for the last time and walked about 2 ½ miles south to open the doors of our new home at 1717 West Allegheny Ave. – in the Tioga section of North Philadelphia.

The furniture, the books and everything else had already been moved. It was time to move the spirit of the school to our new permanent home.

Before embarking, we bid goodbye to our friend, pastor and landlord, Fr. Efren Esmilla. Fr. Efren welcomed us into the former Holy Child school when our fledgling, young startup was looking for a place to begin in 2012. We will always be grateful for Fr. Efren's encouragement and his willingness to share his home with 500 teenagers. The goodbyes on Friday were cheerful and high spirited because we know that Fr. Efren will always be our pastor no matter where we live.



We began the walk south, down the east side of Broad Street – a well-worn path for most of our students, to the Logan subway station

where we bantered one more time with Jimmy, the produce vendor, and Russell, the newspaper salesman, who have been vigilant protectors of our students from the beginning.

South of Logan, we passed many buildings and vacant lots that we had considered during our search for a permanent home: the Mormon theater and the Bell Telephone building on Broad Street, and many different abandoned buildings and lots in Hunting Park.

At Erie Avenue, we arrived at the northern boundary of our new Tioga neighborhood. As usual, the intersection of Broad, Erie and Germantown Avenues was loud, lively and colorful – North Philly in full bloom! We turned west off the Broad Street commercial corridor to walk further south through the neighborhoods.

Tioga was a beautiful and thriving community in the first half of the 20th century. The residents worked good jobs in nearby factories and textile mills that have mostly now closed. Many buildings in the neighborhood now suffer from neglect, however, classic Philadelphia architecture and urban beauty are still evident everywhere. Examples of revitalization abound: new construction, restorations, and new streetlights and sidewalks. Tioga rising!

Our walking group attracted curious looks and friendly greetings from new neighbors. We remembered our gratitude for the many Tioga people and organizations that have supported our move since the journey began in 2015: Tioga United, Mercy Ministries, Thankful Learning Center, The Georgia Gregory School of Music, Zion Baptist Church and Mount Ephraim Baptist Church.

Walking west on Allegheny Ave. from Broad Street, we saw the first glimpse of the A. Mecky Company velocipede factory at 17th Street, now repurposed into the centerpiece building of the beautiful Cristo Rey campus. Contractors hustled about to finish construction in time for the first day of school on August 12th. With a little imagination, we envisioned the seven acres of fields, gardens, and the plaza that are currently in development behind the school buildings – safe, calm, green and inviting. Ours is not a school building that's "good enough for city kids." It's a campus that honors the beauty and dignity of our students and the Tioga community.

We arrived at the front door of the new school about an hour after our walk began and about six years after we made the decision to move.



Even now, after seven years of new beginnings, Cristo Rey Philadelphia is still a very young school. We are pleased with the growth from our roots at 5218 N. Broad St. and we are grateful for your support that has enabled our journey so far. But we are still just beginning. There is plenty more to come.

Stay tuned!

Sincerely,

John McConnell
Founder and President

Take a look at some of Cristo Rey's favorite and proudest moments on our journey so far and a preview of what's to come at 1717! #TheRoadTo1717



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