

CHRISTOPHER GILLESPIE  
1513 RUNNION AVENUE  
FORT WAYNE, INDIANA 46808  
260-579-0833



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Greetings in the name of Christ,

The past months since I last wrote have been a whirlwind. Last spring, I completed the final semesters of my Masters of Divinity study, graduating in May. Meanwhile, I was accepted into the Masters of Sacred Theology program in February and was awarded a tuition grant in exchange for serving as the graduate assistant for the Systematics department. Once the news was received, I switched gears from placement to this additional one-year program intended to further prepare pastors and for scholarly study in a specific discipline of theology.

An area I hoped to gain further expertise in is called apologetics, the training of our laity in the defense of the faith in the world. I mourn the fact that many of my friends have fallen from the faith after being taught in the Lutheran church. In many of these cases, they were not sufficiently equipped to resist the assaults of the devil coming from science, culture, or paganism. To gain this knowledge, I spent the month after graduation reading materials in the field. One expert is John Warwick Montgomery, a Lutheran, who annually holds an international academy on apologetics and human rights in Strasbourg, France. Thanks to your generous gifts, I was able to attend this two week course with pastors, lawyers, missionaries, and educators. It was a terrific experience and has reframed my scholarly study in the direction of equipping the church with the means of defending the faith in an increasingly hostile world.

When I returned, I completed many necessary repairs to our home and family van, again thanks to your support. Our home is older – these repairs will help us sell come spring when I receive a call into the Holy Ministry, God willing! This took the better part of August and was exhausting.

September 1 was the first day as a graduate assistant. My duties include the writing of syllabi, quizzes, tests, and assessing the incoming students. The department chair and my employer, Dr. David Scaer, is the eldest professor on campus. Our conversations concerning the history of the faith, the Synod, and the seminary have been edifying.

My coursework is more focused and intense. I am taking a course on Luther's theology of worship. We read many volumes of Luther, speaking to various aspects of the liturgy, hymnody, and the Divine Service. Such an in-depth study of this church father has been a joy. I am currently writing a paper for this course specifically considering his understanding of the space used for worship, namely our church buildings. My hope is to expand this study into a more comprehensive thesis on our church sanctuaries. A major component of the S.T.M. program is a 100-page thesis that will be written in the spring and summer quarters. Following this thesis, I hope to be ordained and installed in one of our churches as its pastor.

In addition, I took an intensive course considering liturgy as pastoral care. We discussed how the liturgy, especially the preaching of the Word, baptism, and our Lord's Supper comforts our souls by the forgiveness of sins. Finally, much of my time is occupied by intensive study of German, especially modern and Reformation-era theological German. The STM degree requires passing advanced proficiency in both a modern language and either Greek or Hebrew. I will be studying advanced Greek next semester, along with a courses on justification and preliminary thesis research. Again, I am extremely thankful for this opportunity that your support has afforded me. I am confident this additional year will benefit the church greatly.



As it no doubt sounds, my academic work is keeping me extremely busy. Yet, I must not forget my family! I am blessed with a patient and caring wife who looks after our household. We have been blessed by a full quiver of children, Ethan (9), Elsie (7), Gabriel (5), Luke (3), and Naomi (1). They are a joy and great gift. Ethan is a lover of music and reading. His is progressing rapidly in piano - moreover in height. Elsie is following Ethan with a love of music and especially drawing. Gabriel too loves to draw and building with blocks. Luke has found his voice and intellect. He loves showing off both of them. Naomi has learned not just to walk but to climb. Her speciality is climbing onto the kitchen table and playing there with glee (much to her parents' consternation)! They all remain fed, clothed, and educated by your gracious support.

We have been blessed yet again with a "bun in the oven." We are expecting again in April! That month will prove to be an exciting with the birth of a new child of God and the announcement of the location of my call into the Holy Ministry. Thankfully, Anne has made it through the first trimester, the time of nausea. We're happy to be able to eat many things again that did not agree with her before.

We are thankful for all the blessings God has given us. With the good, he has also blessed us with trials. In June, Naomi, the youngest, began experiencing seizures during the night. They increased in frequency and severity over a couple of weeks. It was extremely scary. Thankfully, we were able to rapidly come to both a diagnosis and treatment, including a duo of anti-seizure medicines and vitamin supplements. The seizures are infrequent now and the doctors are confident with their diagnosis. The disease is called Tuberous Sclerosis. It is a hereditary, genetic, multi-system complex. It manifests itself with seizures, numerous birthmarks, and possible benign tumors. Thankfully, she is not currently afflicted with the tumors. We are extremely grateful for God's watchful eye over His children, providing skilled doctors and specialists for Naomi's care. Her demeanor is cheerful and outgoing, a significant change from before the diagnosis.

I wish to express my deep gratitude for your support during my training to be a pastor of Christ's flock. We have been truly blessed by your support. You have shown true Christian love and patience. May God bless you as you have blessed us. To God be the glory!

In Christ,

Christopher Gillespie