

Singing for joy!

All Saints campus ministry waited three years for Akelah Hughes to become a Lutheran and to have her two young children baptized. I had begun to believe that this would never happen, but it did.

Akelah came to Slippery Rock University from the British Virgin Islands with her husband Willis, and three children. Willis got a job to support the family and Akelah became a student. We welcomed her to worship, Bible study, student meals, and all the time she wanted to visit. She grew to love being in the church and student center. She often brought her children with her. Because I was always in the church, the children came to assume that this was my home and that I lived here!

Akelah is a very enthusiastic Christian who is passionate about telling students that they should come to All Saints Korean student meals and for any help they might need. She gladly accepted our request that she serve as president of All Saints Fellowship. She is a dedicated worker. She set the tables for the Korean meals beautifully. She drew students to the delicious meals until covid struck.

Akelah came in so often to talk with me and to make plans with campus pastor, Rev. Larry K. Loree, that I thought she would want to have Bible study as so many students involved with the Fellowship had done in the past. But she did not. She preferred to use her smart phone to read a daily devotion or to hear a sermon by a pastor she admired.

In the British Virgin Islands Akelah attended a Reformed Church. We did not try to steal her away from her denomination and her church in Slippery Rock. However, we did share our Lutheran perspective on what the Bible teaches about baptism and Holy Communion. She listened, but responded that her children had been dedicated. She thought that that was the same as baptism, and that it was good enough.

I am not certain how the change came. Maybe it was the countless emails she sent out to the students we had gotten to know who had graduated. In these emails to former students who had made All Saints a home while studying here, I often answered their questions about baptism explaining why Lutherans believe that God makes us his children in baptism. I usually encourage them to attend worship, find out what the Lord's Supper is, and to study with a pastor to really know the full meaning of baptism, including infant baptism.

During the time campus pastor Rev. Loree was at All Saints, he became a friend and mentor to Akelah. They talked easily about raising children, balancing budgets, and what Lutherans believe. He gave her very helpful advice. Clearly, they bonded even though she did not attend worship here.

Then it happened. When Akelah realized that Pastor Loree would be leaving in mid-August, she immediately asked if he would make time to teach her what it means to be Lutheran. She wanted to join our church and she wanted to have her two youngest children, Love and Liam, baptized. She wants her eldest high school-age son baptized as soon as our vacancy pastor, Rev. Jacob Deal, can give him instruction. The Holy Spirit has been active! Rev. Loree made time to instruct her. For him it was pure joy to do so.

On Rev. Loree's next-to-last Sunday as pastor of All Saints, Akelah became a Lutheran and a member of our congregation, and Love and Liam were baptized. The water of baptism soaked Love's white satin dress and Liam's suit. Big smiles filled their faces in spite of their being surprised by the large splash of water. Tears filled the eyes of the pastor, the church members, and the godparents. The godparents are Billie Hunkler, a member of All Saints who has become a friend to Akelah, as well as my husband and me. The members all felt like it was a wedding. Even though we felt sadness at saying goodbye to our dear Loree family, we felt like we could

hear the angels singing with joy because Love and Liam now belong to Jesus. We praise God for bringing this gift of baptism to them. This is All Saints' hope for future students and their children.



Love and Liam's Baptismal Day

Akelah , Rev. Loree, Love and Liam, La Vaughn, Mr. and Mrs. Mennell, Billie Hunkler