

## Friendship Evangelism

Maryam came into our lives at the Slippery Rock annual Village Festival three years ago. All Saints Lutheran Church and Student Center rented a table to be part of the festival. We handed out bottles of cold water and invited everyone to feel welcome to All Saints. The college students seemed especially pleased to be invited to our monthly student meals.

Maryam came to the village festival with her infant daughter. She had recently arrived in town with her husband, who had just begun teaching at the university. They had come from the Midwest where he had just received his PhD. They had developed many friendships, Christian and Muslim. Being an outgoing, friendly person she had made many friends there. Now she was looking to see if she could find more friends. She is from Bangladesh, but had not let this stop her from coming to the festival to make new friends.

As she walked past All Saints' table, church member Jim Mennell introduced himself. He told her that our friendly church was just a block away and that members really enjoyed meeting people from all over the world. He welcomed her to attend our free student meals, to come in any time to visit; or to ask for help with transportation. He let her know that All Saints would gladly be a friend.

This was the beginning of a growing friendship with this young mother who now comes for frequent visits and brings her two daughters with her. You can tell that the children have come with her because the floor of my office is covered with items from the top of my desk as well as empty plastic Easter eggs which serve as great toys. The girls love to come in. They feel at home. The little toddler is no longer shy. She just beams big smiles now. To my delight the older daughter asked her mother to visit us at a time when she could come, too.

Maryam has a happy family. She values her traditions, her family back home, and life with her husband. They are practicing Muslims and seem quite content with their religion. She's not that much interested in the Christian faith, but she is not hostile.

A wonderful opportunity to share our Christian faith came a few weeks ago. Maryam stayed to listen one day when a student named Donivan came into All Saints and asked if I'd tell him what Lutherans believe. This was a God-given opportunity. I explained, in Maryam's hearing, that we believe in Jesus as God's only Son who died on the cross to atone for our sins.

Maryam listened, but she did not comment when I finished. Actually she knows what Christians believe. When she was in the Midwest while her husband studied for his graduate degree, she was included by Christians in their ladies Bible class. She did not want to study, but she did want to babysit for them during the Bible class. From her times with these Christian ladies she came to realize that, as she put it to us at the Slippery Rock Festival, "Christians are kind." She still feels that way.

You might wonder why a Christian should be a friend when there is no guarantee that someone like Maryam, who has become a dear friend, will become a Christian. The answer is that God commands us to in Matthew 28:19 to "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." This seems to include friendship evangelism.

A one-time graduate student that I know very well had become an atheist based upon the theory of evolution. But he came back to Christianity because God worked through a close Lutheran friend of his who practiced friendship evangelism through unconditional friendship. This graduate student became very

impressed with his friend's Christianity; it was so alive that he couldn't help but notice it. In time, the graduate student became filled with a desire to have just such a relationship with Jesus, too.

Even if Maryam never believes in Jesus through All Saints' friendship evangelism, we will continue to love her unconditionally. We believe seeds are planted. The rest is up to the Holy Spirit.

Augusta R. Mennell

Campus Ministry Director, All Saints Lutheran Church and Student Center

Slippery Rock PA 16057

