

## Reaching the Unaffiliated

“The religiously unaffiliated are the fastest growing religious group in America,” says an article in the April edition of The Lutheran Witness. This is exactly why All Saints Fellowship’s campus ministry is so grateful to God for allowing us to be on campus to share the Gospel. We appreciate every opportunity possible to share the Gospel with Grove City College and Slippery Rock University students.

Our February student meal was filled with opportunities to share God’s word through the friendship, the conversation, and the boardgames introduced at this meal. We shared with a Sri Lankan former student at SRU. Then we reassured three Japanese students who were nervous about trying American food. And then we shared with an American graduate student, Jonathan, who wants to make a difference in Slippery Rock borough government.

Aru, a Sri Lankan international who graduated five years ago, stunned us by walking in unannounced to visit. When he was a student here, he and several international friends had attended student meals and had come in for advice, as well as to get rides to the stores. Their photos are in one of the several church photo albums of church activities over the years. One photograph shows them obviously feeling very much at home in our undercroft.

Aru’s visit was very special because he stayed for the whole afternoon to talk about life, his job, his wonderful wife Irene from Peru, and his conversion to Christianity. And that seems to be what he really came in for: he wants to learn more about Christianity. He asked if he could have a footnoted Bible to keep. We gladly gave him a CPH NIV Self-Study Bible. Nothing is more thrilling than to have a former student who had been raised by a caring Buddhist family request a Christian Bible. He also wants to learn more about personal relationships.

He decided not only to return the next day for more conversation, but also to stay to attend the student meal so that he could introduce his wife to the place that had been home while he studied at SRU. He beamed as they came into the meal. It was like old times.

The best part of the student meal is that Aru learned from campus pastor Rev. Jacob Deal about Rev. Edward Naumann’s ministry. Rev. Naumann is the Director of SALM, the South Asia Lutheran Mission. It seemed like a miracle because Rev. Naumann’s ministry is available to people like Aru, who want to learn more about Christianity. Rev. Naumann even has Bibles and catechisms in Tamil, Aru’s native language. I explained to Aru that he should find an LCMS church to really learn God’s Word. Rev. Deal then helped Aru and Irene to locate an LCMS church near their home in Las Vegas Nevada.

Three Japanese students came to the meal. They were pleased to be invited, but felt a little nervous about trying American food, in this case pizza, homemade meatballs, and other American dishes. We encouraged them, and they did try the American food, and they liked it. Their plates were empty when they left! They will be first on the list to be called for the next meal, and will be encouraged to bring friends. They don’t know much of anything about God, but we hope that, like former Japanese students Satoru and Kenzaburo, they will read the Bible one day.

Another result of the meal is the connection with an American graduate student named Jonathan. The first time we met him was when he asked us to attend a Slippery Rock borough meeting to consider the borough’s decision to deal with the most prominent vacant city lot in town. We made it a point to attend the

meeting, which really pleased Jonathan. We later met him once or twice at worship because he is a little bit interested in the Lutheran faith.

When Jonathan attended the February student meal we were happy to see him. Although he was riveted to a competitive game of chess, he made time to ask Aru about his connection with an SRU professor who has become expert in showing local businesses how to improve their outreach to the community. This is the very help Jonathan needs to provide practical ideas for the borough leaders and local businesses. At the meal, they shared information and for this Jonathan is very appreciative. He thanked us for the introduction to Aru and said he might return again for worship. We pray he does, so so that he can hear God’s Word which will help them to grow in faith.

The increasing numbers of those identifying as “unaffiliated,” those who don’t identify with Christianity enough to even have a denominational preference, has become a concern. Therefore, All Saints will fight hard to find ways to share faith in Jesus. We know that hearing God’s Word is a start, so will pray for ways to welcome students to meals and worship. We want every student to see a good reason for attending the Lutheran church.



Reverend Jacob Deal, All Saints Campus Pastor, welcomes international students attending Slippery Rock University to the All Saints Fellowship monthly student meal.