

"Campus Ministry is for all people on campus"

By Rev. Dr. Eric Andrae

[Names have been changed for this story.]

One of our student leaders and I met Carl (32) at the CMU Fall Activities Fair back in September, as he was working for university security. One of the large posters at our table (see picture below) had caught his eye. We struck up a conversation with him and learned that he had grown up Lutheran but had left the church in his 20s and become, in his own words, an "obnoxious atheist." We invited him to First Trinity, to "come back home." The very next day, while at a local pub celebrating my birthday, Carl and I just happened to run into each other; he was very happy to see me and bought me a beer. Again, I invited him to church, and followed up with an email later, but a couple months went by without him coming to church.

But on November 12, he and his girlfriend Karen (25), along with their friend, Chari (24), attended the Divine Service. This was also the Sunday for our annual Thanksgiving Dinner. We invited them to stay for the meal and they did! When I followed up with a text hoping they were "made to feel welcome," Carl responded the next day: "It was as welcome as Grandma's house. There is clearly a lot of love in the parish."

On December 8, the four of us went out for dinner, where I learned that Carl had come to see the error of his atheist ways and is seeking the Lord's mercy anew; and Karen, who had also strayed from the Lutheran flock, was seeking her way back. Carl had questions about his own sin and guilt, and when I expounded on Romans 5-8, he was moved to tears by God's mercy.

Meanwhile, I found out that Chari is a brand new believer. Though baptized as a child when her parents were still nominal Congregationalists, she was raised in an atheist home. Having dealt with life-long mental health issues (depression, anxiety) that nothing seemed to alleviate, about a year ago she thought she would try religion as a last resort; so she started reading the Bible, and then just a few months ago began attending weekly worship at a small Presbyterian church down the street from her apartment. She has lots of questions!

