

Is getting an A in religion class enough?

Fourteen years ago a sixteen-year-old Chinese student from Surinam in Central America came to Slippery Rock University to study to become a medical doctor. It seemed like this was an impossible dream because she was so young; had limited money; spoke only a moderate amount of English; and was so far from home.

Shen (not her real name) did not have time from her studies to attend the Korean student meals except occasionally. However, she did stop in at All Saints campus ministry office once in a while to say a quick hello. She wanted us to know that she really wished she had more time to attend the meals, and time for leisurely conversations. Whenever she did make time for a meal, her mother, who is a doctor, chided her, reminding her to make studies her first and only priority.

During our brief conversations while she was an undergrad, she would tell me about her goal to get into a good medical school. She would mention that she was a Christian. Yet she did not have time to talk much about what Christians believe. She never did have time to come for Bible study or for worship. Nevertheless, she felt that I was a friend. She asked me more than once to help her move from one dorm to another because she didn't have a car. I'll never forget the first time because when I arrived at her dorm room she had not even begun to pack.

I really did not realize how much our friendship meant to her until a few years later. After she graduated and went away to medical school, she came back to All Saints to show her parents and much younger brother the "special place" where she felt so cared for. She described All Saints campus ministry to her family as "being her light." It was touching to meet her parents, who were so grateful for our support for their daughter.

Recently, I called Shen as I have done through the years. As always, she was very happy to hear from me. Even though she was busy at work in the ICU, she was able to get someone to take her place so that she could talk. She was excited to say that she was completing a residency in New York and would be going to her next one in Kentucky, where she will study for three intensive years to become a cardiologist. What surprised me is that she did not want to focus on her medical achievements. Instead she wanted to ask me about baptism. It amazed me that after all these years she wanted to know what baptism means, how to become baptized, and how to find someone to guide her. What an incredible opportunity to help this former SRU student.

Shen told me she had attended a Christian school in Surinam for grades 3 – 12. She had learned basic Bible stories and memorized many Bible verses. What troubles her now is that she was never taught what baptism means and she was not baptized. School records show her attendance, but do not show that she was ever baptized.

Not being baptized concerns her now, because her young brother is attending a Christian school where he is earning A's in religion, but has not been instructed in baptism and

has not been baptized. Shen remembers that during our conversations the importance of baptism was shared with her and now it was a concern that again there was no baptism for her young brother. Since this young man is very important to her, she wants to get him baptized.

I never would have believed that after all these years campus ministry at All Saints could be such a help. Because she and her brother and mother will be moving soon to another state for her next residency, we have set up telephone time to discuss what Luther's Small Catechism teaches about baptism. I immediately sent her a copy. We will read it together. I urged her to meet with the spiritual head of her brother's school to see what should be done concerning baptism. I encouraged her to make time for her brother to attend catechism class and that she and her mother, who goes to church twice a week, should attend also. Her mother wants to be baptized, too, because Shen has told her about All Saints' beliefs on baptism.

All this is being done with a sense of urgency. I want God's gift of baptism for her brother, her mother and for Shen.

Shen did say she wasn't certain she'd have time to worship and learn about baptism because her next three years of residency in cardiology will be so demanding. We shared with her that her dream of becoming a doctor was coming true because she had made it a high priority. Now was the time to ask God to help her make it a very high priority for getting baptized.

Shen shared wonderful news during our most recent telephone conversation. She said she has called the Christian school in Kentucky and has made preparations for her brother to be instructed so that he can become baptized. She will take classes, too, and so will her mother, even though she struggles with English.

All Saints has no greater joy than seeing students, family, friends, and church members becoming God's children through baptism. Our dream is to have Shen and her family baptized. It's a long time in coming, but we are thankful for the opportunity to help her and her family become children of God.

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