

All Saints is Family

All Saints Lutheran Church and Student Center is family to students. That's just what one of our college students said. He told me, "My goal is to return to the area after graduation so that I can remain a member at All Saints." He is one of the family.

How did All Saints become family? From the beginning in 1977, this congregation intentionally made students feel like they were part of the family. All Saints was inclusive and friendly. Photos from the past show students taking part in worship, Valentine's Day parties, and church picnics. That has not changed. Today church members provide transportation to worship, become "grandparents" by inviting students to their homes to work on school projects, and by coming to the Korean student meals to be with the students, and to listen to their thoughts.

Akelah, a former SRU student from the British Virgin Islands, joined this church and had her two youngest children baptized here. She made this decision because she was made to feel like she belonged. She was made to feel this way by everyone and especially by Billie, who offered to take her anywhere she needed to go, and who regularly asked how Akelah was doing.

Giving gifts is a special way of showing others how much they matter. Because we are family All Saints gives gifts to students. We recently gave books to our students when they went home for the summer. At Rev. Jacob Deal's suggestion we gave the book called Broken – Seven Christian Rules That Every Christian Ought to Break As Often As Possible, by Jonathan Fisk (CPH). This book was given as a token of love.

We all know what Thanksgiving feels like! It's family where we delight in being together as family. Taking students out for a free delicious meal feels like Thanksgiving to them. We just had one more meal with students at the Brewery restaurant in town. Although the weather outside was miserable, we were warm inside and laughing, talking, and feeling sad to say goodbye, but filled with emotion trying to express how each has meant. Our host, Rev. Deal, gave great warmth to the gathering by sharing some of his experiences, especially how the seminary helped him to grow. His special gift was answering questions by students who are interested in understanding what happens in the Lord's Supper. Rev. Deal's answers were so intense and compelling that even our waiter became totally engrossed. After the meal, we invited our waiter to visit All Saints just to talk.

Why is being family so important to All Saints? It's because students like Zuzel from Bolivia feel that they can look forward to coming to All Saints. Zuzel enjoyed a student meal, and later lunch with me at the local Thai restaurant. While eating lunch together she said she would be at SRU for three more years. She expressed delight in how friendly and caring everyone is. She said she'd tell the international students that they should come and visit. She admitted that she knows only a little about the Christian faith, but because she feels so accepted, she is willing to learn more.

All Saints has not changed. A South Korean student felt close enough to ask if he could store two suitcases in our downstairs while he is home working in South Korea. He is not a Christian, but he feels like he is family. Two graduating SRU American students also feel a part of our congregation. They wanted their families to see the campus ministry where they had spent a great deal of time studying the Bible and attending the Korean meals, and even coming to worship occasionally. They are not Lutheran, but thoroughly enjoy our style of worship. They will visit in the future.

We will continue to be family to students. We look forward to sharing our lives with SRU, Grove City College, and Westminster College students when they return in the fall.



