

Let's have lunch!

There is no substitute for personal interaction. Loved ones who live in nursing homes have faces that become radiant when a friend walks in the door. Pastors who get together for a hot cakes breakfast laugh a lot as they enjoy each other's company. Students who get to have a free lunch and the chance to share their thoughts never forget that Lutheran campus ministry loves them.

One of the biggest challenges for me as All Saints Campus Ministry Director is finding a way to have personal visits with college students. All Saints' monthly Korean meals are a good start for giving students the means to know about the friendship we have to offer, but the meals are not the only way. I have found that having lunch one-on-one with students does the job, too.

Wang (not his real name) from Nepal was glad to get an invitation to lunch. He chose to eat at Slippery Rock's newest restaurant, Taco Bell. Wang told me about his family. Some live in Nepal. Others live in the USA. An uncle is a doctor who gave him the opportunity to shadow him because this is the work he wants to do. In a personal setting like this we were comfortable talking about family, faith, and education. He told me he is Buddhist – a secular Buddhist. He believes that he is a good person. He believes that being kind and good is the way to please God. He is not certain about what happens after death. Since our time to visit was short because he had a class to attend, I didn't think he would want me to tell him about what Christians believe. I was really pleased when he asked me to at least give him a quick summary of the Christian faith. He listened as I told him that God loves us so much that He had His Son die on a cross for our sins. I explained that Christians believe they need what God's Son did because no matter how much we try we cannot be perfect.

Wang related that he had attended an excellent academic school in Nepal run by Augustinians. He had learned all the secular information he needed to do well in college, but he said he did not learn much about Christianity. He said he understood that Jesus was born in a stable because His family were "outcasts". Having lunch in private gave us the way to discuss faith.

Hopefully, will have lunch again. I want to show him an excellent article in the Lutheran Heritage Foundation's January-February 2020 issue. The article is a story of a Buddhist who became a Christian and now feels so free of the wrongs he had done. He now knows he is forgiven. It is so exciting to be able to share the freedom that the Christian faith gives. It is especially exciting to have the chance to share – over lunch – with a student.

Anne (not her real name) is an American college student who wants to teach. She's had lunch with me before. She attends Sunday worship regularly. She's a pastor's daughter and already has faith. She comes to have lunch just because it is enjoyable since we can talk about almost everything. As we ate at Bob's Sub Shop, she asked about what advice she should give a friend. Her friend goes to church once in a while, but wants her boyfriend to come to church

more often than he does. During this lunch we debated what advice she should give her friend. We talked about the “witness” her girlfriend was giving to her boyfriend. We wondered if he knew her faith was important to her because she attended worship just now and then. We concluded that her girlfriend might want to learn more about her own faith. Did it really have meaning? We shared that asking her boyfriend to go to worship with her would be a good beginning to strengthen her own faith and his.

As we finished lunch, Anne talked about her father. He is an LCMS pastor who was not a strong believer before becoming a pastor. Somewhere along the way the Holy Spirit changed him. Could it have been her mother’s influence? Anne would like to know more about her father’s faith. We talked about how wonderful it would be for both of them if she asked him to tell her about how God brought about this change.

Lunch with college students helps me to understand what the “baggage” is that they carry. I was struck with that realization by an article by Deon Prue, of Haskell Light Campus Ministry to Native American college students in Lawrence, Kansas. She writes in the Lutheran Indian Ministries Lenten Devotions for March 4: “We don’t ignore their baggage, we help them carry it to our final destination.” This is All Saints’ goal, too. Time to visit during lunch is a good time to show students that they can take their baggage to Jesus, who gave His life for them.

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