

TESTIMONY

PASTOR JOHN JJ VOELKER
LUTHERAN CAMPUS MINISTRY OF KENT STATE

The following is a testimony from an international student at Kent State University. Their name as been omitted.

There is a phrase that you sometimes hear spoken in Lutheran circles that refers to the, “mutual conversation and consolation of brethren.” That phrase comes from one of our Lutheran Confessions, known as the Smalcald Articles, and it appears in relation to the topic of the Gospel. The Gospel, as you probably already know, is the Good News of our salvation that we have in Christ Jesus. And the Smalcald Articles talk about the various ways in which the Gospel comes to us.

That’s what takes place when you are speaking with a fellow Christian and, perhaps, are sharing your worries, your concerns, or maybe even your struggle with your sins, and your brother or sister in Christ comforts you with the truth that Jesus Christ died on the cross because He loves you so very much and gave His life as a payment for all of your sins. And it’s wonderful to hear those glad tidings spoken from the lips of those whom we trust and in whom we have confided. There is no friendship like that tie that binds our hearts together in Christian love.

That mutual Christian conversation and consolation is something that can take place at any time and in any place; it is not limited to Sunday morning visits. It is a blessing that we must never take for granted but work to foster; for the testimony of our faith that we speak in the safe company of



PRESIDENT MATTHEW HARRISON OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD WELCOMES THE IN-DEPTH STUDENTS TO HIS OFFICE WHILE THEY VISITED THE LCMS INTERNATIONAL CENTER.

fellow believers, gives to us the opportunity to prepare to be able to share our faith with those who do not know Christ.

Too often, we find ourselves apprehensive to testify about our Savior in our conversations with one another. We are less afraid to engage in discussions of sensitive subjects such as politics, taxes, and healthcare, than we are to speak about our faith.

Perhaps that’s because we are aware that there are so many differing opinions when it comes to people’s religious beliefs—or even regarding Christianity, for that matter—that we are hesitant to speak up for what we believe. Or maybe the reason for our hesitancy can be traced back to something as simple as being afraid that we’ll say something that incorrect. And that is a legitimate concern. But it is a concern for which there is a reassuring solution. And it is found in that title, “Christ.”

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I'd like to share my story with you if I might. Not that I think it particularly dramatic or necessarily inspiring, but I'd simply like to share with you the story of my faith journey which, at long last, has led me to the Lutheran Church.

I was raised as a Muslim in a family that while recognizing the value of the church in our lives did not speak about it much. As a child I was drawn to religion and mosques, but as time progressed I fell away. This was early in my teens and gradually I decided that religion was okay for some but it wasn't essential for me.

Without a relationship with God I was left to my own devices -- and brother did I put myself through a lot of hell! I was not very outgoing and had few friends. I became something of a chameleon. I would change my opinions, likes and dislikes to match whomever was my best friend at the time. I was afraid that if I believed anything differently, they wouldn't be my friend any longer.

During college I got involved with unhealthy foods and unhealthy lifestyle and began a lifelong battle with depression. College made things worse. The friends I had were actively hostile to religion (although they would admit their main problem was with organized religion). My problems worsened: heavy alcohol use, too much partying, a string of carnal, broken relationships and even a growing struggle with pornography.

After college, I continue my long struggle with religion. A good friend found Jesus through the Holy Rosary Church in Bangladesh and began witnessing to me in the only manner that would get through to me -- his life was transformed, and he had such joy!

While I wanted what he had, I didn't want to give up so much. Instead of repenting, I began to search for the form of religion that suited me best. Another Christian friend did some heavy witnessing to me as well, but nothing took much. I even attended a service at the local International Church of Christ but was so put off by it that I never returned.

I drifted from church to church, religion to religion. Each time, I KNEW I'd found the truth, only to drift away when I changed my mind about what I believed. I went from Buddhism, to Hinduism, to Judaism, to many other religions. I also wandered into new age thought. I came to the conclusion that while a spiritual life was beneficial, I didn't have time for it.

A couple of years ago I was sure that Islam was the truth. I even went so far as to say the shahada (makes you a Muslim) but then never

followed-through. Once again I'd been betrayed by following my heart, my feelings, to find the truth. I prayed to God for forgiveness and guidance.

My struggle with depression deepened until my life was miserable. I was alone, utterly and completely. I was diagnosed as with a fatty liver (stage 3). I was pre-diabetic, had high cholesterol, and high blood pressure. I was put on medications and my doctors and dietitians tried their best to convert me into a healthy lifestyle, but they failed. I lost my hope in them, in my life and in everything. I started praying to God for help out of this life threatening problem.

I started working out and living a healthy lifestyle. I started trusting in God and I found tremendous results by the mercy of him. Then I started studying Nutrition and made up my mind to get a higher degree from USA and got admission to Kent State University.

When I first came to the U.S. life was a struggle. Due to some unfortunate situations, I was homeless for couple of months. I was so financially weak I hardly was able to buy food for my survival. I had no transportation, no furniture and no place to live. Again, God helped me at that struggling moment.

The Lord brought JJ Voelker into my life, who would become my parent and start me truly on the road to salvation.

JJ Voelker is the pastor of Lutheran Campus Ministry of Kent. He helped me settle down my life here. He helped me out in each and every single trouble I have faced in my life. He introduced me to new friends at the international student friendship ministry on campus and they welcomed me in.

I went to Faith Lutheran Church and immediately felt at home. The people were very friendly, and I felt at home. The liturgical service called to me in a way that no other service had.

I got new hope in my life, I got a family where everybody is connected to each other in their happiness and sorrows. We follow a tradition called Chat-n-Chow where we invite people from different places, share a meal and study the Bible. We discuss our problems and help each other up. We also invite Pastors from different churches for in-depth study and to share what are their observations of life. We have a strong bond of humanity.

JJ is firm in his faith and his personal relationship with Jesus. He never pushed me, but simply made it clear that he wanted me to become a server of God someday. I started volunteering with JJ to help other homeless people around the community and help whoever needs help.

I received the opportunity to spend 10 days in St. Louis with pastors Paul Hoemann and Lee Meyer for the ISM, Inc. In-Depth Conference. It was so influencing and eye opening for me. I have learned a lot about Christianity from the daily bible study and they helped answer my questions and clear all my confusions.

The more I study and the more I read, the more sure I am that this Church holds the truth. I've come to embrace the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod and seek out a traditional, liturgical and confessional church.

Now I am able to study, maintain good grades and fulfill my basic needs for survival. I have hope in my mind to be a good nutritionist in the future and serve the people who are suffering from different health issues.

God put this wonderful man (JJ Voelker) into my life to be my guide, friend, father and brother. He means more to me than any other person on earth. Most importantly he introduced me to Jesus, whom I love above all.

As I write this, I am very close to peace at last. I've found my way off the religious roller coaster I've been riding for years. I look forward to studying into this great church and attend the workshops of international student ministry, which I hope to make my home for years to come.

May God richly bless you. ■

"Therefore
encourage one
another and build
one another up, just
as you are doing."
1 Thessalonians 5:11

If you'd like more information about In-Depth or to support next year's In-Depth Bible Seminar, please use visit our website, <https://www.isminc.org/conferences.html>. Thank you!



APPLE PICKING

**BESSIE FICK, ISM COORDINATOR
TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH, EDWARDSVILLE, IL
SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY**

International Student Ministry at Trinity Lutheran in Edwardsville, IL is a ministry of friendship and hospitality that we might have the opportunity to invite our friends to hear about God's love for them.

In September we had a combined activity with the LCMS Southern Illinois University students to Eckert's farm for Apple picking. There were 16 present it was a beautiful day with lots of good conversations and a great opportunity to have the internationals view some of our Southern Illinois countryside. ■

CAMPUS MINISTRY: A LIFESAVER

**AUGUSTA R. MENNELL, CAMPUS MINISTRY DIRECTOR
SLIPPERY ROCK UNIVERSITY
ALL SAINTS LUTHERAN CHURCH AND STUDENT CENTER**

Campus ministry means even more to me because our oldest granddaughter went off to college this semester. Our prayers are that she will find a campus ministry at her university.

College students are basically the same as students were twenty-five years ago. Although they are much more tech savvy, they are still often broken on the inside, no matter how well-adjusted they seem to be on the outside. The recent suicide of a Slippery Rock University student who was a popular leader on campus made this shockingly apparent. He allowed inner pain, which he had not shared with anyone, to overwhelm him. So he took his own life.

A bright young student popped in to campus ministry on the first day of classes this semester. Thankfully, she had the courage to come and ask for help in dealing with some personal painful issues. College students need unconditional friendship and the clear Gospel. All Saints campus ministry has these for students.

The important thing is that through campus ministry many people are reaching out and providing care for students. X is one example of how campus ministry makes the difference. X is a Chinese college student who came to Slippery Rock eight years ago. She took a break from her college courses in China to work as a nanny for an American couple who have lovingly adopted several children from China. They invited X to be a nanny so she could help care for their young family.

While X lived with them she wanted to meet more Americans. Someone at Slippery Rock University suggested that she contact All Saints Campus Ministry, saying that they were very friendly and therefore would be happy to help. We invited X to our annual Thanksgiving dinner in our home, and she came. Then she gladly accepted our invitation to study the Bible two or three times a week at All Saints.

What a remarkable student she was and is! She soaked up the Bible like a sponge! Studying the Bible quickly became the center of her life. She realized that her passion was sharing the Gospel. She wanted to be baptized, but something held her back: she wanted to be baptized with her father. The first thing she did when she went home to China was to be baptized with him.

One thing led to another. An international professor who came to campus ministry to improve his English and to learn a little of the Bible introduced X to a couple who were getting ready to go to China as missionaries. They became close. This couple gave advice to X about how she could serve God. They guided her while she was living in China, Angola, and Australia. Since they are back in Ohio now, they brought X to visit All Saints this summer.



X is now attending Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas. She has an internship teaching Chinese to English speaking students, and she has a scholarship to study linguistics. She thanks the missionary couple for all their prayers.

X explained that it was not easy to know where she should work or study. What made a difference was the help from campus ministry and help from friends who gave her advice and love. I will never forget her time in Bible class. The thing that stays in my mind is one statement it seems like she made repeatedly: "I have one more question!" She always wanted to learn more about God's Word.

Not all students need as much as X did, but almost all of them could use a place to be: a home away from home. Effective campus ministry makes a huge difference for impressionable and vulnerable young people. I hope it will in my granddaughter's life, too. Each of our student Korean meals will be introduced with the words that whatever their burdens or challenges or fears are, All Saints campus ministry is here for them. We want to do all we can to help. ■