

The Coffee Hour // September 3, 2019

Guest: Rev. Eric Andrae, First Trinity Lutheran Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Today is a special day on the Coffee Hour. It's September, it's back to school season and everybody is back into their fall routines, back to school including our college students. If you were listening before the break, you heard the spot from Pastor Zill about LCMS U and campus ministry. We get to talk to two of our LCMS U chapters; one here in St Louis; we get to talk to the chapter out of my home church that serves students at Washington University in St Louis in the second half. In the first half, we get to talk to the LCMS U chapter in Pittsburgh, a pastor I know from way back from my high school days. Thank you to C U W for your support of the Coffee Hour. You can find out more about them at CUW@ edu/ Live uncommon. Joining me by phone today is Pastor Eric Andrae from First Trinity Lutheran Church in Pittsburgh, PA and also the LCMS U chapter serving the greater Pittsburgh area. Welcome Pastor Andrae. Thanks for joining me today.

Pastor: Sarah, it's great to be with you. Thank you!

Sarah: Absolutely. It was great to see you over the summer, too, randomly dropping in on Pittsburgh. You have a unique place there in Pittsburgh. You serve more than just one university. Tell me a little about the general area around Pittsburgh where you serve.

Pastor: You may call us a town and gown setting. We have our regular congregational ministry with a full-time parish pastor. Then I serve as the full time campus pastor. We are within walking distance of the University of Pittsburgh, Pitt, and Carnegie Mellon(CMU). Both are about a 10-15-minute walk away. Then we have Carlo and Chatham two smaller schools that I call European walking distance, about 25 minutes walk away or a short ride. Then we have, about a 10-minute ride, Duquesne University, Point park University and we also have the Community college. We get students from all of those schools, chiefly Pitt and CMU because of their proximity and size, but as I said, we serve many schools.

Sarah: That is a wide range of students from many universities and different backgrounds. How large is your chapter of LCMS U

Pastor: That's a good question. How do we measure that? We have different categories, unofficial categories. There are those who are here every Sunday for worship, Divine Service and every Wednesday for student Bible Study dinner and Compline. Then we have students who only come to worship and students who maybe just come to the Bible Study. Then we have our English as a Second Language students, who come to the class and that Bible Study is especially geared toward International students. Then there are students I serve through other programs. There's a program that I've been a part of, called A Christian studies program, which creates a virtual minor in Theology at the schools. That draws students from a wide variety of Christian backgrounds and even non-Christian. There are students that I've developed relationships with over my nearly 20 years of campus ministry by being visible on campus and speaking to other groups. So, I have a pastoral relationship with those. They may never darken these doors, but I get together with them about once or twice a semester, just to see how life's going, to help them deal with crises. So I would say we have in a typical year about 30-40 that come to worship or Bible study regularly. Then we have all those other students. I didn't mention that I'm also the chaplain for pre-med Hospice volunteer program. That draws in another 20 -25 students which are about half Christian and half not and I meet with them five times a year, at least, as a group and maybe more than that individually. So, counting all of those other students; the ESL, the Hospice, the other groups I meet with that probably at least doubles or triples that number. Probably 30-50 that

Identify themselves strongly with the LCMS U chapter and then at least another 75- 100 that I have a regular pastoral relationship with.

Sarah: That's a such an expansive different set of ways that you and the congregation are able to reach out into these college campuses. It's not just worship and Bible study on Sunday morning. There are so many other opportunities to interact with these college students. And to really bring the Gospel of Jesus to them. Tell me a little bit more about those other ways outside of Sunday morning church and Bible Study that you and the congregation are able to reach out to these college students.

Pastor: We have this pre-med hospice volunteer program. That connects under graduate, pre-med students with local hospital Hospice care program. Then they come here for lunch, for hospitality and for time that's needed to process the spiritual dimensions of death and dying. We host them, the congregation hosts them. The congregation is very welcoming in that way.

I mentioned the Christian Studies Program. I was asked to be a part of that 7 or 8 years ago. That's where I can really stimulate and put forth the intellectual tradition of Christian thought and civilization with seminars, connecting the students with Christian faculty to help them process classes that may have something that may have something to do, directly or indirectly, with Christianity. Our students have been involved with that as well, with conferences or things like that. We're on campus a lot; the students and I. We go "tabling". We have an officially recognized student organization at Pitt and CMU and the officers of those student organizations help me on campus to "table". We call it "tabling". Whether it's an activities fair we've done. One activity we did last year was the Ash Wednesday tabling. We go and we pray and we bring the imposition of ashes on campus, right in the dorms, or student union or in the cafeteria, and we get up to a hundred students, even staff, that stop by and receive prayer and imposition of ashes and of course an invitation to join us for Lenten and Easter services. Those are just a few of many, many ways. We're having a film and faith class that we advertised on campus; where we have a local noted film enthusiast. A member of our parish is teaching that class and we advertised to the film club on campus. We are hoping for a good turnout for that beginning later this month. So, many, many opportunities and many ways we seek to engage both on and off campus, here at the church, wherever the students might find themselves.

Sarah: Absolutely! You mentioned that you have been doing campus ministry for 20 years. What is the impact of a campus ministry like this on the students who are able to interact with the campus ministry while they are in this different situation in college, in this area, in this time of their lives.

Pastor: In their own words, and in what I've seen, it's life changing. There are so many worthy missions out there, domestic and international. I can't think of another domestic mission that is more crucial than campus ministry. We are engaging students at a time the faith is often either lost or gained or hopefully sustained. These young men and women become who they will be forever; in vocationally, in relationships, maybe finding their future spouse, and certainly spiritually, in terms of; many of them maybe having grown up in the faith, is this something that now they will, so to speak, own. Is this something that they will personally appropriate? Then there are those who have never heard of the faith. We had hundreds, if not thousands, of international students here in Pittsburgh. CMU with a student body of about 14000, 42% of those 14000, are international students, representing well over 100 countries. Our ESL program engages those students with volunteer teachers from the parish, volunteer child care and so on. We are catching them at a crucial time. They are also being challenged of course. I serve at secular universities and I don't see them as adversaries but let's face it, they are being tested in the crucible of so many "isms" that counter the message we are trying to give as a Christian world view, whether its evolution or views on gender and sexuality or scientism as almost a god that is

the only source of knowledge. We're engaging them on these topics and helping them to think through them, live through them, pray through them, worship with them and give them a community of brothers and sisters, bring them to the faith bring them to the font, sustain them in that faith given to them in baptism and sustain them in preaching and the Lords Supper. I can't think of a mission that's more crucial. It affects and all the things that are being debated in society and in the church. We've been debating them in campus ministry for 10-15 years previous. I can see what's coming to the public square because its already been on the Quad. Like I said, we've already been talking about it for 15 years. I love it! It's energizing for me. It's exciting and it's a lot of fun.

Sarah: You mentioned the community that this builds. What does this community look like with these students from across all nationalities; what does that community look like when you bring all these students together for campus ministry?

Pastor: It's centered around the word and sacrament. I tell the students at the beginning of every year and throughout that the main thing is, come on Sunday morning, be gathered by the Spirit, around God's word and sacraments. Break bread together – mealtime is underrated. It's not just free food. It's time for conversation, time to take a breath, find a refuge and a haven in our mid-week student meal, be gathered around the Word and study and pray together in compline. I think that builds a cohesion. What I have seen so beautifully is friendships, marriages that have grown out of our student ministry because of community. I especially love to see what the students are doing. We plan things in the office like organized events, social activities, going to a ballgame, going apple picking, a hayride or what have you, but the students themselves develop those kind of relationships – for life. Again, life changing. It's really beautiful. Last year, a couple of graduate students came to me and "We would like to start a mentoring program where incoming freshman can be paired up with seniors or graduate students and be mentored in what is to be a Christian on a college campus . "We're starting that this year and we've already paired up a couple of folks. It's just exciting to see them take ownership of that and help develop that community that the Spirit is forming. The Spirit is really giving. We just have to enter it. The life of the church is here. Life together is here, and I see the students enter it and live it and it's really beautiful.

Sarah: Absolutely! Pastor Eric Andrae, Pastor of First Trinity Lutheran Church and the LCMS U chapter there in Pittsburgh, PA. Thanks so much for joining me on the Coffee Hour this morning!

Pastor: Thanks Sarah! Take Care!