

Cuisine, companionship and caring

Foreign students find Koshy home oasis of friendship

By Eric Sherman

Dr. T.E. Koshy is not a medical doctor. He does not wear a stethoscope, prescribe medicine or heal physical ailments. Yet hundreds of foreign students at Syracuse University say there is no better person to go to when they feel pain.

Koshy, an evangelical chaplain at Hendricks with a Ph.D. from SU in communications, has been helping foreign students overcome the many problems of adjusting to college life in America for more than 15 years.

Each Sunday afternoon at 1, Koshy opens his Ostrom Avenue home for a fellowship dinner. Between 30 and 50 foreign and American students share in an afternoon meal, each other's customs and most importantly, friendship.

"What most of the internationals are looking for when they come here is a friend who they can turn to in a time of need," Koshy says. "The meal serves as an ice-breaker."

Most American students are unaware of the problems foreigners face, according to Koshy. "When a foreigner comes to this country he goes through various changes or shocks, such as cultural shock, identity shock, if they are in Syracuse, weather shock, food shock, educational shock and, above all, loneliness.

"They are not looking for money or housing. They are looking for someone who cares. I tell students, 'Friend, we love you and we care for you.'"

Many students can find religious meaning in the program, by attending services conducted by Koshy before the fellowship meal. However, Koshy stresses that students are not required to attend the service and are befriended regardless of their religious beliefs.

"Our main concern is to be a loving and a caring service to foreign students, regardless of who they are,



Photo by Kevin Gilbert

Each Sunday afternoon, Drs. T.E. and Indira Koshy invite between 30 and 50 foreign students to their home to share in each other's customs and develop friendships.

whether they are atheist, agnostic or whatever," Koshy says.

Koshy performs this role as friend not just during the Sunday fellowship meal. His office and home are always open to foreign students. He takes pride in telling of an unhappy student who came to talk to him. After speaking with Koshy for two hours, he asked to stay the night. Koshy agreed and finally said good-bye to the student five months later. The man regained his confidence and went on to receive an assistantship with the University.

Fifteen years ago, Koshy himself was in need of friendship. As a graduate student at SU from India, Koshy experienced the isolation that

many of today's 1,300 international students face. One night, while reading from the Bible, he says he heard an inner voice tell him to forget his problems and help other international students.

Despite his small apartment and limited budget, he began inviting other foreigners into his home and preparing dinner himself. After graduating in 1967 and moving to Washington, he again felt the need to help students at Syracuse. He returned that same year, and was married. His wife Indira is a physician at the health center who shares her husband's goals, preparing each Sunday's lunch.

Mrs. Koshy, who is also aided in the

cooking chores by her mother, says she does not mind spending all of Saturday afternoon preparing the meals, which include food from her native India and provisions for vegetarians.

"It's a lot of work, but I get joy out of doing it," she says. "I get to meet many interesting people from different countries and seeing them happy makes us happy."

The Koshys do not receive funding for their endeavors. But Koshy insists that he and his wife do not "look at the expenses. We look at the good that we do."

According to the students who have attended the fellowship meals, Koshy succeeds in his goals of friendship.

When Antonio Malakia, a senior in the School of Engineering, first came to Syracuse from Angola in 1976, he says he felt incredibly lonely and had no one with whom he could discuss his problems.

"There were people around but no one I could speak to," he recalls. "I felt like someone in a desert."

Malakia's oasis, like so many other foreign students', was Koshy. "He (Koshy) introduced me to a lot of friends at the meal," Malakia said. "I found the world was different from that day. I found there was a lot more happiness in it."

Koshy sees his program as being extremely successful in fulfilling its goal of helping international students find companionship. However, he has another goal he would like to reach in the near future—to have Americans learn from international students and accept them as they are.

"My hope and prayer is that I may instill and inspire many to have unselfish love," Koshy says. "Then the world can be a better place to live for ourselves and our children."