

## Religion

# SU chaplain believes in love, service

By Bart Pollock  
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The evangelical Christian chaplain had just spent an hour knocking on the dormitory room doors of Moslem students at Syracuse University inviting them to a dinner at his house.

Afterward, a born-again Christian friend of his scolded, "You didn't even witness to them about Jesus."

The chaplain replied, "I am not doing this to make them Christians. I'm doing this because this is what Jesus would do."

The chaplain, T.E. Koshy (he prefers not to be called "Reverend"), is critical of some of his evangelical colleagues who, he says, "have used religion as just another business."

He adds, "I do not believe in brain-washing, and I do not believe in trying to force conversion on another. Conversion is not the work of man; it is the work of the Holy Spirit."

One of the biggest problems Koshy sees among evangelical Christians is that "so many people are quick to preach and slow to serve."

And service is what Koshy's ministry at SU is all about.

Seated in the living room of his comfortable university-area home, Koshy recalls how his unusual ministry began 17 years ago.

A native of India, he arrived in Syracuse in 1965 to begin graduate studies at SU's Newhouse School of Journalism. Not long after — about the time of the first snowfall — he began to suffer from culture shock.

"I was all alone in my room crying and praying to God, asking, 'Why did I come to this country where nobody cares?'" he said.

In the midst of his distress, he began to feel "the loving presence of God," Koshy recalls. And he thought of all the other foreign students who must be going through a similar adjustment.

He felt God was calling him to serve the 1,300 other international students at SU through some form of ministry.

But he resisted.

Most of the foreign students he had met were Hindus, Buddhists or Moslems, says Koshy, whose Anglican upbringing placed him among the small minority of Indians who are Christians.

Still praying, Koshy said to God, "But they (the non-Christian foreign students) don't care for you."



'So many people are quick to preach and slow to serve.'

— T.E. Koshy

Then, he says, God spoke these words in his heart: "Koshy, I care for them."

From that day on, he opened his home as a place of hospitality for SU's international students, starting by simply inviting a few over for dinner each day.

"In those early days, I was chief cook and bottle washer," Koshy recalls, noting that he continued his journalism studies (eventually earning a doctorate in that field) even while serving meals and offering friendship and counseling to international students on a daily basis.

Now, 17 years later, Koshy's ministry has been officially recognized by the university. In addition, he now has three full-time associates and several volunteers helping him.

In 1967, he was married to ophthalmologist Dr. Indira Koshy, also a Christian from India, who became his partner in the never-ending work of providing hospitality to Syracuse's international students.

Koshy says they have always sought to maintain a balance between the "humanitarian" and the "spiritual" aspects

of their work. When foreign students come to Koshy's house for Sunday dinners (an event that regularly draws 50 to 70 guests), he does not preach or try to evangelize. Last Sunday, in fact, because of the presence of 27 visitors from China, he refrained from even asking a blessing before the meal.

Even so, when he is approached by a guest who wants to know why Koshy and his associates are so generous with their hospitality, as often happens, he will tell them about his conversion.

"I am doing these things because Jesus changed me," Koshy says.

Yet he insists there are "no strings attached" to the hospitality, counseling and practical assistance he gives foreign students.

For Koshy, it is enough to serve others out of love. The rest he leaves up to God.

"As I serve people in the love of Christ, and they begin to see the beauty and the loveliness of Christ, then in that way these people can be introduced to Christ through me," he says.

The chaplain says he has often been accused of having ulterior motives for his ministry of service. He tells the story of a Hindu student who approached him with open hostility and said, "Don't tell me about your Christ and your religion."

The response he got from Koshy was, "Yes, but you can't stop me from loving you."

The chaplain claims that student came back a year later, apologized and said he had become convinced Koshy was acting purely out of love.

Indeed, Koshy himself says, "Everything I do is out of love."

His ministry is now divided into two separate organizations: the International Friendship Evangelism, which continues to serve weekly meals and provide practical assistance and counseling to foreign students; and The International Assembly, a non-denominational Christian church of which Koshy is pastor, with Sunday worship services at 10:45 in the SU Hall of Languages, Bible study Wednesdays at 7 p.m., and prayer meetings Fridays also at 7 p.m.