

MEET PTS



The Rev. Sean Brubaker '14 engaged the usual crew of neighborhood boys one summer Saturday afternoon. The boys knew that when the parking lot of Calvin Presbyterian Church (Elwood City, Pa.) was full of cars, food was usually involved—always a good motivator for hanging around.

The church was hosting retired mission co-worker Nancy McGaughey and guests from the South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church: Elder Daniel Kech Puoc, financial secretary, and his wife, Madam Achol Majok Kur, chairperson of the women's desk for SSPEC's executive committee. The boys inquired about the food and the possibility of being invited to stay. So pastor Sean struck a deal—they could stay and eat as long as they stayed to hear the guests speak. The boys agreed but noted they had to leave at 5:00 p.m. because they "had to be somewhere."

Daniel and Achol didn't begin sharing till about 4:45 p.m. Their personas and traumatic stories of survival and faith captured the attention of these boys. Then, partway through Daniel's testimony of God's using disaster as opportunity in his life, he began to challenge the boys—directly. He asked whether they were followers of Jesus and about their participation in the church and their commitment to God's kingdom. It was a somewhat awkward and tense moment. He got no answer and moved on.

But a moment later the boys leaned over to tell Sean they could now stay till 5:15. When 5:15 came they said to Sean, "We can stay till 5:30." Then, "We can stay till 6:00." Some of the boys stayed for the entire 90 minutes of testimonies, challenges, and encouragement by Daniel, Achol, and Nancy. By the end of the evening the boys helped pass the offering plate and at least one of them contributed some money himself.

Sean realized that the boys' understanding of church had changed that night—changed in a way they may never have learned from another outreach program. On Tuesday morning they showed up for the summer ministry and were eager to talk about what they had heard. "I can't believe that lady went to those places!" "How do you know those people from South Sudan, and why did they come here?" "Do you always collect money for things, and where does that money go?" Something had clicked. Sean couldn't name it, but it had something to do with the fact that these same people the boys hear singing on Sunday mornings, the same people who serve their lunches, are somehow connected to these people from South Sudan and this missionary who does amazing things in dangerous places halfway around the world.

Sean reflected on the evening: "The picture of what the church is to those boys had grown exponentially in one evening. Perhaps it has grown for us too."

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