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**January 10, 2005**

### **SAU graduates and students attracted to LaSalle Street Church in Chicago**

Paul Nemecek has been leading CORE and sociology classes to Chicago for weekend visits since he began teaching courses at Spring Arbor University in 1982. But during those 80 trips to the city, he had never encountered the welcome he felt last semester when his Urban Sociology class attended LaSalle Street Church for Sunday service.

The large group of students was warmly greeted by the parishioners throughout the entirety of the service. Nemecek recalls the warm reception. "The pastor gave a special greeting to the students from Spring Arbor University. But later during the announcements, one of the elders revisited the subject and said, 'I can't emphasize enough how excited we are to have students from Spring Arbor University here today. Oreon Trickey '86 and Joe Mole '98 are two of our worship leaders, Rob Acton '91 is running the Cabrini-Green Legal Aid Clinic and Beth Forte '78 is on the board of elders.'

"He then said, 'The LaSalle Street Church would not be what it is today were it not for Spring Arbor University. We can't thank you enough.'" The elder's remarks are likely the direct result of the contributions the four previously-mentioned SAU alums have made to the church and surrounding community. "Spring Arbor University turns out students with hearts for service, and LaSalle is uniquely situated to give them opportunities to serve," says Nemecek.

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The LaSalle Street Church is positioned between Chicago's "Gold Coast" (just east of the Magnificent Mile) and Cabrini-Green (one of the largest public housing projects in the U.S.). "From the beginning their vision was to be a bridge across the barriers of race and class in the city of Chicago," says Nemecek. "They have developed affordable housing units, day cares, etc."

While there are several hundred churches in the Chicago area, LaSalle tends to draw the attention of Spring Arbor University graduates due to its heart to serve the community through Christ's love. The church has made such a strong impact on these grads that Nemecek often takes his classes to the church when visiting the windy city.

During the recent trip to the LaSalle Street Church, SAU students appreciated the warm welcome and the opportunity to participate in the service. Nemecek believes one of the reasons University students respond so well to the visits at LaSalle Street Church is the church's diversity. Not only is the congregation diverse, but its service often incorporates elements of high liturgy along with contemporary praise songs.

"The worship was fun, contemporary and traditional in one. It incorporated young and old, and had a good combination of voices and music," says senior Kayla Stevens. "I loved the church because it was so welcoming, inviting and honest. The congregation was diverse, containing people from all walks of life and financial backgrounds."

Students also appreciated the community aspect of LaSalle. "During our Chicago visit, we drove through so many areas of Chicago with different problems, and sometimes the problem with sociology is that you study the problems so much that it gets depressing," says junior Brian LaBenne. "But, LaSalle was a welcomed boost to our trip. To see that among all the problems in Chicago there is a place that is doing what God has called the Church to do was amazing."

The community and outreach opportunities are also what attracted Trickey '86 to the church. Trickey knew LaSalle's senior pastor, Laura Traux, and opted to attend services at the request of several friends. "I decided to attend a few services and very quickly realized that these are people with whom I can worship, serve, laugh and follow Jesus," says Trickey.

"LaSalle Street Church impacts its members by providing a strong and genuine community within which one can explore and pursue personal growth," says Trickey, who serves as the director for Breakthrough Ministries in Chicago.

With a vision statement that seeks to be a diverse community that worships Jesus Christ and responds to his claims and call by pursuing authentic relationships, genuine service with others, and participation in the broader Christian church, LaSalle Street Church truly serves to meet the needs of its diverse community, which continues to attract Spring Arbor University alums and students alike.

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