



# Northeast Report

*News of Reformed University Fellowship in the Northeast*

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## **Serving Those in Need**

The first time Jesus sent His followers into ministry, He said, “Proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.” (Matthew 10:7-8) In our fall and winter newsletters we focused on preaching and evangelism – the proclaiming part of Jesus’ command. In the same breath Jesus instructed His disciples to heal the sick and cleanse the lepers.

Serving the poor, sick, and needy is not proclaiming the gospel, but service ought to accompany the gospel. Jesus fed and healed people as He traveled the Galilean countryside, and it is fitting that His followers care for the needy as we travel through life. And we hope that as the gospel grips the hearts and minds of college students, a desire wells up within them to serve those around them. Following are reports from RUF ministries in the Northeast of students reaching out to serve others.

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### **University of Pittsburgh**

This semester at Pitt RUF we have explored service opportunities with two local organizations. We have served with the Family House University Place which is located on Pitt’s campus. The Family House is an organization that provides a “home away from home” for patients and their families who are in the area for the treatment of serious illness. We had the opportunity to buy and prepare a pizza dinner for the patient’s families who were returning from visiting hours at the hospital. After the dinner we had the opportunity to hang out and talk with some of the families. I learned that many of the patients were in Pittsburgh for lung transplants, and that people had come from all over the country to receive treatment here in Pittsburgh. I was encouraged from hearing many stories about successful transplants and recoveries. Overall the Family House provided a nice opportunity to encourage and be encouraged by people who would otherwise be strangers here in Pittsburgh. It was really great to be able to contribute in a small way to making them feel at home during their stay in Pittsburgh.

The other service opportunity we have been pursuing is with the Happy English Corner. The Happy English Corner is an arm of the local Pittsburgh Chinese Church

Oakland (PCCO). I have been serving as a speaking assistant with the Happy English Corner occasionally since last fall. The purpose of the group is to provide English Speaking Assistants to international visiting scholars, students and their families. As speaking assistants we practice English and get to build relationships with the people who come. Every week we have a new cultural topic to speak about, such as family, banking or holidays, and part of the conversation is related to the Bible. So we get to learn about Chinese culture and get to share about America and our faith. The purpose of the Happy English Corner is ultimately to build relationships with the attendees and get some of them connected to the PCCO. It’s been great to be able to meet and get to know some of the regular attendees, and there always seem to be new faces every time I go!

Overall I’ve been really blessed to have been able to serve with both organizations, it was nice to be able to be a part of welcoming these visitors to Oakland. The mission of both organizations is partly to welcome people to the community, and I think that it’s been a great way to serve our campus. *Chris Williams, junior at University of Pittsburgh*

Following are pictures from Pitt RUF’s spring break service project. We served the homeless and hungry, while getting a fair understanding of the needs of the city through serving with about 10 different organizations. *Derek Bates, Campus Minister at University of Pittsburgh*



The Pitt team in front of Nashville Cares, an AIDS prevention and care facility



Working at Hands on Nashville, an urban farm



Hands on Nashville provides food for local non-profits

### University of Connecticut

One of the challenges of ministry on a college campus is that the campus separates our students from other spheres of life where God is at work. For this reason, I'm excited to take our students down to New Haven and partner with a local church to serve in one of the most impoverished neighborhoods in the Northeast, "The Hill" in New Haven, CT. In addition to various service projects that day, we'll also get the chance to hear from a local pastor about what it's like to minister in the inner city. *Lucas Dourado, Campus Minister at University of Connecticut*

### Brown University and Rhode Island School of Design

Love In Action (LIA, for short) is the community service arm of RUFBrownRISD. We tutor Providence inner-city youth Saturday mornings in basic English and math. I'm doing it because I love the kids. I can help them with math and English, but I've also truly benefited from getting to see their vibrant personalities and being a small part of their lives. When I started tutoring in LIA as a RISD sophomore last year, I was paired with Jerryline who

was in the 7th grade. We immediately hit it off. She and I were able to establish a really good connection and friendship, and so I knew I wanted to continue with LIA for the rest of my time at RISD.

When the opportunity came to me to lead the program this year (my junior year) I was immediately interested. The kids we tutor are so great, it's a great way to serve in the city of Providence. I am the leader for LIA now. As the leader, I'm less able to tutor Jerryline one-on-one, but Jerryline and I are still good friends. I arrive early on Saturday mornings, well before tutoring starts, so that I can prepare and be there for the kids and our college student tutors from the first moment they all arrive. Of course, leading has its challenges as well. We've struggled keeping consistent numbers with tutors but recently have started getting them back up. I am hoping and praying we continue this momentum. And sure, it's Saturday mornings; so sometimes the kids aren't as focused and wanting to do homework, but if we can at least work on establishing trust-confidence relationships between tutors and kids, I trust it will work out for the better.

I've always been drawn to children. In the last several year, I have traveled to Haiti, Tanzania and Uganda to work with children in those places. Through those experiences, I feel that God is making it clearer and clearer that I am called to work with and serve kids. Leading Love in Action is a perfect place to continue in this work here in the US and is just as if not equally important and valued service. *Robin Hilkey, junior at Rhode Island School of Design, head of Love In Action, the community service arm of RUFBrownRISD*



Robin with two of the children in the tutoring program

## Your Connection with RUF

This is a small sample of the ways in which RUF students are serving people around them. It is the gospel which motivates them, but it is RUF which provides a context and an opportunity to act on that desire.



The money you give to support this ministry pays for campus ministers who motivate, equip, and lead students into serving others. Your prayers for students translate into works of service to the needy. Thanks for your partnership!

RUF ended 2013 in a strong financial position, thanks to the support of many generous churches and individuals. There is one campus in the Northeast which is in a deficit. If you are able to help with this campus, send me an email or letter and I will put you in touch with the campus minister.

You can make donations to our ministry here: <https://www.ruf.org/donate/> or scan this QR code →



Remember to visit our RUF Northeast website! Each week a campus minister posts some new development among our RUF ministries. Go to <http://rufnortheast.org/> or scan this code →



If you would rather receive these newsletters by email, contact us at [Northeast@ruf.org](mailto:Northeast@ruf.org).

And if you would like to receive weekly prayer requests by email, also contact us at [Northeast@ruf.org](mailto:Northeast@ruf.org).

## Focus on Michael Keller

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Now in their fifth year, Michael Keller and his wife Sara serve side-by-side on RUF's staff in New York City, raising their two young daughters while ministering to students from all five boroughs. From the Ivy League to a small Christian school, the masses at NYU to single students making their way from Queens and Brooklyn, RUF persists in being a place of rest and community for students of all backgrounds.

Michael describes himself as a “fuzzy Christian” upon entering Vanderbilt as an undergrad and, like many do, he indulged in the new freedoms afforded him as a college freshman. In his own words, he went crazy. But it was the RUF campus minister's faithful pursuit and the upperclassmen's friendship that drew Michael into RUF's community. His minister was honest in challenging him and pointed out the inconsistency with which he opposed Christianity. Late in his freshman fall Michael became a Christian and spent his remaining time in RUF growing and strengthening this newfound faith.

After Vanderbilt, Michael and Sara married, moving back to New York City where he briefly interned with a charismatic church. They soon moved to Massachusetts where Michael earned his M.Div. from Gordon-Conwell, while Sara earned her Ed.M. at Harvard. But it was not long before the Kellers made the move back to Manhattan. Having loved RUF during their own undergrad days, they were excited to start a ministry in the city. After lots of prayer and months of intensive fundraising, RUF was off the ground.

Loosely inspired by fellowships Michael had observed in Oxford and Cambridge, RUF began meeting over meals after Sunday worship services at Redeemer Presbyterian Church. The Kellers knew this would help to quickly grow a sizeable group and provide a more intentional community for the students who were attending church services, but not getting more involved. Throughout these early years Sunday Conversations served as the primary gathering tool, offering apologetic talks that attracted the confused and skeptical while also challenging and growing the more established believers.

From these Sunday Conversations grew a robust and diverse ministry. Striking an important balance, RUF offers a place to rest from an often cold and isolating city, while intentionally growing a deep affection for New York and its inhabitants. This vision is reflected in the ministry's motto: “Hear about faith. Talk about doubt. Engage the city.” As many students work one or more jobs in addition to their academic work, downtime is a rarity. While this poses a challenge to gathering people, students in the city learn early the importance of making friendship and community a top priority. Spontaneity is replaced with intentionality, which students find to be just as sweet.

Now in its fifth year, RUF is planning for the future. This summer Columbia University will have its own RUF, with plans for NYU to follow soon. The hope is that these campus specific ministries will reach new students who would not otherwise look beyond the campus for Christian fellowship. The ministries will remain closely connected to one another through retreats and citywide social activities.

In February RUF in New York joined other RUFs for the New England Winter Conference. One student, the child

of PCA missionaries, brought a non-Christian friend from school. Growing up outside the U.S., this friend had little-to-no exposure to Christianity and has had very little context for understanding the teachings at RUF. But having been loved and welcomed into this new group of friends, she decided to come to Newport. Caught off-guard during a seminar on “Work and Rest,” the student later approached Michael and her friend saying, “I think I get what grace is. I think I might be a Christian.”

It is sweet moments like this that encourage Michael and Sara in the work God is doing through RUF. Students raised in the church learn to ask tough questions and develop a deeper understanding of their faith. And those who have never picked up the Bible come to love the word of God, seeing it as the lifesaving truth that it is. They are seeing people’s lives transformed by the gospel and the Kellers, along with students, are learning what it means to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

– by Dana Skerry

## Spring Reflections

“Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” *Matthew 25:41*



Whoever thinks that Jesus is calm and comforting compared to the God of the Old Testament has forgotten the parable of the sheep and the goats. Jesus dispels any nonsense about blind tolerance and bland acceptance by declaring that He will separate people – and that separation is not benign. One group will be richly blessed, and one will be fiercely cursed. The difference is in how they served the needy about them.

It is essential for us to grasp the connection between the gospel and our destiny. In this passage Jesus draws a direct connection between serving others and eternal blessing – and we would do well not to blunt the impact of Jesus’ words. But we would be misled if we did not remember that Jesus also declared that the Kingdom of God is open to those who believe in Him. This means that all who do truly believe in Jesus also serve other people.

The gospel is not a command, but a promise. It is a promise of salvation, of deliverance from sin, of friendship with God, of union with Christ, of blessedness now and forever. It is also a promise of sanctification, of fruitfulness, of a life of good works. Service to others is not so much a command (although it *is* a command) as a promise that we will be transformed. Jesus comes to us in our hatefulness and selfishness, and calls us to follow Him. And as He gives us faith to follow, we find ourselves also given love for others and a desire to serve. We become people who feed the hungry and clothe the poor.

If by chance you find yourself hateful and selfish, perhaps you are a goat, and subject to the curse of Jesus. Jesus calls you to renounce your former life and follow Him. He promises to transform you into a loving and caring person, and subject to the blessings of His Kingdom. If you find yourself loving Jesus weakly and serving others poorly, rejoice that God is at work in you! Wait patiently as the promises of Jesus are fulfilled in you in His time. Hear the words of Jesus,

“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” *Matthew 25:34*

*David Green*



Pitt RUF spring break mission team

