

VOLUNTEER CONNECTION

Ramkrishna Vedanta Society

“Serving UMD is the best thing that ever happened to this organization.”

On May 5, 2013, the Ramkrishna Vedanta Society of North Carolina served lunch for the first time and has continued to do so every other month on the first Sunday. Last Thanksgiving, they wanted to help, but UMD already had groups booked to serve the holiday meals. Instead, their organizer, Dr. Kalyan K. Ghosh, found a way to make a major gift in support of UMD’s mission. Sending a letter to the 150 members on their website, donations began immediately coming in. Kalyan delivered a check to UMD for \$950 and said that if more didn’t come in to make it “an even \$1,000” the Society would make up the difference. One more \$50 donation arrived, and Kalyan delivered on his promise. The Society wrote a check for the remaining \$50.

The Ramkrishna Vedanta Society of North Carolina is dedicated to the practice and propagation of the ideals of Vedanta--one of the six orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy. Like many faith traditions, they emphasize helping the poor. 2014 marks the 150th birthday anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, the world famous Hindu monk who first brought the teachings of Vedanta to the US and Western world. Kalyan says Vivekananda is probably the most important person in the spiritual history of India. Vivekananda’s mantra was “to serve God, you must serve the poor.” Kalyan believed that to truly celebrate Vivekananda’s life, the Ramkrishna Vedanta Society of North Carolina needed to do something for this community to help our poor and needy neighbors. Searching the internet Kalyan found UMD. He saw the multiple things UMD does and the diversity of services provided. He also saw that you don’t have to spend a lot of money to help, to serve. He contacted UMD, learned what opportunities were available for a group, and shared this with the roughly 150 members. “The response was immediate and positive and people were ecstatic about getting involved.” So began a powerful partnership between UMD and the Society.



Born in a small village in West Bengal, India, and raised in a lower middle class family, Kalyan’s parents believed in education. An educator all his life, Kalyan came to the United States in 1966, has a PhD, and was the President of Worcester State University for 12 years. In 1973, he and his wife moved to Chapel Hill, NC for retirement.

Kalyan describes the society members as mostly upper-middle-class Indians who had never closely observed poverty in the United States until getting involved with UMD. He believes that all of us are God’s children but some aren’t as lucky as others. “Vivekananda believed you need to help these poor people, the people less fortunate than you...seeing the people sitting on the side of the road at UMD, and coming into lunch, makes us feel good to serve. *We feel good in our souls.*” Through Kalyan’s work and the dedication of the Ramkrishna Vedanta Society of North Carolina, they found another way to both celebrate Vivekananda’s life and support UMD. The society staged a laser light show on the life and work of Vivekananda this past spring. The Duke Center for Performing Arts auditorium in Raleigh was packed with dignitaries and Triangle residents. And a part of the proceeds was donated to UMD—a major gift to help our poor and needy neighbors.

