On a travel site online, you can find “12 things you most definitely didn’t know about Sioux Falls,” and number 11 is that “Sioux Falls has its eye on the rest of the world.”

How? You might ask. Well, spend an hour with members Eric and Stefanie Kagone and find out about EROS, the Earth Resources Observation and Science Center, operated by the U.S. Geological Survey. On their website, it says: “Since 1972, EROS has worked to map, monitor, and analyze land changes across our nation and around the world.”

Those words may sound like a bunch of word salad, but it was in this heady environment that Eric and Stefanie met, Eric in IT and Stefanie in Science. Eric can tell you about those Google Earth maps and Stefanie can tell you how the U.S. government checks with her team to verify that a third-world country really needs food aid depending on rainfall and other socio-economic conditions that could lead to a famine.

Eric was born in Kenya and came to the U.S. at age 16 as an exchange student to DeKalb, Illinois. After that school year, he went back to Kenya for more schooling, and then returned to the U.S. for more education at USF. He remembers taking a PE course from Sherry Halleen. He has two children, David and Peris, from a previous marriage. Both children were baptized by Pastor Val. Now young adults, David and Peris live in their own places in Sioux Falls.

Stefanie was born in Germany. She came to the U.S. at age 25 when she was hired by EROS as a “visiting scientist.” Ever since, she has worked on the same drought monitoring project and has had the same boss. The hardest thing at the time she moved here was leaving family and friends behind. But she says, “Then you make new friends.”

Eric and Stefanie have two daughters, Maya going into first grade and Hanna, Kindergarten. The girls love our Sunday School and like learning how to pray and drawing pictures about what they learn from Alisa and Mattie. Eric and Stefanie enjoy gardening together, and the family likes to go along when Eric golfs.

When asked what they wished for in our church, Stefanie wishes she could participate more but she works full time and travels abroad for work. Eric would like to be known as someone who is approachable and ready to help. “Ask me for anything,” he says. He enjoys genuine conversations, no fluff for him, and tries to live his life by example, accepting that we all have imperfections.

Eric and Stefanie are most visible when he operates our livestream camera two Sundays a month, and Stefanie sits nearby because “the girls like to watch their Dad.”

Be ready for an enriching multicultural conversation when you talk with this family!