

Winter 2025

LIGHT YEARS



BEYOND THE SHALLOW

Roy is a deeply thoughtful student who started out as a philosophy major here at U of M. He also plays accordion, and occasionally plays it in worship. His love of music, especially Irish music, means that changing to the BFA in music program ultimately made a lot of sense to him.

Roy grew up in a more conservative Christian tradition that takes a literalist view of the Bible. “When I arrived at Michigan,” he says, “I was becoming politically aware and going through this spiritual deconstruction that had started junior year of high school. There was a lot of turmoil in my first couple of years of college.”

Finding a community where he could ask real, deep questions was important to Roy. “A lot of people have a rough year their first year,” he says, “and that was my experience. I got into a routine of coming on Wednesdays and Sundays, and this became my community.”

During Wednesday night Faith & conversations, undergrads get into deep conversations as they explore how various topics intersect with their faith lives. This small group is pretty consistent, so students build trust with each other and feel they can bring whatever they’re wrestling with to the group. “We have conversations that go beyond the shallow,” Roy says, “which you’re not really going to find in most secular environments. The individual people, too, are people I enjoy being around and I have friendships with.”

On a particular Wednesday night in winter, Roy was in the midst of intense philosophical ponderings about consciousness and the external world. “There was the catharsis,” Roy says, “of being able to talk about all this random philosophy stuff with people who were able to hear what I was saying and just be there. I think it was apparent to folks that I was going through something big at that moment, and I wasn’t being excluded for my questions. In the moment, the armor slipped just a little bit - not fully - but I think it was apparent that I wasn’t in the best place, and the lack of judgement, and their ability to listen, were really important in making me feel supported.”

“Ultimately,” Roy says, “I felt cared for in a moment when I was wondering about the nature of pretty much everything.”



“They shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.” - Jeremiah 17:8

ROOTED IN ANCIENT FAITH

Pastor Elizabeth Friedman

Winter has settled in, and this is the time of year when campus ministry turns deeper and more contemplative. We are no longer frantically meeting new students and coordinating and carrying out the exhausting schedule of opening events and tabling at information fairs; our community has entered into its rhythm for this school year, and now is the time for deepening conversations as we engage with the topics that really matter.

During college, students move from the faith of their parents to the faith they will claim as adults. It's a fertile time of questions, doubts, and challenges - and for those who have grown up in the church, it's also a time of sorting through which aspects of faith feel authentic, and which seem dissonant.

Openness is a key component of an adult faith, and being rooted in ancient tradition helps the faithful feel they can reach out and explore the ways in which God is acting in the world, and in their lives, without losing their grounding. Some of our students come to us having heard that they must choose between science and faith, or between their faith and their God-breathed identity. Learning to integrate what once seemed to be disparate parts of themselves and their understanding of the world, students engage more deeply with conversations and religious practices that expand their concept of who God is.

Lord of Light Lutheran Church and Campus Ministry is a place where we encourage deep, sometimes difficult conversations, where questions are honored, and where we admit we don't always have the answers. Such deep engagement is rare in a world that craves simplicity; but God is much bigger than the boxes we would like to put God in.

Winter is a time when, at least in this part of the world, everything seems dormant. It's a time for reflection, for slowing down, for integrating. But it's also a time when roots are stretching and growing below the surface as they prepare for spring.

Thank you so much for your continued care of and participation in this ministry, as we form faithful servants for the sake of the world. We are so grateful for you!

Blessings,



Pastor Elizabeth



LCM student leaders Adaeze, Addie, and Dominique
with Pastor Elizabeth

You might notice that our annual list of donors is missing from this newsletter. **We want you to know how grateful we are to our donors**, and we also want to be good stewards of the gifts you have given us by filling these pages with stories that show you how your gift matters.



LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE

Sierra is a senior in biomedical engineering. She's from the Upper Peninsula, loves nature, and enjoys doing yoga. "I feel like I've always been interested in biology," she says, "and I've always liked the idea of being able to help people get better if they're sick. Creating life-saving technologies is a way I can really improve people's lives."

When Sierra was growing up, faith and church were a big part of her life, and she looked forward to attending Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp every summer. In college, she didn't wind up finding a community right away, and felt she was missing something. During her sophomore year, she set out to look for a church and found Lord of Light and LCM. "There are a lot of pastors in my family," she says, "and I feel like I've always been surrounded by faith. It's been very central to my family, even at points when we weren't as active in church."

On her first Sunday at Lord of Light and LCM, Sierra says that she noticed the welcoming atmosphere. "I could just see how loving and open it was - you could tell by how people were acting. I really enjoyed the worship service and the community, and I knew I wanted to continue coming to this place. Now, I really appreciate having a faith community to journey with me in this phase of my life in college."

Sierra has found Sunday dinners to be really important for her. "I feel like dinner draws people in to be a little more social," she says. "I'm not the most outgoing, and I feel like if we didn't have a meal together, I wouldn't talk to as many people. It would have taken me longer to open up."

For Sierra, Lord of Light and LCM's stance as an LGBTQIA+-affirming community is significant. "It's important to me to be in an open and affirming congregation. That love and acceptance of all people is something I hold as very valuable, and it's just the type of Christian that I want to be."

FAITH IS A PRACTICE

Steven is a Ph.D. candidate in French Literature and is excited about introducing people to the language he loves. “When you learn about other cultures, you know yourself better,” he says. “I deeply believe that learning a language is part of living a fuller life and having broader horizons. I tell students that you might do this for work, or you might do this because it brings you joy; but French is something you can have for your whole life.”

When he moved to Ann Arbor to start his program, Steven knew that Lord of Light Lutheran Church and Campus Ministry was right around the corner. But, he says, “I was kind of shy to come. I was invited by Pastor Elizabeth when the church was having a taco truck party during my second week here.” Now, Steven is very involved in various aspects of the community’s ministry, including as part of our young adult group, Gather, the altar guild, and the team that runs the sound system. “A big game-changer for me was when another LoL member, Ruth, invited me to get involved with the CROP Walk,” he says. Steven now spearheads LoL/LCM’s involvement in the annual event to fund hunger programs around the world through Church World Service.

“Faith has always been in my life in one way or another,” Steven says. A lifelong Lutheran, Steven was baptized on Christmas day, a month after he was born. He then attended Concordia College in Moorhead, MN, and found churches to attend while he was studying in France. Lord of Light feels like the right place for him at this stage in his faith journey. “I’m asking these questions about who I am, what I’m doing, and what’s next,” he says. “This church pushes me to be a kinder and gentler person. Regularly attending church and being with people here helps me resist knee-jerk reactions, and it gives me the tools to meet the challenges of life - whether that challenge is about something or about

someone. It’s a reminder of how I can choose to face life’s challenges with a measure of trust and peace.”

Steven remembers a pastor in high school saying, “If you’re too busy for church, you’re too busy,” and he has taken that advice to heart. “Obviously,” he says, “sometimes things get in the way, but I try not to miss because I feel the difference if I’m not here. There are parallels to fitness: Some days you don’t have a lot to give, but you show up anyway. There’s a benefit even if you don’t feel like it. Faith is a practice, not something that’s always going to go perfectly, and there’s always room for improvement or learning.”

Lord of Light is a church with a strong musical tradition, and for Steven, traditional liturgical worship and communal singing make him feel connected to his faith. “There are times when the organ swells or people harmonize,” he says, “and I find that amazing. It’s something that is rarer and rarer; people don’t really sing together anymore. There’s something so beautiful about voices lifting up together. I value the ancientness of traditional worship, and seeing ourselves as part of this ancient lineage. I can remember people in my own past who aren’t here anymore, who informed my faith and who loved me - and that’s really powerful to me.”

