

Fall 2024

LIGHT YEARS



BECAUSE YOU'RE YOU

Dominique is a junior double-majoring in Arts and Ideas in the Humanities and Psychology at the Residential College at the University of Michigan. She's excited that she gets to combine so many things she loves into her time here. "It's fun," she says, "because when it came to my major, I wanted to do everything I like. Even though it's hard to do it all, I actually am getting to do everything I want!"

Growing up, Dominique attended a large non-denominational congregation, but it was so big she felt lost there. "It was nice to have a group," she says, "but I never knew whether I actually fit in there. I didn't even feel like they would care if I left. We did dodgeball and got custom t-shirts with our last names on them, but they didn't even spell my last name right. I just didn't feel known."

She also felt like it was really hard to fit in as a teenager, even in her youth group. "Adolescence feels so much like you're always wondering whether you're wanted in different spaces," she said. "In groups, I didn't know if I was really engaging with the material or trying to engage because I was supposed to. A lot of the rhetoric I heard growing up was all or nothing - like if you don't completely subscribe to this ideology or believe all of these things, you're hopeless." And that made it really hard for her to have authentic conversations about faith.

Midway through her freshman year, Dominique found her way to Lord of Light and the Lutheran Campus Ministry at U of M. "I feel like doubt had become very all-consuming," she shared. "I know now that it's part of my faith journey, and my world is wider now. I still have a lot of questions, and I'm still exploring, but I feel like being a Christian makes the most sense to me."

Perhaps even more importantly, Dominique feels seen and known. "I don't have to question whether I'm wanted here," she says. "I've never felt like I'm not wanted. I don't feel like a burden

(CONTINUED ON P. 3)



“Whoever welcomes me welcomes not me, but the one who sent me.” - Mark 9:37b

AUTHENTIC BELONGING

Pastor Elizabeth Friedman

A student was biking by a couple of weeks ago as I was changing the words on our sign, and said, “Inclusive community - does that mean anyone can come?” I said, “Of course!” and then I told him about our worship times, and that we eat dinner together after services. That student has since shown up every Sunday and is looking for other ways to get involved. As someone who grew up in church and who feels comfortable in these spaces, it’s easy to forget that no matter how much we try to make sure our signs convey that welcome, a personal invitation and reassurance is often needed, too.

Have you ever been to the home of someone who is just incredibly gifted at hosting? The kind of place where you know your presence is cherished, the kind of place where you feel not so much like a guest but right at home?

So often, our churches strive to make newcomers feel like welcome guests - and while that is admirable, we know in campus ministry that it’s even more important to help our new folks feel right at home. After just having left any support networks they had at home, they are now looking to form new bonds and find new, trustworthy communities where they can be themselves.

Our new students are looking for a place they can call home while they’re here. That means not just being served, but becoming an integral part of the community and having a sense of ownership in that community. This also means the community needs to be open to their new ideas, suggestions, and things they would like to prioritize.

Belonging is an essential part of being human, and it’s part of the antidote to the loneliness epidemic that is plaguing our young adult and adolescent communities. Ranked right behind secure housing, food, and sleep, belonging is something we all need in order to thrive. But our social patterns that lift up independence rather than interdependence, as well as technology that gives us a breadth of relationships without depth, can leave us feeling like there’s nowhere we belong.

Lord of Light Lutheran Church and Campus Ministry is a place where we strive to create an

authentic sense of belonging that echoes the welcome we are called to extend in Jesus’ name. Your generosity ensures that our community members have a place where they know they matter, and where they have people who care about them. Thank you for all the ways you help us create a sense of belonging and genuine welcome in this community!

Blessings,

Rev. Stephen Fried



LoL/LCM Community members Pastor Elizabeth, Rachel, Dayle, Tom, and Zane after the 2024 Ragnar, where we helped raise \$110,000 for Living Water Ministries, our local ELCA camp!

BECAUSE YOU'RE YOU (cont'd from p. 1)

or that I shouldn't be in this space. It feels like a space where I can be myself without people wondering why I'm there. I feel like it's a space where I belong, and I want to share that same feeling with other people."

Dominique feels like she found Lord of Light at the perfect time in her life, and she feels more confident in who she is, knowing she's loved by God and by her community. She is a student leader, and now she's sharing that sense of belonging with others. "Social space isn't a finite resource," she says, "but in so many spaces it feels that way. Here, it doesn't feel like that. I feel like I'm allowed to take up the space I need to be me."

Dominique knows Lord of Light really cares about each individual person, and isn't just looking to make the community bigger. "We want you here," she says, "not just because you're another 'you,' but because you're you!"



YODER SCHOLARSHIP AWARDED TO ADAEZE UZOIJE

I am extremely honored to have received the 2024 Yoder Memorial Scholarship. As an out-of-state student who has had a difficult time navigating my way through Michigan, Lord of Light has been a safe space for me to both better myself and my community each and every day. This scholarship will allow me to pay for my tuition as I attend the University of Michigan, allowing me to stay afloat at a challenging school while still being able to feel like myself.

Through this church, along with my involvement with the RC Players, Whole Health at the University of Michigan, and the Michigan Daily, I have been able to find closeness in those around me and walk faithfully with my peers by my side. I give thanks to my mentors Pastor Elizabeth Friedman, Dr. Nikhil Parekh, and Dr. David Brottman for leading me through difficult times and to where I am now. I'd also like to thank all of my friends who have led me through this period of my life, as I am not only lifted up by those who see ahead of me, but by those who watch my back as well. Finally, I'd like to give a special thanks to my younger sibling, who has been there for me since the beginning.

HONEST EXPLORATION

Addie is a sophomore in the Residential College, majoring in creative writing. She has always loved figuring out how things work, and that's why she feels drawn to writing: She wants to know and create the inside parts of the story. "Even when I cook," she says, "I don't follow recipes. I have to do it my own way."

When Addie arrived at the University of Michigan last year, she knew she wanted to be part of a campus ministry. Her pastor at home had given her name to Pastor Elizabeth here at Lord of Light and LCM, and so she got connected right away. The first time she showed up at church, people asked her questions to get to know her. As she started to have conversations over dinner, she felt seen and known. "Every time I came to Lord of Light," Addie says, "someone made the effort to know my name and find out more about me. Clubs can be so intimidating because there are so many of them. But campus ministry is more defined and dependable - plus, it's church. Everyone really wants you there."

Growing up, Addie went to a lot of different churches, but spent several formative years in a church that centered its theology around staying out of hell. At that congregation, she felt her doubts and questions weren't welcome. Eventually, her family wound up leaving that church and started going to a Lutheran congregation, where Addie felt like she could really begin to engage with her evolving faith.

Lord of Light has a long tradition of encouraging its community to wrestle with tough theological questions, challenges, and doubts.



"Coming here is my favorite church," Addie says. "It's designed for people like me. I think this church is the one that has encouraged me the most to ask questions and be ok with not knowing everything. Most churches I've been to have told me what to believe, but this church helps me explore. This is the church where I've felt encouraged to be the most honest."

Addie is a student leader now, and she's giving new students the same gift she received when she arrived: Belonging. "I'm wanted here," she says, "and I'm encouraged to participate. People reach out to you and make a personal connection to you. In other groups, people come and go. Here, it feels good to be cared about, to be remembered."



CONGRATULATIONS, GRADUATES!



Ethan Magley

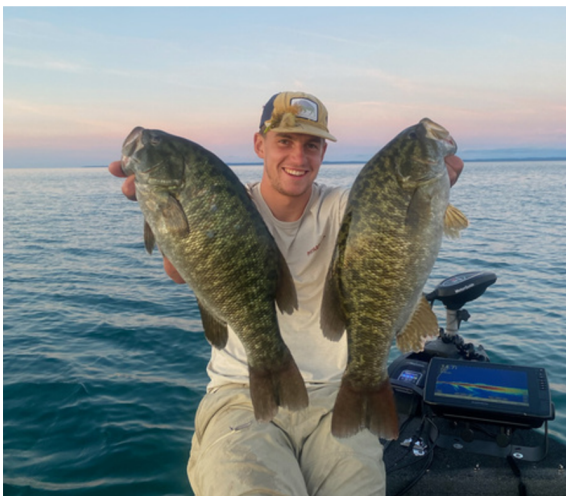
B.A., English; B.A., Education

I graduated with majors in English and Education. In my time with campus ministry, I found it to be an amazing way to connect to others and God. It was an incredibly inclusive community. In the coming months, I'll be getting settled into my own classroom! I'll be teaching 8th grade English Language Arts in the Baltimore area.

Isabella Bonnewit

B.S., Biology, Health and Society,
B.S., Social Theory and Practice

I graduated with majors in Biology, Health and Society, and Social Theory and Practice. This fall, I'll be going to grad school studying public health at Johns Hopkins University. I'm so grateful for my time at Lord of Light and LCM, and for all of the folks I met.



Will Tschetter

B.S., Earth and Environmental
Sciences

After graduating from undergrad, I started my Master's program at U of M's School of Ecology and Sustainability in Ecological Sciences and Management. LCM has been instrumental in providing me with a community I can lean on. Whether it's on the court or in the classroom, I can always rely on my LCM family to be there for me when I step into worship and fellowship dinners.



Anna Scheck B.S., Earth and Environmental Sciences

Throughout my four years at the University of Michigan, Lord of Light became my home. Coming into college, I knew LCM would be a part of my weekly routine because of my background being a pastor's-kid-who-goes-to-church-every-Sunday-no-exceptions.

It was incredibly refreshing to have a faith community that felt fully mine, as I was celebrated and valued so genuinely here. I made space for campus ministry to be a part of my college experience because of the fantastic community I found here. I attribute my comfortability with questioning my faith to the friends I've found through LCM. As a student leader during my junior and senior years, I was able to take a proactive role in connecting other students to the church home I had come to love.

In May, I graduated with my BS in Earth and Environmental Sciences with a minor in Geology.

This summer I've worked at Camp Luther in northeast Ohio as a cook, which has been a delightful change of pace from college life, as my biggest concern was flipping 300 pancakes before the breakfast bell rang. Now I am at home in Hastings, MI, figuring out what comes next for me now that I have escaped the rat race of academia. So far, I've gotten my temporary driving permit (again) and am working on my driving (let's hope I pass this time around!). Blessings to all on campus during the excitement of the start of fall semester, as I will miss being there to witness it.

MY PRESENCE IS ENOUGH

Maddie is a senior in the School of Information, studying User Experience Design. She's excited to start her Master's degree here at U of M next year. "I'm really interested in technology and using technology for social good," she says. "I started out studying computer science, but I didn't feel like I got to have the influence I wanted to have in the design of the product. Design is such a people-focused field, and I love interacting with people. My field combines art and design with research and data skills."

Maddie grew up in LGBTQIA+-affirming ELCA churches, and it was really important to her to find a similar space when she arrived at U of M. "When I first came to Michigan," she says, "I was a remote student during quarantine. I watched a Zoom about the different faith communities at Michigan, and Lord of Light fit what I was looking for. I came once or twice as the pandemic started to lift, and then a couple of years later I started coming consistently."

It was important to Maddie to find friends who shared her values. "Before Lord of Light and LCM, I never really had friends who were Christian," she says. "So this was kind of my first experience having friends who have shared spiritual and religious beliefs. And, before I came to LCM, I didn't have many queer friends. Coming here has been important in helping me find my place in community and finding friends who support me as I continue to understand my own queerness. I wanted to come at first because church communities are important to me, and I've made a lot of friends here. Now I want to keep coming back so I can see my friends."

Between PowerPoint nights where Maddie has been able to share her unabashed love of the Disney Character Lightning McQueen and dance parties after Wednesday night Faith & conversations, Maddie has found a place where she can be herself. As a student leader and vice president of the church council, Maddie is working to make sure other students feel the same support, care, and acceptance she has found here. "I'm thankful that somebody has my back," she says, "and that was really important when I was starting out on my own in college. It felt good to know that if something happened or there was an emergency, people would be there - even if it was something small. We kind of have a pact to take care of each other. I've gained a lot of self-confidence at LCM because I have been told and shown here repeatedly that who I am is enough. In other spaces in my life, it's all about what you can bring to the table, what you can produce and contribute, and here I know that just my presence is enough."



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