

Spring 2025

LIGHT YEARS



FRIENDS WHO ARE LIKE FAMILY

Rona is an international graduate student from Taiwan, here to study survey methodology and data science. She has a particular heart for aesthetics, art, philosophy, and music, and she shares her varied interests every week on her radio show, “Two Heads with Bias,” on WCBN-FM, 88.3 Ann Arbor, the university’s station.

Rona first found out about Lord of Light and the Lutheran Campus Ministry at U of M at the graduate student involvement fair. She was new in the country and looking for a community. “They had lemonade,” she says, “and they seemed so nice! I tried out the service, which is definitely at the best time - 5pm. And I really loved the dinner and the people.”

Rona’s smile and laugh are captivating, and she often brings friends along to church. “I genuinely enjoy my time at LoL. I will prioritize coming to church, and I’ll involve my friends. It’s like taking your friends to your favorite café. The food, the atmosphere, the people - they’re just so nice! I don’t feel obligated to attend, but I genuinely want to invite people to come with me because I want to share this place with people.”

Finding a community with a sense of calm here, in a new country, was really important for Rona. “When I was in Taiwan, I always went to a small Daoist temple in the mountains. In this hectic life, I have been looking for somewhere to be able to have some tranquility and peace. When I came here, I was worried I wouldn’t be able to find a place where I could have that kind of spiritual connection and comfort again. I may not be hiking a mountain, but when I walk to church, and when we pray and sing together, I find a similar connection. It’s a source of blessing. We can listen and reflect on what’s going on, and we can have dinner together with friends who are like family.”

LoL/LCM’s intergenerational community is a bonus for Rona. “I enjoy talking with people from different perspectives and learning from them,” she says. One of LoL’s “grown-up” members, Kathy, offered a cooking class to Rona and a few other graduate students. “Kathy picked a recipe and taught us how to do it, and gave us ‘hacks.’ The best part of being a human being is experiencing and learning new things. If you’re open-minded, you will always find something new you can learn.”

Rona feels like LoL/LCM is different from other Christian communities she has experienced. “I feel like this church is so unique,” she says. “People are open-minded here and care about me as a person. It’s about love. I feel like that’s the real Christian thing: God loves everyone. You don’t have to be Christian, or American, or white, to be part of this community, and that’s real equity. That’s real love.”



“The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the stranger as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.” - Leviticus 19:34

SEEKING BELONGING

Pastor Elizabeth Friedman

When was the last time you found you had to meet all new people and form a brand-new community? In college? When you moved for a job? When you retired?

Moving is scary, and it means leaving a community you’ve invested in, and which has invested in you. Sometimes, it’s exciting. But even when it’s exciting, it can seem daunting to have to figure out how to make meaningful connections and establish trust with people you’ve never met.

The three graduate students featured in this newsletter all had to find ways to create meaningful connections in a brand-new community, and found many of those connections here at Lord of Light and LCM.

This term, we have found a lot of ways to explore our faith deeply together. In January and February, we convened weekly discussions about the so-called “clobber” verses, the texts which have routinely been used to justify the exclusion of LGBTQIA+ Christians from life in the church. We participated in the annual ecumenical Ash Wednesday service, and several students and community members attended together. Throughout Lent, we have been engaging in weekly Wednesday night Bible studies around generosity. We have also gotten groups together to visit seniors in a facility for those living with dementia, to play music and chat. Sunday worship continues to be our community anchor, with dinner gratefully provided by community members and partner churches. At the center of all of this activity, we find the importance of building up the body of Christ, and forming community in the image of God.

The welcome we extend, every year and every day, to those who are seeking hospitality and belonging on campus and in our wider communities, is our Christian mandate. In this time of deep division, may we continue to seek peace and dignity in our shared humanity.



Above: After Ash Wednesday services: Pastor Elizabeth, Maddie, Emily, Elizabeth, and Anna

Right: Helena, Dominique, and Steven perform for Music for Dementia

Pastor Elizabeth
Pastor Elizabeth





CONNECTION WITH OUR PAST

Rachel is a Ph.D. candidate in mechanical engineering who has once held uranium (in a crucible, she says, not in her hand). She's also a pastor's kid and was a camp counselor at Camp Mowana in Ohio, and she is signed up to run her fourth 200-mile relay race, the Ragnar, with the LCM team, to raise money for Living Water Ministries here in Michigan.

Rachel got into mechanical engineering because it's a broad field. Her work intersects with chemistry, which she loves. Her current work is on capturing carbon dioxide from ocean water, which she says is important because "when we release it into the air, it gets into the water and acidifies it, which kills different species. It dissolves calcium carbonate, which is what shells are made of - so that means any corals or animals with shells are at risk." Rachel is thinking about starting up a company to make carbon capture filters for inside homes, so people could have cleaner air when it wasn't possible to open a window - during a wildfire, for instance.

When Rachel arrived in Ann Arbor, she Googled Lutheran churches and found that Lord of Light was using Holden Evening Prayer during the summer. "It's got a nice mix of tradition rooted in modern community," she says. "I like the evening service - it feels like a way I can have my faith that's my own. I think contemplation and calm is important to me in church, and it feels like we can connect to our past. We don't have to totally separate ourselves from the way things were done before in order to own our faith. When you come to Communion, you're with all the saints, living and dead, and that's a powerful connection."

Before arriving at Michigan in fall of 2021, Rachel was a Fulbright scholar in Cambodia. "I went to church once over that whole 7-month timeframe," she says. "It was a Catholic church, and they had statues of Jesus washing the disciples' feet, but they were in a Buddhist style of art. It made me think about how we engage authentically with other cultures." In Cambodia, Rachel encountered a Christianity that was intent on aggressive conversion, including a megachurch with a wakeboard facility where you could practice surfing. "There was a really stark contrast," she says, "between the churches in Cambodia that to me were not really about Jesus, and traditional Buddhism, which people have kind of turned away from. There's a lot of conversion culture; how do you negotiate your identity as a Christian when you're constantly having to say, 'but I'm not that kind of Christian?' I really appreciated coming to Michigan and finding this community that lives faithfully into our own tradition while embracing modern relationships and respect for other traditions."

Starting up a doctoral program in a new place meant finding community all over again. Having a mixed, intergenerational community at Lord of Light and LCM was important for Rachel. "Grad school is a lot of work," Rachel says, "and having a consistent community in grad school is hard. LCM has provided me with a community and consistent events. I have to eat alone a lot, but knowing I have people who I can eat dinner with on Sundays, and that I can talk with people in different age groups, is really important. It makes me feel connected."

PAY IT FORWARD

Dayle is a Master's student in Higher Education who loves backpacking and has raised monarchs their whole life, probably 200-300 from eggs. Caring for others is just part of who they are, and their intention of shepherding students through their time in college is part of that care. "There were people who were really influential for me when I was in college," Dayle says. "I want to pay it forward, and help fix systemic problems."

Dayle grew up in the church, and says that those communities felt supportive at the time but wound up not being particularly good environments. "When I came out," Dayle says, "I had to completely leave the churches I was part of, and I swore I would never go back; I didn't want any part of 'loving Christian community' that didn't want all of me."

But, after arriving in Ann Arbor, Dayle found that they didn't know anyone in their brand-new community and felt isolated. "The way I knew how to build community," Dayle says, "was through church." Dayle had seen some of Lord of Light's flyers around campus sporting the Reconciling in Christ (RIC) symbol, advertising evening worship and free dinner, and the slogan, "Inclusive Community. (For Real)."

"I told myself, 'I can sit through a church service for dinner.'" Dayle says. "I'll give this a try, and if they're not cool, then I'll just never go back." The rainbow was encouraging, and the evening worship was huge. I would not have gone if it had been a morning thing."

Dayle notes that, on that first Sunday, the liturgy was really important to them. "More recently, I'd come out of contemporary Evangelical spaces," Dayle says, "and the liturgy reminded me of summer camp. I'd worked at a Lutheran summer camp, and there was something familiar and refreshing to me about the liturgy. I felt connected to roots and a new connection to growth. It felt like an important thing I could hang on to. And then, the food was so good, and I met people who became really important to me."



It may have been the food, the evening worship, and the publicly affirming stance of the community that drew Dayle in, but it's the deep friendships and supportive environment that have led to Lord of Light and Lutheran Campus Ministry being an important part of their life, as well as Dayle's increasing leadership at LoL/LCM, as a delegate to synod assembly, and as a synodically elected delegate to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly. Every week, Dayle finds Sunday worship and dinner are important ways to connect with God and with a community that truly values and cares about them. "Worship is a really good way to wind down my weekend and start my week," Dayle says. "It's really reflective. This is my set-aside time to ground myself after the weekends, and before the work week starts."

During our conversation, Dayle pulled out their phone and scrolled to a photo from that first Sunday, of the welcome statement and RIC symbol right there on the second page of the bulletin. "I'd experienced an affirming church before on vacation in Denver," they say, "but I didn't realize it could be a part of a community where I actually live."