

Fall 2025

## LIGHT YEARS



## CONNECTED

Helena comes from a family of engineers, so as someone who really likes science and math, she decided engineering would be a good fit for her, too. “It seemed like the natural choice,” she says. As a sophomore, she’s still deciding which branch to specialize in, but has narrowed it down to civil and nuclear.

Growing up, Helena’s family attended a Christian Reformed church near where they live, but they left after the congregation started to move in a more socially conservative direction. “Church felt performative,” Helena says, “and they kept shutting down important conversations that people were trying to have about the church’s direction. There was a lot of conflict, and I saw that the church’s priorities weren’t matching what I understood Jesus to be calling us into.”

It was Helena’s grandfather who first suggested she try Lord of Light and the Lutheran Campus Ministry when she started at the University of Michigan. “He goes to Holy Faith in Saline,” she says. “Pastor Andrea [at Holy Faith] told him to make sure to connect me because she knew I was coming to Michigan.”

Although Helena knew about Lord of Light, it took a while to show up. “I got connected at the beginning of the year,” she says, “but I was nervous to come by myself. Eventually, I realized I missed going to church, so I finally just came. The people were all really nice - it was welcoming but not overly high-pressure. Especially when I first started coming to Bible study, I felt like it was ok for me to just listen rather than actively participate - like I could try it out before getting really involved. Especially as someone who was nervous, it was good to feel like I could ease in.”

Worship has been important for Helena, too. “I really like the liturgy and the music, honestly,” Helena says. “I can’t sing to save my life, but I especially like when people sing solos or when we have instruments. It’s one of the things my parents commented on when we came here - we were doing Holden Evening Prayer, and they kept talking about how pretty it was.”

Helena has now gotten really involved, sometimes playing her cello at worship and even participating in the 200-mile Ragnar relay run for our local ELCA camp in September. She appreciates Lord of Light’s emphasis on living out what we learn each week. “Here, I feel like church helps me figure out how to apply the things we’re talking about into my everyday life, rather than just trying to get all my religion in one day. Going to church helps me think of ways to make the world a better place.”



“Give to everyone who asks of you, and if anyone takes away what is yours, do not ask for it back again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

- Luke 6:30-31

## WE BELONG TO ONE ANOTHER

Pastor Elizabeth Friedman

As soon as our children could talk, they declared that they wanted to “do it self!” That desire to be fully independent doesn’t change when you head to college, especially in a culture that holds up total independence as the gold standard of human existence. We’re not supposed to need help studying or navigating social conflict or finding our people.

There’s joy and pride in being able to do things on our own, but being stubbornly, completely independent can lead to loneliness. Generation Z is widely recognized as the loneliest generation (see: all of Google) and while some of that loneliness can be attributed to our phones and social media, some of it can also be attributed to the strong societal decline in faith community participation.

One of the things faith communities provide is a “church family”: A sense of belonging within an intergenerational context - a set of people who you see regularly, who actually care about you and want to know how you’re doing, but who aren’t necessarily blood relatives. In the Beatitudes, Jesus calls us out for our desire to be completely independent, because when we don’t need each other at all, and when we fail to respond to the needs of others, we also fail to be connected. Jesus calls us, always, into deeper relationship with one another, which requires that we risk our hearts and our very selves. Jesus tells us the truth, over and over again, that we belong to one another.

Thank you so much for your connection to this community on the campus of the University of Michigan, which strives to be a place of real belonging for students and young adults as they navigate this vulnerable period of their lives. We are grateful for you!

Blessings,



Pastor Elizabeth



Clockwise from top left: Our LCM Ragnar Run The Race Team for Living Water Ministries: Rick, Zane, Helena, Dominique, Pastor Elizabeth, Leah, Hannah, and Rachel; Our fall trip to get ice cream at Blank Slate; Sunday School 2.0, which meets on Wednesday nights.





## COMMUNITY YOU CAN LEAN ON

Emma is a senior in the Ford School of Public Policy, studying international security and intelligence. As a child, she lived in China for three years. “My experience in China basically set me on the path to studying international relations,” she says, “and then last year I decided to switch to international security.”

Growing up, Emma attended the small, all-girls K-12 Catholic school in St. Louis where her mother worked as a kindergarten teacher. “I enjoyed going to school with my mom,” she says, “and playing with the little kids after school. I was like the fun older sister.” Besides helping her mom out in the aftercare program, Emma got involved in theater, started the first all-female cybersecurity team in Missouri which competed on the national level at the Air Force’s CyberPatriot’s competition, and served in leadership on her school’s robotics team and in their ambassador program.

Emma was baptized Lutheran, and before she began attending Catholic school, Emma’s family went to a Methodist church together. As a busy leader with many interests, she wasn’t necessarily looking to get involved in a faith community right when she got to campus, but she found LoL/LCM at FestiFaith and came to services a couple of times during freshman year. “Honestly,” Emma says, “There were so many days when I was ‘churched out’ from the daily worship and social teaching curriculum at school that it wasn’t something I also wanted to do on the weekends. I was trying to figure out how it was going to be part of my life.”

But sophomore year, Emma suddenly and very unexpectedly got severely ill. She was put on life support and had to withdraw from classes while her body healed. “My high school heard about it,” Emma says, “and they ended up holding a prayer service for me. The children in the elementary school were praying rosaries for me. I got an overwhelming sense of community, and there is a part of me that believes that the prayer worked and helped. My mom would pray by my bed all day every day, and I think somehow I was soaking that up. Afterward, when I did get better, I was just so angry - like, ‘God, what? Why?’ And so it took me a while to come back to church. Even being in church would bring back memories, and I started to associate prayer with sickness and illness. Coming back to school made it possible for me to start seeing prayer enforcing the positive and not only being a reaction to the negative.”

For Emma, the community at LoL/LCM has given her a place where she can figure out her own faith and what that means for her now. “I love being around people who love talking about their faith,” she says. “I feel like I have a sturdier relationship with God than I did when I was a sophomore, but it ebbs and flows. It’s the first time I’ve gotten to choose my church, and ask not just what I can get out of this, but also what I can contribute to the conversation and give to the community.”

As someone who is fiercely independent, Emma is still learning to reach out when she needs help with something. “I’m trying to remind myself that a church isn’t just a place to worship, but it’s a community you can build together and lean on.”

# REAL CHURCH

Elli is a first-year Ph.D. student in statistics. “The way we use data affects people,” she says, “and it will continue to increasingly affect people. I want to make sure people are taken care of. I also just really love math!”

Elli's dad is the pastor at Covenant Lutheran Church in Temple, Texas, and she was looking to find a church home right when she arrived at U of M. “I was excited to join a faith community in Ann Arbor,” she says, “because I was nervous about moving to a new place.” During her undergrad at Pomona College, there wasn't a campus ministry that was a good fit. Elli had tried out a local congregation, but she didn't quite find her place there, either. “There was the pandemic, of course, and they were going through a pastoral transition,” she says. “The morning timing of the service was also tough. My friends tended to be out late on Saturday nights. That was our community time, so getting up for church in the morning was really hard to do.”

When Elli saw Lord of Light and LCM advertised on a poster on campus, and that it offered an evening service, she decided to give it a try. “I was betting with my mom whether it would be a ‘real’ church service because it was at 5pm - and the first time I went, I was proven right! I was so excited to share that we were doing the liturgy and everything!”

For Elli, finding a ministry centered around young adults has been life-giving. “I was drawn in by the immediate welcome,” she says. “It's been really exciting to live in faith with people who are my age. Church has always been a big part of my life, but it's almost never been with people my age, except for camp. Living day to day in faith with people who are around my age has been fun. Grad school can be lonely, but I feel less alone in my current position because I know there are a lot of other people who are doing the same thing.”

But, as Elli notes, it is a “real” church, too, with people from every generation. “It was an immediate point of connection for me when I showed up in a new place, knowing nobody,” she says. “I have the best conversations with [retired pastors] Stan and Roland. No matter what's going on, I know I'm going to go to church on Sunday and there will be people who will be excited to see me.”



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