

Winter 2026

LIGHT YEARS



HOMEY

Ellie is a sophomore in movement science, and is planning to be either a physical therapist or a physician's assistant. She loves to be active, and she's on the synchronized skating team here at U of M. "I love to talk to people and get to know them," she says, "and I love getting to be a meaningful part of their life. I like being proactive, so I always would rather prevent a problem than treat it. Teaching people how to strengthen their muscles and prevent injury in the first place is important to me."

Ellie was raised in an ELCA church, and her mom was her Sunday School teacher. She attended church with several of her extended family members, and she and her sister served Communion every other Sunday. She was confirmed and had her first Communion there. "People have known me there since I was little," she says. When she came to U of M, she knew she wanted to find another church that would give her that same sense of connection as her home congregation, so she looked churches up on Google, then saw flyers for Lord of Light and LCM around campus. "My faith life was something I wanted to continue," she says. "I wanted to go somewhere liturgical and somewhere serious, and it's also just a 10-minute walk from campus."

While Lord of Light and LCM feel like a seamless continuation of Ellie's faith journey, she likes the new perspective it gives her. "It's a break from the inside world of school," she says. "I go and hear the story, and I'm able to formulate my own opinions. I feel like I get to think about things from my own perspective, and I can sit with my own thoughts about what I've heard."

For Ellie, LoL/LCM's openness and intergenerational nature are strengths. "It was very homey and what I was used to in an ELCA church," she says. "I knew what was happening, and everyone was warm and welcoming, so it reminded me of home. It's a community that greets you at the door and sends you on your way into the next week."

Being far from home, having a community that knows her is really important to Ellie. "You have your outside community and your church community, and even though you only see them once a week, they know you." That sense of connection to home continues to be important as Ellie navigates her college years. During one of Ellie's first services her freshman year, we sang a hymn that had been sung at her grandmother's funeral. "Every time the tune plays, I know I'm about to cry, but it's because I feel connected to her through the music. Even though she's not here anymore, she's still with me."



“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”
- Matthew 26:40

BELOVED COMMUNITY

Pastor Elizabeth Friedman

One of the most vivid admonitions I remember hearing during the peer ministry training I received as a teenager was that I should always look at the corners of the room and see who was feeling left out. These days, the main question in ministry is almost always, “Who is not here? Why?” Now, I find my own student leaders are instinctively asking those questions, too.

In the fall, our student leaders applied for a grant and organized an event centered around disability justice entitled, “Moving From Pity to Partnership.” They invited Rev. Sarah Mayer-Flatt to lead us in conversation and to think theologically about disability. For our winter retreat, students chose to travel to Love Rising Lutheran Church in Detroit, where we were led by Rev. Michael Johnson in a conversation about racism and our faithful response to it. In both events, students engaged deeply and discovered a lot about different ways we can engage faithfully to make the world a better place.

In Matthew, an expert in the Law asks Jesus which commandment is the greatest. Jesus responds that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and love our neighbors as ourselves. He goes on to say, “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” In Matthew, Jesus proclaims that he has come not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. And how is the law fulfilled? When we love God and our neighbor.

As we look around ourselves now, we can ask: Who is being excluded? Who is not at the table? Who is the most vulnerable? There, we can find our neighbor, who needs our love. There, we can find the beloved community.

Thank you so much for being a part of our beloved community.

Blessings,

Pastor Elizabeth



Above: Maddie, Elli, Leah, Maya, Adaeze, Dominique, Pastor Elizabeth, and Pastor Michael Johnson at Love Rising Lutheran Church in Detroit.

Right: Pastor Sarah Mayer-Flatt leads students in a discussion about disability justice in the church.





REPAIR WORK

Reese is a senior in Art and Design, and she sings soprano in the chamber choir here at U of M. “I’m an artist and a musician,” she says, “and I was drawn to those disciplines because there’s always a way to grow, either on my own as a painter or in a community through music.”

Reese grew up in California, attending a large non-denominational church where she served in the worship band. “It was great for me at the time,” she says. “It had a robust youth ministry. I attended that church for 9 years. I was in the band for six years through middle school and high school, and it was a great way to be deeply embedded in community as a young person.”

However, as she transitioned from playing in the band for the children’s worship service into playing for the adult service, she realized she felt disconnected from the theological messaging in the adult congregation. Reese says she noticed how differently pastors spoke about welcome with students versus the adults. Even though they didn’t necessarily embody it, she says, “the student community had welcoming language: All are welcome, nobody’s perfect. The student community felt isolated because it was in a physically separate building, and when I started to play in the band for the adult service, I realized they were ‘dumbing down’ some of the topics for the students.” There were other issues, too. “There was a scandal that shook the entire church, and so I started distancing myself. I felt a rift between the student community I had helped foster, and the ‘real’ adult service that was the heart of the church.”

Reese knew that when she arrived at U of M, she was looking for something different. “I saw a big poster for Lord of Light and LCM outside of my dorm,” she says. “I had been looking for a church that was unabashed about its affirmation of people in the LGBTQIA+ community, and it’s not something I had seen in other organizations on campus. I had known maybe just a few queer people at the big California church, but it was never something we could discuss openly. It was cool for me to see that open welcome and acceptance.”

Reese appreciates that at LoL/LCM, there are people from every generation worshipping together. “I love that there isn’t a hierarchy, and that we all sing together. Singing has always been the core of my life, even in non-religious spaces, and it’s a way I’ve connected with people. I had a lot of fun singing in the band at my old church, but it was only me singing by myself. I really love the liturgy and the opportunity to sight-read, and to sing with everyone together. It’s something that has always shifted my mood; I could be having the worst day of my life, but the singing part is healing. It’s like repair work.”

For Reese, having Communion weekly provides a deep sense of connection with God. In her old church, Communion happened at unpredictable times, usually at the end of a sermon series, and it felt like it was only reserved for the people who deserved it. “It almost felt like a competition,” she says. “It was always like, ‘Well, what if I’m not feeling this way? Do I get to come to the table?’ Here, it’s not a competition, there’s no pressure - it’s more like, ‘How can I take the Word and have my life changed this week?’ We’re not supposed to obsess about whether we’ve made God happy by doing everything right.”

On Sunday evenings, Reese finds her place at the table at LoL/LCM. “I love that it’s in the evening and there’s dinner,” she says. “You’re ending and beginning your week on a good note.”

Greyson is a junior, majoring in math, whose soft-spoken kindness and thoughtfulness help shape the community around him. He chose to major in math because, he says, “I was good at math in high school, and I really like logic.” Greyson lives in a nearby co-op with about 20 housemates. He likes the community he has found there, and enjoys playing board games and volleyball.

For Greyson, church has always been a part of life. “I went to a Lutheran church growing up,” he says. “I was very connected to that church, and I still am.”

Pastor Elizabeth sent Greyson a care package at camp before he arrived on campus his freshman year, and he decided to check out Lord of Light and the Lutheran Campus Ministry at U of M when he arrived. “I like the people here,” he says, “and I like the services. It’s important to have people who are going through the same stuff as I am, and who I go to church with.”

Greyson regularly brings friends with him to LCM for worship and dinner, and, he says, “The people are so nice. I like the Sunday night dinners and the chance to get to know people better. I think it feels more intimate here - it’s a smaller community, it’s so welcoming, and I like that it’s at night - I don’t think I’d be able to get up in the morning for an early service!”

Greyson appreciates that he’s found a church home while he’s away at school. In college, he says, “it’s an important time to have a good, outreaching church community, because for someone who grew up going to church, it’s the first time that it’s my choice whether I go to church or not.” Greyson finds that the Sunday evening service gets him ready for the week to come. “It’s a good way to decompress and get centered on what’s important before the new week starts up again, and have some time when I’m not doing work or stressed about school.”



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