

Stolen moments

Women in the Twin Cities metro area share their experiences with recurrent pregnancy loss.

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Places to breathe

Bethel alumnus Leigh Finke examines how religion and culture intersect with the lives of queer people and inspires others to work toward inclusivity, such as the creation of Bethel's LGBTQ+ student group, Prism.

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Oceans apart: Unrest in Myanmar

Bethel Karen students reflect on the journey from Myanmar to Minnesota and the effects of a recent military coup.

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Photo by Yanna Contreras

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from the editor

To the scared and the broken

Think about the last time you were scared. No, not the kind of scared you get when someone chucks a snowball at your dorm room window or when Pennywise stretches a toothy grin across the theatre screen. But real fear. The kind that hits you in the bones.

A couple weeks ago, I thought my face was falling off. Journaling in my bed well after midnight, my forehead turned hot. Seconds later, the skin of my nose felt like it vacuum-sealed to the cartilage underneath. I raced to the bathroom to steal a pump of my roommate's face lotion and met my eyes in the mirror. My face looked like a spotlight.

Back under the bed covers, I typed "why is my face so red and hot" into the Safari search bar on my phone. The first word I read on the results page was "anxiety." No. No way. I've never dealt with mental health issues before. It's probably just stress. Something I can crush with a to-do list and

a game of Mario Party. But the more I read about hot flashes and anxiety and chemical imbalance, the more I replayed the semester up to this point in my head. When I remembered the way my stomach twisted just thinking about memorizing linguistics charts or the way my heart turned to white-hot lead every time I counted the more than 100 days until graduation, when I can finally set down the 15 flaming bowling-pins I've been juggling the past four years, I believed the search results. And I was scared. Really scared.

In this issue, you'll meet people who know what fear feels like. People who still have the scars etched into their bones. And people who work every day to make that fear hurt a little less.

Zachariah Walker

Editor in Chief

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You'll meet Leigh Fink, a transgender woman and Bethel graduate who struggled almost 20 years with accepting her identity. Now, she has authored two books that provide insight and support for LGBTQ+ teenagers inside and out of the Christian faith.

You'll meet Kjeirstin Carlson, a Bethel senior living with atrial fibrillation, a heart disease rarely found in people under the age of 65. Despite her condition, which raises the possibility of suffering a stroke, she serves as director of the Bethel DECA chapter and plans to intern in New York City this summer.

And, among others, you'll meet Say Ra Paw and Tu Lor Eh Paw, two Bethel students living 8,000 miles from their home in

Myanmar while the country struggles through a military coup that has taken the lives of several protesters.

When I hear stories like those featured in this issue, I start to question my own hardships. I wonder if my newly-onset anxiety is that big of a deal if people are living every day with heart conditions or being massacred in the streets for speaking against the government. But then I remember why The Clarion exists. Why I care so deeply for these stories and this publication.

The Clarion is a place for broken people. It shows Bethel not as the perfect, anointed, arms-raised community of Christ followers often publicized to prospective students

and alumni donors, but as a collection of scars. This university, like any community of people anywhere in the world, consists of complex individuals each carrying their own set of bone-deep fears. And The Clarion is not afraid to show that.

So, whatever you are holding on to, whatever stress or fear or trauma has crawled deep under your skin, these stories are for you. All of you. Because none of us smile the way the posters say we do. And none of us raise our arms and keep them there. Maybe we're scared to, but maybe that's OK. **C**

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Teaching through a world lens

Dr. Bernon Lee | Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies | Singapore

Four professors from four diverse backgrounds share how growing up outside of the United States has shaped their teaching style.

By Soraya Keiser

Dr. Ann Job | Adjunct Professor of Business and Economics | India

Professor Ann Job has lived on four continents throughout her life. She was born in India, grew up in Nigeria and the United States, and eventually pursued higher education in France and Switzerland before returning to the U.S. Although difficult at times, Job appreciates this diverse cultural background that she was exposed to.

“It forces you to think about who you really are and what your relationship with others is,” Job said. “At a certain point I realized I am more American than Indian...but I’m Christian first.”

Job enjoys teaching at a Christian school because she can use a teaching approach that integrates her faith. At the start of the Principles of Economics course, Job begins with a prayer for the persecuted church around the world. Along with this, she uses the opportunity to not just teach economics, but also bring her perspective that students might not otherwise have.

By bringing in real life economic examples from an international perspective, such as the Dutch Disease and the advantages of free trade between countries, she helps students step out of their comfort zone and learn about different parts of the world.

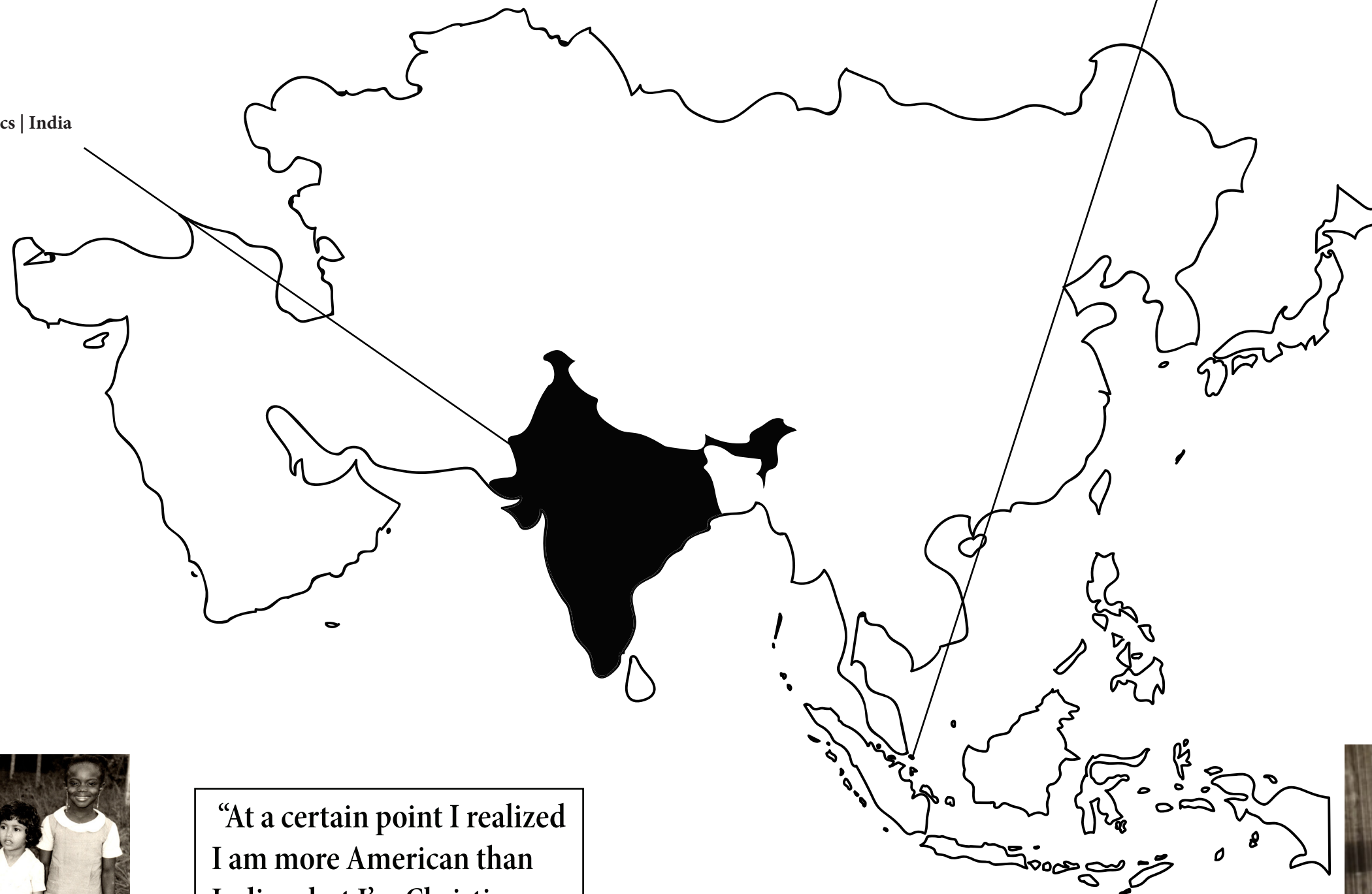
“In terms of teaching, what I try to do as much as I can is deliberately move a little bit away from us just thinking about ‘America, America, America’ all the time,” Job said.

Business and Economics Professor, Ann Job, poses for a photo with family friends in Nigeria. Job’s family moved there when she was three-years-old. “What I remember the most was how warm and kind the people were,” Job said. | Photo Submitted by Ann Job.



“At a certain point I realized I am more American than Indian, but I’m Christian first.”

*Dr. Ann Job,
Adjunct Professor of Business and Economics*



When Professor Bernon Lee first arrived in Canada to study at the University of Calgary, he was told by his host family that the way he ate his rice and curry was wrong. The way he mixed his food together, as he would do back in Singapore, was unusual. While living in Singapore, Lee was used to one specific way of living because more than 70% of the population was ethnic Chinese.

“When you grow up in a more or less monolithic society... you don’t think you have a culture, you think you have common sense,” Lee said.

He was also surprised by the strong sense of individuality and personal freedom in North America.

“At first it was actually exhilarating,” Lee said. “It was wonderful because it was that brand of thinking that allowed me to do what I did.”

Within the very competitive academic culture of Singapore, Lee felt like he was wearing a straightjacket in which the only two ways to succeed were either to become an engineer or a doctor. However, when he studied in Canada, Lee was able to pursue whatever he found interesting. History. Classics. And eventually the Hebrew Bible.

Lee admits that it is challenging to connect to students at times because he is sometimes one of the first people to propose an entirely new way of thinking to them. This cognitive disequilibrium can cause some students to brush off his classes in favor of more straightforward ones.

“You learn one thing,” he said. “And over time you convince yourself that that is the thing.”

In his classes, Lee often challenges students to think critically past what they have always believed to be true.

“You really read the Bible over a lifetime, and the meaning of the Bible is not the same in the course of your lifetime,” Lee said. “Your journey in life will change the meanings that you discover in Scripture.”

Bringing in his own global perspective allows students to figure out what they actually believe and why they believe it. Although this can be overwhelming, Lee reassures students that these shifts aren’t unusual, but natural.



Biblical and Theological Studies Professor Bernon Lee (second from left) shares a meal with his siblings in Singapore. Understanding Western eating habits was a culture shock for Lee when he arrived in Canada. “You learn one thing,” Lee said. “And over time you convince yourself that that is the thing.” | Photo Submitted by Bernon Lee.

Dr. Andy Bramsen | Associate Professor of Political Science | Senegal

Every Sunday, as an 8-year-old, Professor Andy Bramsen pushed around couches and benches in their family living room in Saint Louis, Senegal. Each week, 20 to 30 friends and neighbors joined his family to make room for the house church. As the child of missionaries, Bramsen's family moved to the west African country of Senegal when he was a baby, and he lived there until he was 17-years-old.

"Having grown up in this very hospitable, people-focused environment, [I realized] that I wanted to invest my life in people," Bramsen said.

Although he didn't continue on as a missionary, Bramsen looked to teaching in order to fulfill this calling. In the classroom, Bramsen tries to bring the process of becoming more people-focused into his teaching.

"Not that careers and goals aren't important, but in Senegal, people are very focused on relationships and people," Bramsen said. "When a person shows up, you are going to prioritize that person."

In a normal year, Bramsen and his wife Sara would have entire classes over for meals in order to get to know them on a deeper level, outside the classroom. They really try to continue the legacy of hospitality that Bramsen grew up with in Senegal.

With more than 95% of Senegal's population being Muslim, Bramsen was a part of the religious minority. Christians in his community would come together, regardless of denomination affiliations or cultural backgrounds. Through this, Bramsen learned to "appreciate the Body of Christ in a bigger way." Methodist. Southern Baptist. Lutheran. French. Togolese. Senegalese.

"Those other identities are secondary to that identity in Christ," Bramsen said.

Teaching at a place like Bethel, Bramsen has been able to highlight denominational differences while also reminding students that they are united with Christians as a whole. In the political science and humanities courses that he teaches, Bramsen wants students to realize that their reality is not the only valid reality.

"I think it's easy for us to look down on the developing world," Bramsen said. "And that's often a really wrong perspective."

In Senegal, Bramsen saw a greater appreciation of relationships over material possessions and socioeconomic status. The Senegalese focus more on connecting with God and others, and Bramsen tries to live this out every day.



As a young child, Political Science Professor Andy Bramsen poses for a photo with a family friend in the port of Dakar. Bramsen's family lived in Dakar, the capital city of Senegal for one year before moving to a more rural area to start a church. | Photo Submitted by Andy Bramsen.

"I think it's easy for us to look down on the developing world, and that's often a really wrong perspective."

*Dr. Andy Bramsen,
Associate Professor of Political Science*



Dr. Samuel Zalanga | Professor of Sociology | Nigeria

Professor Samuel Zalanga was born to low-income farmers in northeastern Nigeria, one of the poorest regions of the country. Zalanga attended the local Bible school and eventually received a scholarship to continue his education at Bayero University.

Zalanga originally wanted to study law, but after learning about Karl Marx, he was drawn to sociology. Although Marx's beliefs eventually laid the foundation for communism, learning about him was a turning point for Zalanga because of his emphasis on justice, not just charity.

"I never had heard anybody who spoke very clearly to me caring for the poor," he said. "So when I heard that lecture on Karl Marx I thought, here is a European German, but he seems to be aware that there are poor people like me in the world."

After receiving his master's degree, Zalanga realized that he could not have a promising future in Nigeria due to his socioeconomic status. His Christian family were also religious and ethnic minorities in Nigeria, so Zalanga wrote letters to more than 60 universities all over the world, wanting a scholarship for his doctorate degree.

The director of graduate studies at the University of Minnesota Department of Sociology responded.

Zalanga had no money to pay the application fee so the director paid for it himself. He also loaned the Nigerian student money for airfare to the U.S.

"I think one of the ways I can honor him is to invest in students like he invested in me," Zalanga said.

Zalanga struggled to make meaningful connections with students when he first started

teaching at Bethel in 1999.

"For a minute or two, my mind would go off kilter because I would be thinking: what is happening here?" he said. "All these white students, and here is me, this boy from rural Africa who grew up very poor standing before them."

Zalanga had to get used to this new dynamic, and he eventually opened up to his students. He realized that his background brought a unique perspective to the topic of sociology that many of his students had never heard before.

"I started understanding the need to talk about myself," Zalanga said. And once he started doing that, he began to connect with his students and engage them in the course material. Through this approach to teaching, Zalanga hopes to equip his students with the passion and perspective to help the less fortunate in Nigeria and all over the world. **C**



Sociology Professor Samuel Zalanga (left) poses with his roommate and friend after a commencement ceremony in Nigeria. Zalanga was able to attend Bayero University because of a scholarship he received. "I wanted to use my education to make a difference in other people's lives," Zalanga said. | Photo Submitted by Samuel Zalanga.

Oceans apart: Unrest in Myanmar

Bethel Karen students reflect on the journey from Myanmar to Minnesota and the effects of a recent military coup.

By [Laura Osterlund](#)

S

ay Ra Paw left Myanmar, a country of 54 million on the southern border of China, when she was around three years old after her parents decided it was not safe to stay. They spent five years in a refugee camp in Thailand before coming to the United States.

Recently, Myanmar made news headlines for the political unrest occurring across the country. In the early hours of Feb. 1, Myanmar's military staged a coup against the government and arrested elected officials as a response to an election that occurred in November 2020.

Since then, the citizens of Myanmar have faced tough restrictions. Many have staged protests against the coup. However, the military has fought back, firing their guns both inside and out of the city where the protests are happening.

Behind the coup, a lesser-known problem stands. Myanmar, formerly called Burma, is in the middle of a 72-year-long civil war, the longest in world history. Senior Tu Lor Eh Paw predicts it will continue until the ethnic groups, including Karen groups, are gone from Myanmar.

"I believe that so strongly because [the military] just doesn't care," she said. "It's just a dictatorship. It happened to my family and to all the Karen families that I talked to."

This has deeply impacted the Karen (pronounced Kah-ren) population. The Karen are an indigenous group of people who now mostly reside near the border of Myanmar and Thailand. As of February 24, the organization Free Burma Rangers cites that 6200 internationally displaced Karen people (or IDPs) are currently on the run due to the harsh treatment they received from Myanmar's military.

Many Karen people have fled from Myanmar, emigrating to refugee camps in Thailand, then to countries like the United States and Australia.

Minnesota is home to the largest concentrated population of Karen refugees in the United States, serving as a place for over 17,000 people to resettle, according to the Karen Organization of Minnesota. Many have come in the Twin Cities area, especially the Frogtown neighborhood in St. Paul, Bethel's partner neighborhood.

Currently, Bethel has 15 Karen students enrolled, each with their own unique story and set of experiences. Yet, they are connected by their heritage.

Business student Tu Lor Eh Paw grew up in Myanmar before spending two years at a refugee camp in Thailand and coming to Minnesota. While her father and most of her siblings reside in the United States, her brother and extended family remain in Myanmar.



"We're unsure of what the future's going to hold, and that's very uneasy," she said. "This coup has happened before, and so the Karen community doesn't trust the government or the military in the Burmese community anymore. When the coup happened, they weren't surprised."

Tu Lor Eh Paw's father hasn't spoken to his son in Myanmar since the coup began. Rumors involving the Myanmar government monitoring communication have become an obstacle in connecting Paw with her extended family.

Despite the distance between Myanmar and Minnesota, people like 2014 Bethel alum Jesse Phenow have found opportunities to help. He created a non-profit, Urban Village, to stand in solidar-

ity with Karen refugees who reside in Minnesota. The organization serves as a community space to cultivate projects, connections and a marketplace for Karen artists.

"The first [way] to help is by getting to know the Karen people here, and to listen and to figure out what it means to be an ally," Phenow said. "And I think then that will inform them on how to be an ally to the community."

According to Say Ra Paw, knowledge and awareness of global conflict is important for students so that they can advocate for refugees.

"Get voices heard actively," she said. "Social media is a big thing that [students] could [use to] spread the word out and educate themselves about who

the Karen people are and what is happening to the community. Take one little step at a time." **C**

(Left) Senior community health major, Say Ra Paw, looks out her window in her North Village dorm. When asked why students should care about this issue, she said, "to be more aware of what they are doing and how they could advocate for the refugee people. And just being really aware of conflict going on in other countries." | Photo by C.J. Washington

(Below) Tu Lor Eh Paw shows one of her most important possessions, a Bible translated into Karen, that she keeps on her desk. | Photo by Ally O'Neil



Not mad, *just* disappointed

Winter sport athletes deal with the letdown due to the cancellation of NCAA Division III national championships.

By Nate Eisenmann

Disappointed and deeply saddened. These are the words that come to mind for sophomore track athlete Kelsie Sealock when thinking about the recent cancellation of the upcoming indoor track and field national championship. Athletes in other sports are also facing the same letdown from yet another event being cancelled as a result of the pandemic. This time, it's competing at a national level, the finale to the season, for athletes like Sealock.

Sealock was looking forward to another opportunity to represent Bethel at the championship this year after coming in first place for the women's 60 meter hurdles last year at the MIAC indoor track and field championship, which qualified her for nationals.

On February 3, the NCAA Division III Administrative Committee made the decision to cancel all winter championships this year. This decision came just a few weeks after the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) voted to move forward with holding conference winter championships. The cancellation of a national championship is due to a low number of participating schools, according to the NCAA.

At Bethel, athletes in basketball, hockey and indoor track and field are affected by this decision.

Gretchen Hunt, an associate athletic director in charge of NCAA compliance at Bethel, gives some insight into the controversy around this decision.

"Even though only around 50% of NCAA schools 'opted in' to the championships, in basketball and track that would be over 200 schools still wanting to try," said Hunt. According to her, this means there were still thousands of athletes that were hoping to compete at a national level and no longer have the opportunity to do so.

This recent announcement means that if schools meet state or local health department requirements as well as NCAA requirements, schools can still compete, but they will not have the opportunity to be selected to an NCAA championship event. This is the pinnacle of competition for these athletes. It's what they look forward to and work toward all season. Despite the loss of the national championships, hockey and basketball athletes will still have a chance to play in reduced conference schedules under the MIAC guidelines; however they will not have conference playoffs or conference championships.

For indoor track and field, the MIAC had already decided to cancel championships; however, there are some track coaches, including Bethel's head track coach Andrew Rock, who have organized dual meets in order to give athletes a

chance to participate in track competitions. These meets are between just two schools to accommodate for indoor restrictions and reducing the virus transmission.

"We don't want to look like we've been doing nothing," said Rock. "We're trying to push [the athletes] to their best."

Bethel has hosted four meets; two against Hamline University, one against Gustavus Adolphus College, and one three-team meet against both St. John's University and Augsburg University.

Sealock is grateful for the work her coaches have put in to give both her and her teammates as much of a season as possible.

"Coach Rock has given us every opportunity to compete with other schools and [have] healthy competitions against our teammates," Sealock said.

In these dual meets, Sealock continues to set records, with a Division III hurdles record during a dual meet against Gustavus Adolphus College on February 6. Triumphs like this are what keeps the team moving forward and motivated.

"The team atmosphere has been contagious because everyone is still upbeat, lively, fun and selfless," Sealock said.

There has been no announcement yet cancelling the outdoor track and field championships for both

Kelsie Sealock tests out starting blocks before running a hurdling drill during track practice in the SRC. Sealock was named an athlete of the week by the MIAC for the week of February 8. | Photo by Emma Gottschalk



“The team atmosphere has been contagious because everyone is still upbeat, lively, fun and selfless.”

KELSIE SEALOCK

the MIAC and the NCAA. Rock believes that it should be easier to hold these events as they are outdoors and the open air reduces the chance of the virus spreading as easily. Overall, he remains optimistic for the remainder of the track season, regardless of what it will look like.

“In the last 12 months, I feel like I’ve learned as much from them as anything—just on how to face disappointment and continue on, keep fighting and keep going,” Rock said.

At a national level, the NCAA is also trying to give athletes future chances to continue competing in order to make up for lost opportunities. Normally, athletes have five years to play four seasons of their sport but due to the ongoing pandemic, the Division III Presidents Council made the decision in October of 2020 to allow athletes to utilize a “blanket waiver,” as defined on the NCAA website, meaning that any athlete participating during the 2020-21 school year will not be required to count this year as one of their four seasons of competition. Both Division I and II have made similar decisions. Sealock says she does not plan on staying an extra year to compete another season.

Rock says that he does not anticipate there will be many, if any, athletes that choose to stay longer at Bethel for track and field because of the many factors to consider, such as the cost to remain enrolled and delaying graduation.

Athletes from the 2019-20 school year were given the same opportunity to participate in their sport for another season. Baseball pitcher Connor Malcolm is one of just a few athletes that is taking advantage of this new rule.

Prior to the pandemic, Malcolm planned to stay at Bethel as a graduate student studying special education. He said that he didn’t have to change any plans to be eligible for an extra season of baseball.

“Once the MIAC passed the rule that students in grad school could play, it was pretty much set up for me already,” said Malcolm.

Malcolm has been on the team since his freshman year at Bethel and was with the team in Florida in March of 2020 when the season was abruptly cut short. Malcolm says the team was devastated, but this didn’t stop their community and closeness. The night before they all flew home from Florida, the seniors got together to process the shock of having no final season.

“We were able to have some final moments with all of us together [...] which was super cool,” said Malcolm.

Now, nearly a full year later, winter sport athletes have also felt the same devastation of not having a clear end to their season. Still battling the uncertainty surrounding attempts to compete, athletes persevere and continue to put in their maximum effort despite not knowing what the final result will be.

“It’s remarkable, inspiring, heart-warming, and also heart-wrenching that our athletes continue to show up for 7 a.m. COVID testing day after day, for what might be a handful of competitions in their sport,” said Hunt. “If there was evidence needed about the passion they have, the discipline they display, the gratefulness that fills them, and their loyalty to each other and this place—well, I can’t think of better evidence.” **C**



Name: Connor Malcolm
Grade: First year graduate student
Sport: Baseball
Position: Pitcher

Credit: Bethel Athletics



Name: Kelsie Sealock
Grade: Sophomore
Sport: Volleyball and track
Events: 60m hurdles and 4x400m

Credit: Bethel Athletics

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Shaping political views with a liberal arts education

Bethel University alumnus Jake Schneider and senior Matthew Ramirez reflect on how Bethel influenced the way they see the world and work in a political environment.

By Rachel Blood and Soraya Keiser

Cameras. Emails. Video marketing and internal communications. Bethel alum Jake Schneider and senior Matthew Ramirez are no strangers to the pressure of quick turnarounds in a high-stakes political setting and have used all of these skills and more to their advantage in the political field, working on opposite ends of the political spectrum but coming from a place of shared compassion and faith.

Jake Schneider

As Communications Director and Press Secretary for Republican U.S. Representative Michelle Fischbach, who represents Minnesota's seventh congressional district, every day brings something new for Jake Schneider, Bethel University '15. Writing speeches. Taking photos. Social media. Anything and everything communications related, Schneider has got it covered. His normal nine to five workday is often encroached on to accommodate committee meetings and the passing of congressional legislation. It's normal for him to see Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi walking through the halls of D.C. government buildings alongside him.

"Government matters for real people," Schneider said. "And it's cool to see that in action." Schneider has always had a passion for politics. Growing up in rural Minnesota with limited political opportunities, he tried to get involved as much as possible through participating in parades, handing out flyers and educating himself on the political state of his country.

At Bethel University, Schneider double majored in political science and communications. He then joined Bethel Student Government and eventually led the

College Republicans. Studying at Bethel also allowed Schneider to hear different perspectives from the conservative background he grew up in. In his political science classes, students would debate institutional and ideological issues.

"It was always respectful. It was always challenging," Schneider said. "Being able to think critically and analyze issues from a different world view is a skill that I learned at Bethel."

As he matured, Schneider tended to lean more conservative, and for that reason he has sought out jobs working for Republican politicians since graduating from Bethel, including positions in legislation, communications and response teams.

One way to educate the general population on political issues is through social media, but Schneider thinks it is a horrible place for political discourse.

According to Schneider, Twitter battles in limited characters can explain what someone believes, but not why they believe it. Full experiences cannot be shared in an environment without body language and human interaction.

"It's so important to understand the humanity

behind the person that's saying something to you," Schneider said. "And you don't get that on social media at all."

Schneider's faith has allowed him to understand issues and their place in his life while allowing him to take his own stance on common areas of political discourse.

"Faith is really important in politics because it gives you a moral foundation," Schneider said. "But it also can't be the case where your politics become your God."

"It's so important to understand the humanity behind the person that's saying something to you."

Jake Schneider



Schneider poses in President Trump's campaign headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, where he worked as the deputy director of rapid response for Trump's re-election campaign. | Photo submitted by Jake Schneider



Matthew Ramirez

Senior political science student Matthew Ramirez spent the fall of 2020 going straight from class to U.S. Senator Tina Smith's campaign office in downtown St. Paul. He'd sit down alongside his digital marketing team advisor and spend the afternoon brainstorming, researching and collaborating on content creation and media implementation for the senator's campaign.

Ramirez, who also has minors in history and media production, connected with a Smith campaign TV producer at the Twin Cities Film Festival. Ramirez first worked on a digital marketing team, creating video content for Smith's campaign. On his first day on the job, Ramirez interviewed Smith herself.

The campaign was split into spring, summer and fall terms for which employees could be rotated or rehired. Following the summer 2020 term, during which Ramirez was forced to work from home due to the pandemic, he was recruited to the Latinx-Hispanic political outreach campaign team, where he set up interviews and calls between his crew and local businesses and was extended once again to the next term.

Because his father was in the Navy and couldn't openly express his political opinions, Ramirez didn't

have many political influences to shape his views.

Ramirez entered Bethel as a history education major and switched when history professor Dr. AnneMarie Kooistra recommended political science.

"In all of the advising I do with students, I encourage them to take advantage of the general education requirements as an opportunity to take classes that they might enjoy," said Kooistra. "One of my former colleagues, Kevin Cragg, once told me that it was important to remember that sometimes God calls us to our joy –meaning that finding joy in something can be a way of ascertaining that we could be called to that something."

Ramirez, who will graduate in May, aims to pursue a career in digital marketing, political science or business. He'd like to go back to his home in Washington state eventually, but will explore his options in Minnesota as well.

Ramirez says that his Bethel education, incorporating faith and the liberal arts, has helped him learn about and understand both ends of the political spectrum, whether that be social issues or policies. It also helped him to see the bigger picture and gain a deep understanding of the workings of the world.

"These last four years have been a perfect time to be a political science major," said Ramirez. "This past year

has really opened the eyes of a lot of people ... these last four years have been really critical to what the political science discourse will be in the future."

On the Smith campaign's digital marketing team, Ramirez single handedly worked on 50 to 60 videos that were published to Tina Smith's Twitter and Instagram pages over the course of three to four months. Social media was a large part of the campaign process.

According to Ramirez, social media is ultimately a positive tool. Political discourse can get out of hand, but social media presents a platform for idea sharing from multiple perspectives.

"It's good to see what the other side thinks, to better understand them," said Ramirez, "because if you only believe in one side, you'll never really, truly understand it."

Working on a Democratic campaign presented interactions with people from different religious backgrounds. Ramirez had to learn what it meant to him to use his Catholic faith in the decisions he made and policies he implemented while considering the effect it had on his colleagues.

"To some, faith is their political beliefs," Ramirez said, "but I think that my relationship with my faith is really personal." **C**

Designed by Bryson Rosell



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Stolen moments

Women in the Twin Cities metro area share their experiences with recurrent pregnancy loss.

By Emma Harville



Sherryse Corrow and her daughter Eleanor pose together on the front steps of their home. | Photo by Emma Gottschalk

This was it, the only moment Sherryse Corrow would get with her daughter. She knew she had to spend it right. Julia fit in the palms of her hands, fully formed with fingers and toes and folds in her ears.

Corrow wrapped Julia in a blanket, sang her songs and told her she loved her. And then, when the hospital staff came in and said, 'Are you ready for us to take her?' Corrow said a final goodbye to the daughter she'd carried for four months.

Although Corrow lost three pregnancies before having Julia in October 2019, this pregnancy was different. She'd made it past the first trimester. She'd felt Julia bounce and squirm. She'd even laughed along with the ultrasound technician when they'd said, 'She's waving at you!'

She'd been bleeding for several weeks after developing two large subchorionic hematomas, a type of blood clot that's formed by the abnormal accumulation of blood between the placenta and the wall of the uterus. But every ultrasound had told her Julia was fine, that she was moving around and her heartbeat was strong.

At 16 weeks she was home lying in bed when she felt contractions and told her husband she needed to go to the hospital. But within 10 minutes, she'd already delivered Julia in her bathroom. She placed her baby in a box and drove herself to the hospital.

A psychology professor at Bethel University, Corrow lives in Vadnais Heights with her husband Jeff and 7-year-old daughter Eleanor. After deciding to start a family in 2011, Corrow was pregnant within a month. When she miscarried after a couple weeks, she and Jeff were devastated by the loss of a dream. When she miscarried three more times after having Eleanor, that devastation only mounted.

"You want answers and you don't get them because so many cases of recurrent pregnancy loss are unexplained," Corrow said. "You just don't have answers."

According to the Mayo Clinic, about 10 to 20 percent of known pregnancies end in miscarriage, which is defined as the spontaneous loss of a pregnancy before the 20th week. However, the clinic notes that the actual number is likely much higher because many miscarriages occur before the woman even realizes she is pregnant.

Dr. Beth LaRusso, a perinatal and reproductive psychiatrist at Abbott Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Minneapolis, stresses that most women who miscarry are grieving more than just the loss of a pregnancy.

"Your hopes for that child, your hopes of being a mother, your hopes for having a family ... all of that is lost," LaRusso said. "This isn't just a loss of a ball of cells."

According to LaRusso, women who experience one miscarriage are more likely to have depression, anxiety and stress after that miscarriage, as well as after subsequent miscarriages. The desire to have a successful pregnancy, she said, can take on the primary focus of a woman's mental and emotional energy and prevent them from experiencing joy.

'The moment you wish you had'

For Corrow, the big things were obvious – grief, emptiness – but the little things every day were hard, too, like the phone call from the doctor telling her Julia had been chromosomally normal or having to continually walk past the boxes of maternity clothes she couldn't bear to put away.

Waves of grief also come in the form of unexpected pregnancy announcements from friends or family, or distant college classmates, an example of what Corrow calls 'a stolen moment.'

"It's a reminder of the moment you wish you had that you never got," Corrow said. "Not that it was stolen by your friend or family member, but just that there was a moment you were supposed to have and it was stolen."

Facebook, she said, is a constant reminder of these stolen moments. Corrow never got to announce that Julia was born. She hadn't even announced she was pregnant.

"I could have, but that's a hard thing to put on Facebook," Corrow said. "Also, it feels a bit morbid for Facebook."

"You want answers and you don't get them because so many cases of recurrent pregnancy loss are unexplained. You just don't have answers."

Sherryse Corrow

Many women take the holiday season as an opportunity to announce their births and pregnancies, which Corrow said makes celebrating Thanksgiving and Christmas difficult. To her, the holidays are a reminder of what didn't come to fruition over the course of the year. Thoughts drifting from 'I should have been five months pregnant right now' to 'Here I am at the end of the year, and still no baby' would often play in her mind.

In Dr. LaRusso's experience, miscarriage or fetal death has the opportunity to bring couples together or tear them apart. Grief is individualized, she said, and couples who are able to communicate openly about their individual experiences of grief tend to do better than those who have different styles of grieving or can't properly express their feelings.

For Corrow's husband, Jeff, one of the hardest things to deal with is his inability to help or resolve the issue.

"At times, I remember feeling like I was floating in a sea of despair without a paddle, unable to guide us where I wanted to go, instead stuck letting the waves of feelings direct where our end destination would be," Jeff said.

After the second and third losses, Jeff found himself crying at his desk at work, going for walks to pull himself together instead of explaining his pain to the people around him.

With little motivation to shave, he grew a beard – something he'd never done. Since losing Julia last year, the beard has not left his face.

"It's a simple reminder of her and the struggles that followed every time I look into the mirror," Jeff said. "Will I shave it someday? Perhaps, but for now I find it to be a good reminder of Julia, and that I'm not the same person I was before the loss."

In Mendota Heights, Resurrection Cemetery hosts a communal fetal committal and burial service every three months for families who have lost an infant to stillbirth or miscarriage. At the service Corrow attended for Julia in February, each family lit a candle for each pregnancy they'd lost before volunteers carried the caskets out to the grave site for burial. All of the babies honored in the service were buried together.

"It was a beautiful service and we were so grateful for the funding provided to make this happen for families," Corrow said. "It provided a sense of closure that we didn't even know we needed."

'The pain doesn't go away'

Two weeks before Minnesota's first stay-at-home order in March, Corrow and three other women sat around a table in the back corner of Cafe Latte on Grand Avenue in St. Paul. They first met in the Minnesota chapter of a Facebook group called Recurrent Pregnancy Loss Support, and each of them has had at least three losses in the past several years.

The women spoke about the stigma they feel surrounding pregnancy loss and miscarriage, and the ways they feel people minimize what they're going through.

"The pain doesn't go away just because you're pregnant again or it's been six months or a year or two years since your loss," said Jessica Stuhr, a Maplewood social worker who lost three pregnancies within a 13-month period. "No one checks in on me anymore. To me, it's been six months but it feels like a minute ago."

After five miscarriages within six years, Nicole Otto of Cottage Grove doesn't think people realize the weight of her losses. When she hears parents complain about their busy schedules, she can only think about how desperately she wishes she were driving to swim practices or basketball games.

Otto is vocal about her losses on Facebook, where for the duration of October she made daily posts for Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month.

"Unfortunately, recurrent loss parents will never be like everyone else," Otto wrote in one post. "They plan their days accordingly...For some, even the thought of going onto Facebook makes them cringe because they don't know how many announcements they will see that day. They may even unfollow someone who is



Sherrysse Corrow leans forward as her daughter Eleanor whispers in her ear, “Mom, do they know you’re pregnant?” In response, Corrow burst out laughing and gestured towards her pregnant stomach. | Photo by Emma Gottschalk

expecting to prevent further heartache. The relationship between themselves and the outside world will change.”

While Facebook can be difficult to navigate for many women going through recurrent loss, Otto has used her profile as a tool to share her story, raise awareness and minimize stigma.

“They don’t teach you about pregnancy loss in health class, or at least they didn’t while I was in it,” Otto said. “They don’t prepare you for having your world ripped away from you and your babies’ futures cut so short.”

Corrow shared that when she was pregnant with Julia, she and a friend had the same due date. While for a time it was difficult for Corrow to see that friend’s pregnancy and newborn without also thinking ‘that’s how pregnant I should be’ or ‘that’s how old my daughter should be,’ she said she’s reached a better place now.

“Seeing him now feels more like a little reminder of Julia, but not in a sad way,” Corrow said. “Her son still makes me think of my daughter ... but I like thinking about her, so it’s welcome.”

Stuhr didn’t even know her best friend had given birth. They were pregnant at the same time, but stopped talking for a period after Stuhr lost her baby. Then her cousin gave birth shortly after her third loss. Stuhr knows her cousin had a baby boy, but she’s never met him.

Plymouth resident and Business Analyst at UnitedHealthcare Andrea Souther wants people to know that there’s little joy in pregnancy after recurrent loss. When people tell her congratulations, she can’t accept it very easily. To her, a pregnancy after four first-trimester losses doesn’t feel like anything to be congratulated for.

Souther is currently pregnant and expecting a baby in May. It wasn’t until she reached the 13-week ultrasound and was told everything looked normal that she put her baby’s due date on the calendar and told her daughter, friends and extended family the news.

“I still worry that something will go wrong, but I have generally allowed myself to be happy and excited about this pregnancy,” Souther said. “Every day it gets a little bit easier.”

After three losses, Corrow and her husband were reluctant to tell Eleanor they were pregnant with Julia right away. But when Corrow became visibly pregnant and was put on bedrest due to the subchorionic hematoma, she didn’t want to lie to Eleanor about why she couldn’t jump or play or do much of anything other than lay down.

“The baby is OK, but there were some problems and there’s a chance the baby could go to heaven,” Corrow and Jeff told their daughter, who was six at the time.

“It’s not fair,” Eleanor said. “The baby didn’t even get a chance to play on Earth yet.”

When Corrow then told her about the previous three losses, Eleanor’s face brightened.

“So either way, I’m a big sister, right?” she asked.

“Yes, honey, either way you’re a big sister,” Corrow said.

Comforted by knowing she has four siblings in heaven, Eleanor was confident she’d one day have a sibling on Earth, too. She’d talk about how she was go-

ing to homeschool them and teach them how to read.

Corrow admits she struggles with comments like ‘Well, be grateful you have Eleanor.’ They don’t know how her losses have made her even more grateful for her only living daughter, she said, as she’s realized how difficult it is for her body to carry a pregnancy to full term.

According to Dr. LaRusso, there is high potential for those undergoing recurrent loss to receive such comments. Compared to postpartum depression, which she said is more publicized and common for women to talk about, miscarriage doesn’t necessarily receive the same awareness.

“Women can feel inadequate, like their body failed them,” LaRusso said. “They can feel less of a woman, like there’s something wrong with them.”

Support groups, she said, can be validating for women to connect with others who share their experience. In addition, Abbott Northwestern’s Mother Baby Mental Health Program Team offers mothers individual evaluation, consultation with a psychiatrist and psychotherapy, as well as support to OB/GYNs and other professionals working with patients who have experienced loss. The hospital also follows a protocol in the Emergency Department to support women who are experiencing miscarriage.

“In the Twin Cities, we have a pretty resource-rich perinatal psychiatric world,” LaRusso said. “That’s really not the case nationally.”

‘More intense than ever’

In May, Corrow found out she was pregnant again. The same fears intruded throughout her first trimester – Are there enough symptoms? Too many symptoms? Are the symptoms the way they’re supposed to be?

“So there’s a subchorionic hematoma, but we’ve seen these all the time,” the ultrasound technician told her.

Corrow lost Julia to a subchorionic hematoma at 16 weeks, and now she sat in the same examination room with the same technician who had told her those exact words less than a year before. Because of COVID-19, she’d come to her appointment alone. She started crying, her mask suctioning to her face as she gasped for air.

The subchorionic hematoma turned out to be smaller than what she had developed with Julia, and it resolved at about 16 weeks. No sign of it since. At 24 weeks, Corrow made it past viability, which means her child is more likely to survive if anything in the pregnancy were to go wrong. She’s due Feb. 7, Eleanor’s birthday.

Corrow knows this pregnancy is not a replacement for Julia, who would have turned one year old Oct. 29. She doesn’t want people to forget her daughter now that she’s pregnant again.

“Julia is still very much our daughter,” Corrow said. “My protectiveness in making sure that her memory is not forgotten is more intense than ever.” **C**

Editor’s Note: On Feb. 16 Corrow and her family welcomed a healthy baby girl, Isadora Ruby Corrow.

Ben Richburg fights his opponent for the ball on a warm winter night at the ice rink on Bethel's campus. | Photo by Emma Gottschalk

Decades on the ice

Bethel students and alumni reflect on how the annual broomball season fosters competition, excitement and community.

By Nate Eisenmann

Students creep out of their dorms after sundown, bundled up in layers upon layers of warm clothing. They grab their battered, dented sticks and prepare to face the bitter cold. Numb fingers, toes and faces are expected as sub-zero temperatures seem to have no effect on the size of the crowds at the ice rink, as it's been for decades. At Bethel University, January is the time for broomball.

Senior Ben Richburg has played every January since he arrived at Bethel as a freshman and looks forward to the season every year, which runs from January through the end of February.

"The months can get long and cold, but playing broomball with so many teams is such a blast and creates something for us all to look forward to and get excited about," Richburg said.

Teams range from playing just for fun to holding weekly practices and designing plays. No matter the end of the spectrum on which a team falls, Richburg says players can expect to have fun.

"[Broomball] creates unlikely friendships and it is hard to not have a great time while playing," Richburg said.

Students in the BUILD program, Bethel's two-year academic experience for students with intellectual disabilities, participated in this year's season, facing off against teams from across campus. For first-year BUILD student Ryan Hunt, the sport was something new.

"My favorite part was playing the game and having social interactions with people," Hunt said. "I didn't care if we won or lost. The only thing I cared about was to have fun and meet people."

Hunt played on a team with both BUILD students and four-year undergraduates. Although they ended the season with a losing record, Hunt said he wants to play again next year.

The Bethel broomball tradition extends beyond the years students spend on campus. Alumni remember their time playing broomball and the friendships they formed, some of which have become lifelong.

1997 Bethel graduate Lisa Horsager played in the Bethel tournament three of her four years as a student, opting out one year to study abroad. Horsager's team was led by Jon Wicklund, also a 1997 alumnus, and they both remember the sport consuming the month of January.

"The whole point of interim was to play broomball," said Horsager. "It's a terribly fun sport and something fun to do in the middle of winter."

Called "The Great 8," Horsager's team made sweat-shirts to wear around campus, and it even won the championship one year. Horsager said, outside the rink, teammates would often get together to watch movies and chat in a residence hall.

Alumni also remember intense competition between teams. 1996 Bethel graduates Joel Johnson and Michael Bryant played on a team that frequently faced

Wicklund and Horsager. "Our team had epic battles with [Wicklund's] team," said Bryant. "Although we were very competitive, it was also very inclusive."

Sometimes, the lengths to which teams would go to play were extreme.

Johnson remembers a day when the outside temperature was so cold the Governor of Minnesota closed public schools and Bethel put a halt on classes for several days, but come nightfall, students were on the ice.

"I remember taking the battery out of my car and storing it in my townhouse in [Arden Village] East just so I could make sure [the car] was ready to drive to broomball," Johnson said.

More than two decades later, the alumni recall broomball memories as some of their most treasured from Bethel. This winter sport of which most people outside Minnesota have never heard continues to have an effect on alumni today.

"Broomball is a time honored and cherished tradition at Bethel. Some people might not realize that the little things like intramural sports and broomball actually make a significant difference in the lives of so many students," Johnson said. "No matter the athletic background or familiarity with sports, broomball is a connection point that brings people together, and those relationships have proven to be lifelong in so many cases." **C**



Best Team Names From The 2021 Season:

- Here Comes the Broom
- No Broom in the Inn
- What the Hockey
- I'd Slap That

By The Numbers:

39 Teams for the 2021 season

312 Players

Organized games every weeknight, starting at 8 p.m. and running until 11:30 p.m.

Designed by Thanh Nguyen

Graphic by Davis McElmurry

Leigh Finke poses in her at home work space. The room is decorated with colorful artworks made by Finke and her and her children. | Photo by Emma Gottschalk

Places to breathe

Bethel alumnus Leigh Finke examines how religion and culture intersect with the lives of queer people and inspires others to work toward incusivity, such as the creation of Bethel's LGBTQ+ student group, Prism.

By Emma Eidsvoog and Makenzi Johnson



At 15 years old, Leigh Finke asked herself a question that took almost 20 years to unravel: *Am I gay?*

Instead of finding an answer she became an Evangelical Christian. Finke didn't grow up in a Christian environment but decided it would be easier than coming out. She decided going to church would keep her from having to address what she felt but couldn't quite explain.

Twenty years later she chose a life that felt right to her.

"I was in love with my wife. I had kids. I was happy," Finke said. "And I fell in love with a man."

In her late 30s, she first came out as bisexual but realized it wasn't quite right. Finke started transitioning to a woman after coming out six years ago.

"Those fears were the same ones. I was just older and more capable of answering those questions emotionally and rationally," Finke said.

Her and her ex-wife are on good terms, raising their two kids in separate St. Paul homes just a few blocks away from each other with the daycare in between. Finke's parents didn't react well.

"You don't grow out of not wanting to disappoint your parents," she said. "You don't grow out of being afraid of what people in your life are going to say."

Now, using her platform as a queer woman and a former Christian, Finke produces film and stories centered around the queer experience.

"I heard this all the time, 'I just don't get this,'" Finke said. "You don't have to get it. I don't expect you to understand it and get it. That's just a reason to not do the work."

After leaving Christianity, which she considered her closet, Finke now views the church as simply her workplace. She teaches leaders how to support LGBTQ youth with her book *Welcoming and Affirming: A Guide to Supporting and Working with*

LGBTQ Christian Youth. Throughout the pages, Finke highlighted statistics from organizations like The Trevor Project, which studies the effects of societal pressure on LGBTQ youth.

"My life's work is to protect young people from killing themselves," she said.

Finke started her writing career as an English literature and writing major at Bethel University, graduating in 2003 before attending DePaul University for her master's degree in Shakespeare. While at Bethel, she wrote for *The Clarion*, protested the Iraq war and realized she was more progressive than others at the university.

In August 2020, Finke published two books through 1517 Media, where Finke works as a Senior Media Producer. She also started her own video production company called *Totally Gay Productions*, which works with organizations, companies, churches and non-profits in the Midwest.

Finke's second book, *Queerfully and Wonderfully Made: A Guide for LGBTQ Christian Teens*, was also published last August. She worked with contributors which included a counselor, school teacher, pastor and others knowledgeable on the issues teens face. She wrote it with the writing voice of a "sassy, older sister" and thought about what she had needed to hear at 15 years old.

"The purpose of the book was twofold," Finke said. "One was to get people confident and back into security and emotionally ready to come out if they felt like they could come out. Part two of the book is how do you even be a queer. What does that mean? What does life look like?"

She wants her books to be at public libraries where youth can learn about themselves if they can't openly talk or ask questions at home.

Finke avoided discussion on theology in her books. She believes there's no discussion to be had.

"My life's work is to protect young people from killing themselves."

Leigh Finke

"You either affirm or not affirm," she said. "You either change that it's sin or not."

In 2013, Finke started a Facebook group to connect LGBTQ Bethel alumni. John Mark Shields, a 2020 Bethel graduate who now works as a facilities management custodian at Bethel, joined the Facebook group in February 2020.

Shields, whose pronouns are they/them, said they began working at Bethel University to heal from past wounds. Shields says they experienced backlash from students after hanging a pride flag from their window in Nelson Hall.

"I felt really alone in my first semester and I needed to connect with other people like me," Shields said. "It was like my own SOS in the window."

During their freshman year, Shields and a few other students decided that a space needed to be created for LGBTQ students to feel safe. In 2016, those students began to form Prism, Bethel's LGBTQ discipleship group.

Shields remembers the day the group was announced in Chapel. As they sat in Benson Great Hall, tears fell down their face. Posters appeared around the stairwells and a group of about 30 students began to meet with former Campus Pastor Jason Steffenhagen, who served as the group's first adviser.

"I just sat bawling because it meant they weren't ashamed anymore," Shields said. "It felt like Bethel didn't pretend we were no longer on this campus."

The club was required to have an adviser and wasn't allowed to make theological statements, but Shields hopes the club lasts in order for LGBTQ students to have a safe space in the Bethel community.

"It felt like I could finally breathe on this campus as a student," Shields said. "As soon as everyone walked in and shut the door, it felt like you could breathe."

Without the support of staff and professors, Shields said they wouldn't have stayed at Bethel.

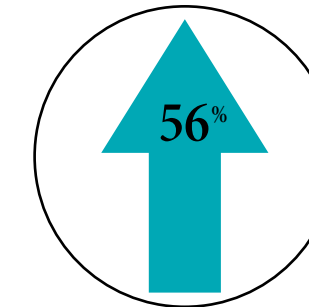
According to Shields, Campus Pastor Laurel Bunker was someone who didn't follow the same theology as them, but made an impact on them by creating a space to be LGBTQ.

"She always held me in that space and said, 'What can I do to support you? What can I do to make you feel at home here?'" Shields said.

As a graduate of Reconciliation Studies, Shields wants to work to reconcile queer people and the church.

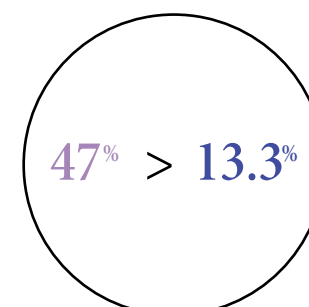
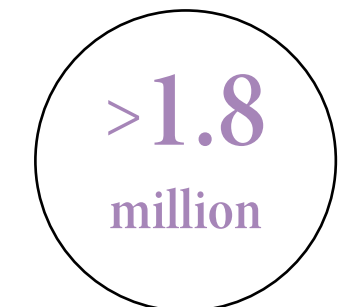
"We're not here to change Bethel," Shields said. "We're here to say, 'Hey, can we go here too? Can we feel comfortable here too?'"

During the formation of Prism, an on-campus "discipleship group" for LGBTQ+ students, Shields



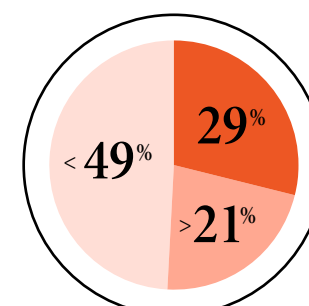
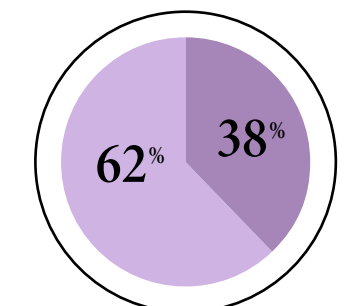
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that between 2007 and 2017, the rate of teenage suicide increased 56 percent

Over 1.8 million LGBTQ+ people ages 13-24 consider suicide each year



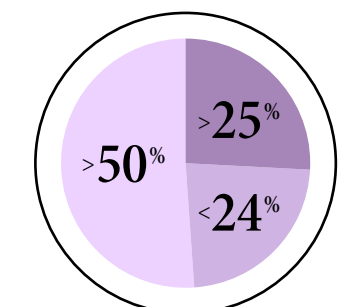
LGB students were three and a half times more likely to consider suicide than their heterosexual peers (47% vs. 13.3%)

38% of LGB students and 25.6% of questioning students had made a plan about how they would attempt suicide



Over half of transgender and nonbinary youth have seriously considered suicide and 29% had attempted it

Almost half of LGBTQ+ youth 13-17 have considered suicide. More than 25% of LGBTQ+ youth have attempted suicide



Senior nursing major and student leader of Prism, Tristan Utech, sits in the nursing department. | Photo by Emma Gottschalk



named Bethel's core values as one of the reasons for the group to be supported.

According to Bethel's website, the purpose of Prism is to provide "a caring and supportive community for students who identify as LGBTQ+ and same-sex attracted." The group began after Shields, along with other LGBTQ+ students, the CFCR office and the Board of Trustees saw a need for a safe space. The group allows students to be more honest and open than they would in a group like Shift, the freshman discipleship group.

"Regardless of where you land on Biblical interpretation or on philosophy of education, whatever the sticky categories are here, it's important to make decisions like this with care and love that goes beyond difference," Prism adviser Pastor Matt Runion said.

The group has been active for almost three years now, with Runion taking the role of adviser after Jason Steffenhagen resigned from his pastoral position at Bethel in January.

Co-advisers Runion and adjunct professor Kristen Nichols-Besel attend group meetings and provide guidance by meeting frequently with student leader Tristan Utech to discuss objectives and goals.

"It is a place for honest engagement in scripture, for authentic community and ultimately a loving place," Runion said.

Utech, a senior nursing major, is currently the student leader for Prism and has been involved since his first meeting in 2019. His role as the student leader is to provide talking points for the six meetings per semester.

"We want people to be able to come and be who they feel that they are to their fullest extent," Utech said. "Who God created them to be."

Utech believes that Prism can help foster healthy and helpful conversations throughout campus.

"It should be somewhere you can come and feel safe," Utech said. "And that's what I want Bethel to be for everyone, and everyone includes LGBTQ+." **C**

"We want people to be able to come and be who they feel that they are to their fullest extent, to who God created them to be."

Tristan Utech

Designed by Alexa Vos

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sodexo*



Kjeirstin Carlson prepares for a DECA event via zoom. She first joined the club in high school, and fell in love with the mix of competition and business strategy. “[At Bethel], I got involved in DECA right away,” Carlson said. “I can really see... all the thinking on my feet and creativity that I have to do in DECA competitions really helping me out now in the real working world.”
| Photo by Vanna Contreras.

Finding a new *rhythm*

Senior Kjeirstin Carlson tells of how a heart condition rarely experienced by young people affects her life as an ambitious college student.

By Emily Rossing

Kjeirstin Carlson shut her eyes. Under her bed covers in Bodien Hall, she tried to fall asleep, exhausted after another busy day as a Bethel freshman.

But her heart wouldn't let her.

As she lay there, she felt her heart pulse with a powerful, irregular beat, like her heart was working harder than it should. She waited for it to stop, and it refused. She grabbed her phone and dialed home, despite it being close to 11 p.m. She noticed panic in her mother's voice. This was serious.

After several hospital trips, she learned the heart palpitations were a sign of heart arrhythmias, or abnormal beating in the heart. Arrhythmias can range from being slightly bothersome to life threatening. One more serious type of arrhythmia is called atrial fibrillation, and occurs when the electrical activity in the heart is unstable instead of regular, so blood is not as easily transported through the body and less likely to reach the brain.

But the doctors said it couldn't be this. AFib, as the heart condition is commonly called, is only seen in elderly patients, not 18-year-olds who make it to the gym almost every day. It had to be a minor arrhythmia, they said. Just an abnormal heart rhythm, but not life-threatening as long as the heart is still pumping blood forcefully. Nothing to be too afraid of.

Still, Carlson could feel that something more serious was going on. The palpitations became more frequent, occurring multiple times a day, and exhausted her. She found herself consistently more tired and having to muster up enough internal motivation just to make it through the day. The drugs and exercises doctors prescribed only made her more sick by giving her headaches, double vision, and severe nausea. Since her heart was working extra hard to pump blood throughout her body, it required extra rest, which isn't compatible with being a college student who strives for

A's, participates in multiple clubs, and values having time with friends. She knew something had to change if she didn't want to give up her lifestyle.

After more hospital visits where more doctors told her more of the same information, she turned to her grandfather's cardiologist at the Minneapolis Heart Institute located at Abbott Northwestern Hospital. In the waiting room, she was the only patient under 60.

It was here that she was officially diagnosed with atrial fibrillation.

Walking back to the examination room, Carlson thought she was again about to hear more of the same information. But this cardiologist specialized in AFib, and would be able to spot the disease where other doctors wouldn't on her echocardiogram, a test done to see heart rhythms.

After one look at the echocardiogram, the doctor knew. She had AFib.

Her mother, who was in the room with her, burst into tears. Saying she needed to take a walk, she left the room, leaving Carlson alone with the doctor who had just officially diagnosed her. He said they could wait until she returned to talk about her options. Carlson filled those five long minutes by reading a packet the doctor handed her that explained what AFib was.

When her mother returned, they began to talk about options. The doctor told them the illness was incurable. Manageable, yes, with medication and good sleep and food, but stubborn. Sometimes drugs work to sustain a normal rhythm, but sometimes it doesn't and surgery is required. The next few months would be a process of trying different techniques to calm her heart down.

Having AFib doesn't just mean having a weak heart, it also greatly increases the risk of stroke. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately nine percent of adults over 65 are eventually diagnosed with the condition, with only two

percent of adults under 65 hearing the same news. For people under 20, that percentage is even lower.

Most people who live with AFib are diagnosed not when they are 18, but when they have 18 years left to live.

"It was very emotional," Carlson said. "A real shock to the system."

At the start of her journey with AFib, she was forced to slow down for a time in order to focus on her health. Not only did she have less time to commit to the activities and people she loved, but more time at the hospital meant more time to ruminate on what was happening to her.

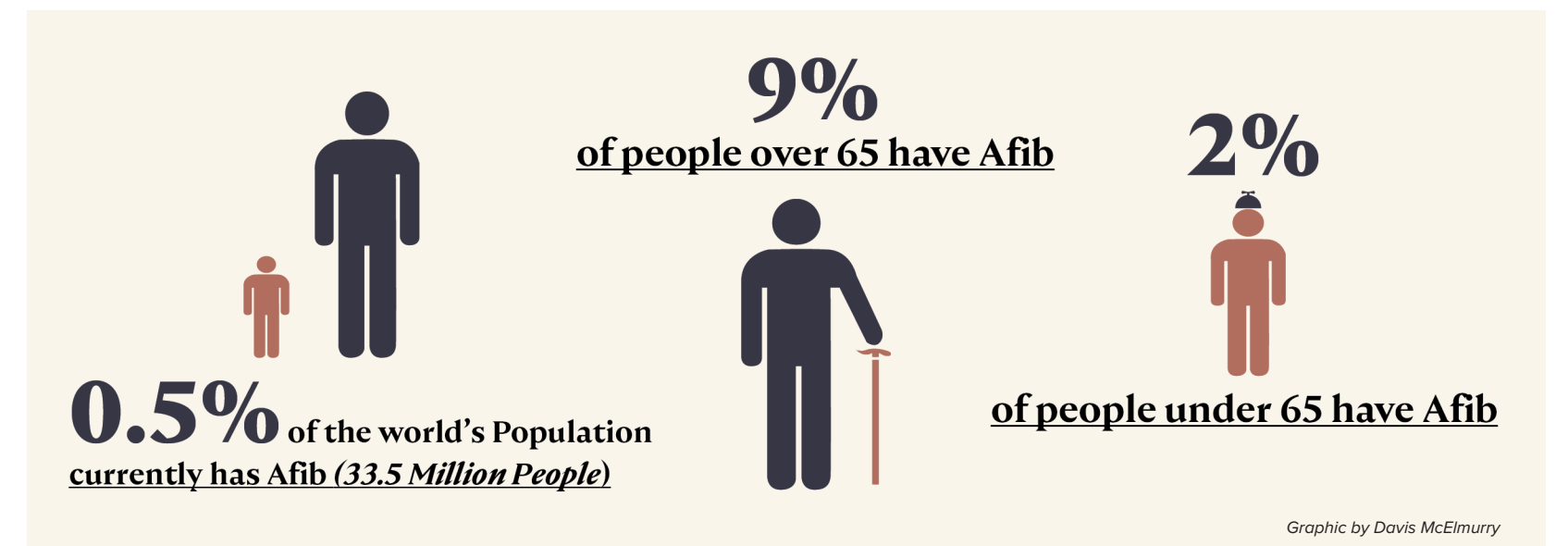
"My mental health really struggled," Carlson said.

Another difficulty Carlson found was learning how to explain her situation to others. It was especially hard with the people she knew best at school, like her friends and freshman floor. Sometimes she didn't have the right words to say it or felt the need to act like she was okay, even though she wasn't. Struggling with an "invisible illness," as she calls it, was very tough mentally for Carlson at the beginning of this journey, simply because she couldn't find the words to tell people what was going on. Though this social aspect was difficult for Carlson, she views it now with a different mindset.

"Now I'm able to look back on it [and see] it was an example [that] sometimes you need to ask for help and clue people in," Carlson said.

As episodes continued to worsen, doctors suggested that Carlson receive surgery to help ease the symptoms and reduce her risk of stroke. On May 1st, 2019, surgeons at Abbott performed a dangerous and invasive procedure called an ablation that charred some of her heart so as to stop extra electrical activity. Doctors entered her body with a catheter through the veins of her leg and threaded it all the way up to her heart. They sent waves of extreme heat through the tube to burn

PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WITH AFIB BY AGE



Kjeirstin Carlson puts away Christmas decorations, cleaning the Student Activities' room, where she spends much of her time as a director in BSG.
| Photo by Vanna Contreras.

pieces of her heart so that they are no longer functional in sending and receiving electrical signals that cause a heart beat. The purpose of such a procedure is to stop extra electrical activity and unify the beats into a more regular pattern.

Carlson says her symptoms reduced 80 to 90 percent after the surgery. Palpitations were less common and less powerful, allowing her life to be less interrupted by the symptoms that came with them.

Even now, as a senior planning to graduate this fall, she says her symptoms are mostly manageable. She can

still experience palpitations some days, but can also go weeks without them. She says it can vary, but it's much better than before her surgery when she experienced them multiple times a day. Time has been good in allowing her to distinguish what triggers these episodes, and she does her best to mostly avoid them now. Things like sudden temperature shifts, eating fatty foods and not getting enough sleep tend to be common culprits.

"I feel like I can kind of tie it to my lifestyle," said Carlson. "Whereas freshman year it was just kinda out of control."

Carlson's sister, Britta, a Bethel sophomore, says witnessing this whole situation made her appreciate the strength and determination of her sister. Britta tells of how the day after heart surgery, Kjeirstin was studying for a French test, and told Britta she planned to return to campus just three days later to take it.

"She was so determined to not let this take too much of her life," Britta Carlson said. "If it would've been me, I would have taken lots of time off."

In the year and a half since the surgery, Carlson has learned to work with her body, not against it. She has accepted AFib as a part of her and knows how to manage it by taking a low-dose aspirin every day as a precaution and watching for triggers in her environment. This way, she can still attend classes and stay involved with her clubs on campus. She can see friends

and family without having to worry if her heart will randomly sabotage her. She can even move to New York City to do an internship this summer and graduate in the fall with a business marketing degree.

"If I didn't have this way of my body telling me [to stop]... I wouldn't focus so much on having a balance," Carlson said.

Carlson serves as the president of Bethel's chapter of DECA, a club that competes nationally in solving business problems, and she is the BSG Director of Banquets and Dances. She also is involved in Bethel Biz, a mentorship program for business majors.

Anyone over 65 who lives with AFib would look at Carlson's life and warn her to slow down. Doctors have told her. Her parents have implored her, but Carlson has dreams of making it big in the business world, and wants to see that come to fruition as soon as possible.

"They told me to hit pause on college, but I'm stubborn, so I didn't," Carlson said. "At the end of the day, something is making me feel normal and involved... which is

good from a mental perspective."

Carlson also thanks her heart condition for strengthening her faith and offering a fresh perspective. Before the condition, Carlson said her life was fairly comfortable and it was easy for her to think she could do everything on her own. She explains how AFib brought that to a screeching halt and reminded her to rely on God for everything. She found herself desperately praying during those episodes of intense palpitations for immediate physical relief and says this practice of prayer and reliance on God has continued even now, two years after the first time her heart wouldn't let her fall asleep.

"[Life] can be harder [sometimes]," Carlson said. "[But this is] the most crucial part of my faith story and my testimony." **C**

"They told me to hit pause on college, but I'm stubborn so I didn't."

KJEIRSTIN CARLSON



Masks are absurd

Opinion

By Joe Werdan

In 1942, Albert Camus wrote a philosophical essay called “The Myth of Sisyphus.” In short, Sisyphus is given a task by the gods: to roll a stone to the top of a hill. But the catch is that as soon as he reaches the top, the stone rolls back down to the bottom, without fail. So Sisyphus must walk to the bottom of the hill, roll the stone to the top and repeat his task—and he must do this for eternity. At this point, Camus interjects and asks a question: What might Sisyphus do?

Camus explores two possibilities. One, Sisyphus could choose to appeal to the gods in hope they will set him free from his burdensome task. Or, he could choose to despair over his situation and see his life as meaningless. For Camus, option one is an attempt to escape from reality, and it does Sisyphus no good, for he still must complete his task. But to give up completely and to view his life as meaningless is just as invalid, because if Sisyphus refuses to roll the stone, it will still be there waiting for him the next day.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter what choice he makes—the options are meaningless. His situation is absurd. But Camus' point isn't so much about which choice Sisyphus makes as it is about how and why he chooses at all.

Today, we find ourselves in a similar position as Sisyphus, not with a stone we must push to the top of a hill, but with a more elementary task—wearing face masks. It's a seemingly meaningless thing that we have to do because we are bound to the contract we signed as part of Bethel's COVID-19 Commitment.

And, yet, we don't all follow through. Most of us walk around campus without keeping appropriate distance from others. Many of us wear our masks improperly, leaving our noses uncovered or turning our face masks into chin straps. And some choose not to wear a mask at all—whether when walking down the bridge or sitting in the BC. Now, to be clear, I'm not lumping everyone into categories of for and against masks, nor am I attempting to make a political statement about social distancing, although the idea of masks being political is ironic since almost every aspect of our lives is influenced by our politics. Rather, I want to ask why we make these choices.

The way I see it is like this: We are Sisyphus, and masks, along with other COVID-19 safety protocols, are our stones. And our hill is simply the reality in which we exist—the reality of wearing masks, attending lectures via Zoom and standing on little blue dots when we're in line for the DC. Now, I personally do not understand why wearing a mask in and of itself is absurd—they're warm, soft, and great at hiding my monotonous facial expressions—but Camus understands. Wearing a mask isn't a choice we make; it's a choice that is made for us—it takes away our freedom. And, whether or not we agree with that choice, we are still “forced” to comply, whether by posted reminders or by the person in the hallway who tells us to pull our masks above our noses, who, admittedly, is usually me. And yet some of us still refuse.

Instead of wearing masks, some of us choose to

believe that only God can protect us from contracting COVID-19. Or, we choose to deny that masks are meaningful—either because they don't work, or because COVID-19 isn't real, which it is. Either way, whether we choose hope or despair, our situation doesn't change. COVID-19 is still very much a reality, and the rules are still in effect. No matter what we do to avoid it, we still have to wear masks. This is the absurdity—that whether or not you choose to wear a mask, you still have to.

To return to Sisyphus, we should ask: How do we imagine him? How might we imagine ourselves? Camus offers a way out for Sisyphus—kind of. But, rather than present a hidden third option, what Camus does is offer a change in perspective. The meaningful thing for Sisyphus to do is to accept the absurd—to choose to roll the stone up the hill. Sisyphus' only way out of the absurdity is to accept the absurdity.

What does this mean for us, then? If COVID-19 is our absurdity, and wearing a mask each day is our task, how do we continue to be human without having false hope or denying our reality? Simple—We have faith. We do as Camus suggests for Sisyphus, and we accept that wearing masks correctly, keeping six feet of distance and bumping elbows, absurd as it may be, is what we should do. For, in the end, ethics does not revolve around the word “can,” but instead around the word “should.” And maybe faith, for us, looks like wearing a mask. **C**

I didn't find my faith at Bethel

Opinion

By Emma Harville

I searched long and hard, but it never came. It didn't come to me arms raised at a Vespers service or hunched over in the back pew at Chapel. It didn't come to me through belonging to a "Christ-centered community" or through long and arduous daily devotionals. No, rather it was a wooded path I walked daily during this year's peculiarly mild January at home that finally cracked me, that forced me to take a long look in the mirror and ponder where I was headed.

Six new freckles emerged on my face by the time I completed the loop around my neighborhood lake, and I felt my flushed cheeks thaw under the sharp wintry sun as I wiped the stream of wet snot that dripped from my nose. Walking along the outskirts of Chomox Golf Course among the cheery company of cross-country skiers, I pulled the gray scarf tight around my neck and relished in the anonymity my hooded parka provided me.

Quite often I'd meet eyes with a particular elderly woman, the one I saw almost every day on these excursions – she'd walk slow, taking measured steps with the help of a cane, always alone and always flashing a set of big, yellowed teeth at me when I passed her.

Other times on these walks I encountered no people at all. Instead I'd engage in the occasional staring match with a camouflaged doe, listen intently to the chirping of black birds or covet the simplicity of a serene, snow-filled forest, filled with creatures unaware and unaffected by the throes of a raging pandemic.

As a senior in my final semester at Bethel, I've begun to feel a strange discomfort when I travel hallways and sit in classrooms. Many of my friends have graduated, and there are times I walk through the BC and fail to recognize a single face. Or, rather, a pair of eyes.

The to-do list for the coming months taunts me: network, network, network; retain my dignity by finding the most "respectable" entry-level job; prove to everyone that I know what I am doing. Oh, yes, and do all of it during a pandemic and global recession.

It's as if I am standing idly on a balance beam, teetering this way and that. I could fall to the left and meet one particular fate or fall to the right and meet another. Petrified of choosing the wrong side, I don't choose at all. Instead, I venture further into the snow-covered woods and fervently hope I find the answer there.

One of my professors recently asked our class of seniors what we

thought about our time at Bethel. One by one, my peers shared their thoughts: Some expressed frustration with the seeming dissonance between the sense of community that's slapped on Bethel's pamphlets and what they really experienced during their time here. Others expressed disappointment in the student body's lack of diversity when it comes to race, culture and viewpoints. A couple people even said that, because of these reasons, they don't think they would recommend Bethel to their future children.

I don't blame them. In nearly four years at a private Christian school in the suburbs, I questioned my faith more frequently than I felt solidly grounded in it. I compared my faith journey to that of those around me and always seemed to fall short. I found myself confused and frustrated when, after a year of disease, turmoil and destruction, many people around me appeared to snap back like elastic to a livelihood that mirrored the very one in which they had been existing before.

To be clear, I don't blame Bethel as an institution for distancing me from my faith – at least not exclusively. I also don't hold any bitterness toward Bethel, because I know that what Bethel has provided for me in friendships and academic opportunities is something of which I will continue to reap the benefits. I'm immensely privileged to have received an education from a school like Bethel, yet I still find myself craving more. More peace. More genuine dialogue. More understanding. And I know I'm not the only one.

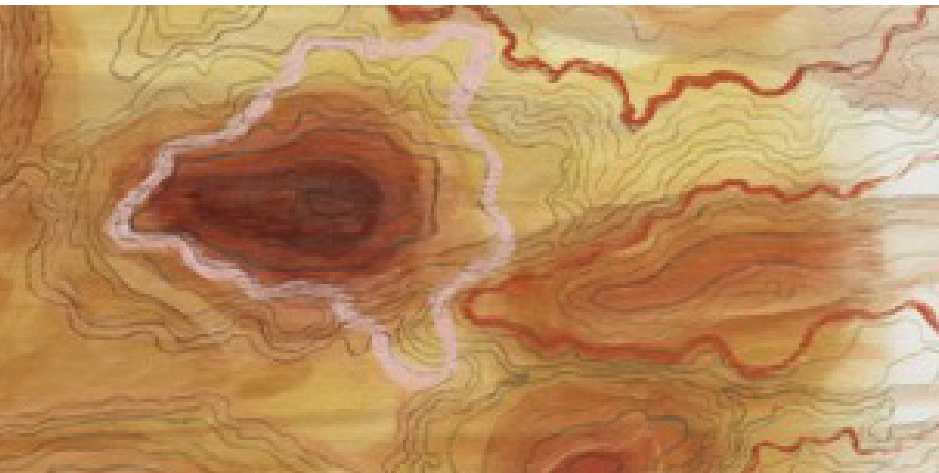
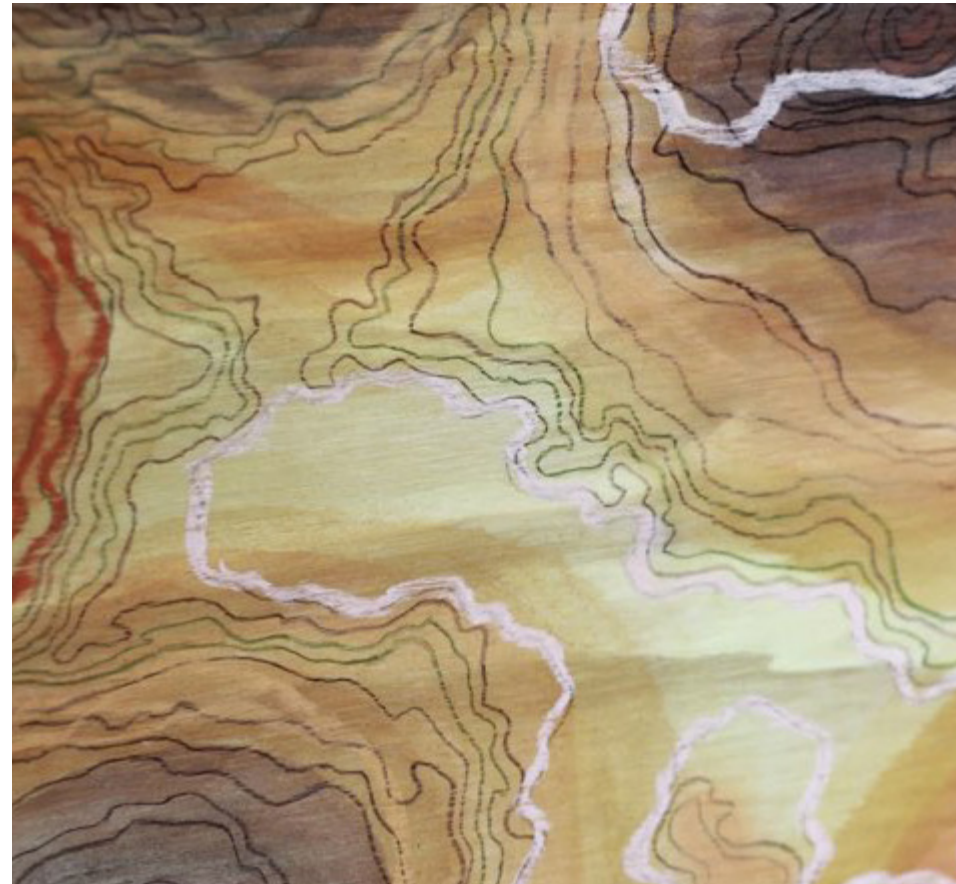
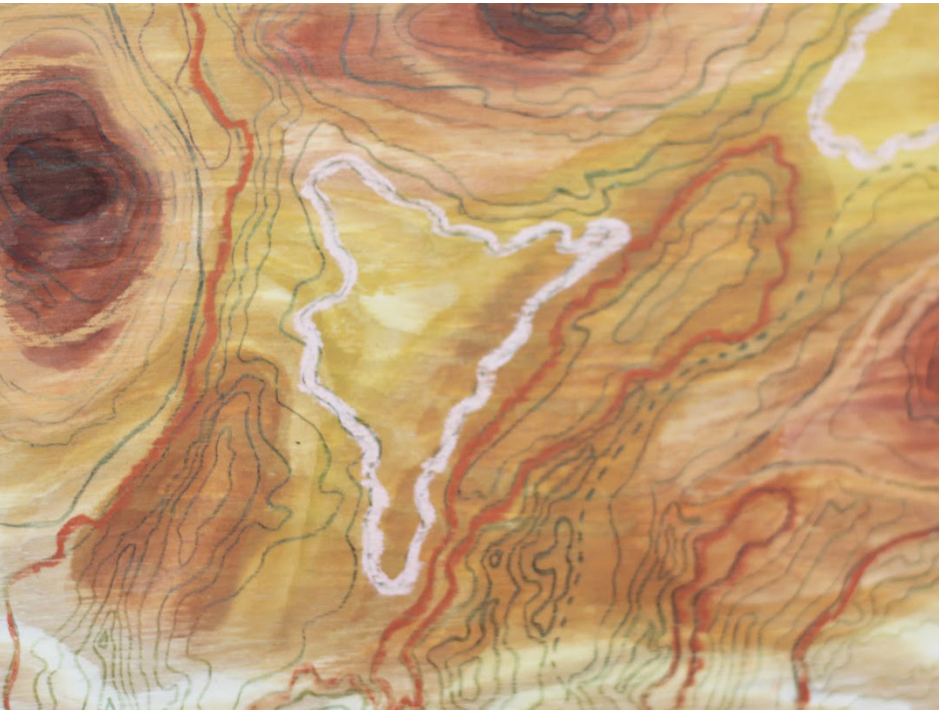
Yes, Bethel forced me to grow in my faith, but maybe not in the way it originally intended me to. I couldn't seem to find God in Arden Hills, so I pulled a magnifying glass out of my pocket and searched elsewhere.

It was then I found Him in a village of northern India during a j-term storytelling trip, kneeling down by a veiled woman building a fire to keep the school children warm. It was then I found Him at a community clean-up in Minneapolis following the murder of George Floyd, wading through the charred, sooty rubble and scooping up gray ash to pour in my bucket.

And it is now that I find Him before me on the secluded wooded path – quiet, just a whisper, under the bright, electric sun and amid the volatile, waspish winds. I still don't have all the answers, but I curiously find that it is when I step outside the prescribed means of faith that I don't have to search so hard anymore. **C**

featured artist

Hadley Rittgers



Declination is a series created to challenge the viewer's perspective. These paintings were created on my bedroom floor in the spring of 2020 during the stay at home order. The topographic lines represent the act of "stepping back" and looking at the bigger picture, while the intricate pattern in the grain of the wood draws the viewer in to see the often overlooked details. I am hoping the visual contrast and conceptual tension expand the viewer's perspective and help them appreciate the little things in life that are often overlooked.

Want to be a featured artist in our next issue? Email your art or design submissions and a short artist statement to emma-gottschalk@bethel.edu