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Showcase Talk – “Our Community: Cultivating the Outward Turn”
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This fall I was very fortunate to study abroad in Amman, Jordan, where I was fully immersed in a different language, culture, and world outside of my comfortable bubble at Northwestern. I was overwhelmed, to say the least. After growing up next to Lake Michigan and as a sailor on the team at Northwestern...I resented the desert. Every day, I disillusioned myself on my walk to school that the thing at the bottom of the hill was a lake, when in fact, it was just a Porsche building that resembled nothing of a lake. In the face of change, it is easy to cling to this comfort: the lake, a culture and friends that I fit in with at Northwestern and looking inward about what I need all the time. It wasn't until I was walking home from school one day, looking down this same hill for the fake lake, when I saw the most gorgeous sunset that I still think about to this day. And it wasn't until that sunset and a conversation a few days later with Deanna when I realized that I wasn't and was never alone...Because when there wasn't a lake, God showed me a sunset. And once I turned outwards, looking to God's creation, I knew that God would always be there guiding me, even if I wasn't listening just yet.

As a predominantly Muslim country, I benefited from observing how others live out their faith, which not only helped my own faith grow deeper, but made me really miss LCMNU. God is embedded into many cultural phrases in the Arabic language and lexicon. For example, when I would get in and out of a taxi, I would always say the phrase “may God be with you and your family”—no hello necessary. Even if life can seem as trivial as a taxi ride sometimes, God is there and guiding everything we do, and I grew so much deeper in my connection to God as I prayed not just for miracles, but to safely ride in a taxi. Throughout my next few beautiful months in Jordan, I engaged with many different communities at school, with people on the street, cooking classes, taxis, dancing, and more and I shared this same phrase— “may God be with you and your family” —because just like they said to me, I hoped that God would be with them and their families.

When I came back to LCMNU, I shared a lot about my faith journey in Jordan, which was well met by our conversations about vocation in 21theo. It is so easy to get caught up with work and school and lose track of God—turning inward to my immediate needs and stressors—but God is omnipresent. I have been so blessed to share in this faith community with my peers, and in Jordan, as a visitor in another faith community that looked outwards and accepted me, I realized how powerful this outward turn can be. The opportunity to connect over meals, share in prayer on Wednesday and Sunday, and engage with the local community through our work with Connections has been so meaningful to not only my experience at Northwestern, but in fostering community and prioritizing these connections. As fellowship leader, I strive to make LCM a welcoming community for people that have been to the ministry once or 100 times. I am so thankful that my study abroad experience opened my eyes to the importance of these connections and how God plays such a strong role in my day-to-day interactions, and I am even more thankful for how LCMNU has let me live out this vocation ever since.