

From “plugged in” to leading

My journey in the Christian community



Students gathered for a retreat photo at Lon Little’s “playground,” affectionately known as “Lonnie Land,” spring 2010.

When I visited my brother, a freshman at Carleton, in fall 2005, I wanted to know about Christian life on campus. Was there a strong community of believers? Were there Bible studies that took a high view of the Scriptures? Did the Christians worship together? Would I leave Carleton closer to God than when I arrived?

Yes, yes, yes and yes, the student I was staying with replied. I only had to “get plugged in.”

Next thing I knew, I was a wide-eyed freshman, eager to find my place

and plug in. I found the FISH House table at the fall Student Activities Fair and signed up for the weekly e-mail list for what was then called the Carleton Christian Community (CCC). I quickly became a regular at Mustard Seed and started attending a small group.

My brother and I also hosted a radio show on KRLX, Carleton’s station, called Christian Radio for Atheists, during which the two of us would dialog about religious topics and play both Christian and secular music.

As I adjusted to Carleton, the upper-

class students in the CCC were especially welcoming. Every time I got a big hug from one of them I wondered how they could be so nice.

At the time, I didn’t think about how FISH House or Mustard Seed came to be, who had put together an e-mail list or how the students might have challenged each other to reach out to a freshman like me. I didn’t know they had been praying for me since the previous spring and had met as leaders encouraging one another to reach out to us newbies.

By the end of fall term, even though

Nikki Reich ’10

I valued the small group I was in, I was looking for a Bible study, particularly a women’s study. There was a Saturday morning women’s study, but I had cross country or track meets. An upper-class student suggested I connect with Deb Hvass if I was looking for help to set something up. Nine freshman girls joined the study Deb and I led, and we spent two terms going in-depth through the book of Ephesians. We called ourselves Fresh(wo)men.

After taking this step of leadership, I attended my first leaders’ meeting. Soon after, I began to understand that there was a leadership framework supporting the CCC. The leaders met twice a term for group updates, facilitated by three elected peer leaders, the Panel.

When I served on the Panel, I started hearing stories about past communities of believers. After hearing about the revival in the ’70s and a dwindling Bible study in the mid-’90s, I realized I had naïvely assumed that the community of believers had always been the same.

As a graduating senior, I was grateful for all the “lunch dates” I’d had, whether I had initiated or someone else had. These were times to meet with a friend or mentor over a meal to spur one another on in the faith. I left college with a stronger theological foundation, gained through the Bible studies I had helped lead and through Gary Hvass’s seminars. I had grown in leadership, not only having increased in confidence, but also in my desire to submit my plans to God and receive wise counsel each step of the way.

Now as a community “groupie”

servicing with SOul ZOne Ministries, I’m participating for a fifth year. Rarely do students get to experience more than four years on campus. I understand more fully the dynamics of Christian groups on campus: The key issues are the identity of Jesus and the nature of the Scriptures. Even within the FC there is not complete agreement on these.

But I continue to love this community for its deep relationships, godly lifestyles and growing faith in Jesus Christ. It’s amazing to see a new generation of students doing what we did—praying for the incoming freshmen, giving welcoming hugs to students trying out new groups, working together as leaders and so much more.

We’ve tried to communicate throughout *Keeping the Faith at Carleton* the sense of eternal heritage that belongs to students who “contend for the faith that was once for all given to the saints” (Jude 3). This heritage comes from years of prayer sown into the campus, from the sacrificial efforts of many students and others in Northfield and ultimately from God’s faithful provision. Such is the foundation on which a strong community is built, and I am glad to have the privilege of playing a part in it. ♦

Nikki Reich ’10 served as staff associate with SOul ZOne Ministries during 2010-2011. She will be married in August 2011 to Andy Shenk ’10, a former Panel member and founder of His In Service.



Hugs happened at the senior BBQ, June 2010.