

Avery Shewmaker
Class of 2020

Lumen Christi Catholic School

My name is Avery Shewmaker and I am your Class President and Valedictorian for the Class of 2020. I am also the sole member of the Class of 2020.

When I was considering where to go to high school, many aspects of Lumen Christi stood out to me right away. Not only was I attracted to the incredible faith of the students and teachers, but to the traditional approach to learning and the opportunities that the school provides.

The most important part of Lumen Christi that stood out to me when deciding where to go to high school was how greatly this community nurtures and fosters the Catholic faith. Every morning starts with Mass. Not many schools can say that they start their day seeing and receiving God. I was blessed to hear advice from a priest every morning in the homily. I was shown upfront by fellow students and teachers that their faith was the most important part of their lives, and that the same faith is worth having. Throughout the school day, teachers started class with prayer. We had opportunities for Adoration and Reconciliation. We prayed the Angelus before lunch together, and we prayed St. Michael's prayer at the end of the day so that we had God's guidance and protection against evil after the school day was done. There was even one day where we were given the opportunity to have Mass and discussions with a Cardinal.

Earlier this year someone asked me a question that I had never heard before. They asked: "If it was illegal to be a Catholic follower of Christ, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" I responded that there *would* be enough evidence to convict me. I think that the reason I was so sure is because Lumen Christi set me up so well to know and love the faith that I could not imagine living a single day without it. I'm confident and proud that the Lumen Christi community is visibly and unapologetically Catholic.

When people ask me what it's like to go to a small school, I feel a great amount of pride in telling how close all the families are, and how personalized the education is. While the Catholic faith is the most special part about Lumen Christi, our education goes hand in hand with it. In our English classes, we are fortunate to read some Christian literature, as well as to participate in essay contests for the Annual Right to Life dinner and see fellow students win. In

our science classes, we learn about how wonderful and complex the world God made for us is, and we also get the Catholic perspective on contested theories such as evolution and the Big Bang Theory. In our history classes we are taught more than public schools; we learn how to respond as Catholics to social injustices and swim against society's current. What stands out to me more than any subject area is our theology classes, and our focus on classical and traditional reasoning.

By the time I graduated, I had read and deciphered the entire Bible, and had gone through the Catechism of the Catholic Church. In my Apologetics class, I learned how to confidently explain and defend the Catholic faith to those who question it, which will be very helpful in my adulthood. I was prepared to discern God's plan for my life and follow the Vocation He has for me. I knew how to pray sincerely and joyfully, and I had a strong relationship with God. It's not just a school, it's a community of God's people.

There were also other opportunities aside from the regular school day. At the end of my freshman year, I was able to travel to California with the school and see many religious sights that I might never have gotten to see otherwise. During my sophomore year, we traveled to Philadelphia and were able to have a priest accompany us to say Masses and share insight. We were able to have Mass in the shrine of St. John Neumann and be blessed with a Second-Class relic of his. We were also able to visit historical sites such as the Liberty Bell and Gettysburg. Toward the end of last year, we were able to go on Pilgrimage to Canada, where we prayed in front of the arm of St. Anne, Mary's mother. One of my favorite trips that we go on every year is to Washington, D.C. for the March for Life. We get to hear from amazing speakers about how to cherish life, the most precious gift God has given us, and we have the first-hand chance to defend it.

Aside from trips, one of the greatest opportunities Lumen Christi has to offer is the chance to grow in faith with the people around us. In the high school, students and teachers have the ability to discuss matters of faith and education. During Catholic Schools Week, students and teachers have the ability to prove who's better at volleyball. As high school students, we have the opportunity to expand our circle even more, whether it's going down to the coffee shop during study hall and building community with the neighborhood, or whether it's volunteering at the soup kitchen down the street. Although the high school is in a different building, we still find

ourselves in the grade school for assemblies, art and science, and to help out other students and teachers when needed.

My most recent example of the Lumen Christi community is this year's graduation. As the sole member of the Class of 2020, I was unsure how graduation would happen with one senior, let alone a global pandemic. However, I was pleasantly surprised at how quickly the school and Fr. McCarthy were able to arrange such a special and personal graduation Mass. I was also able to watch my youngest sibling receive his First Holy Communion at that same Mass. It reaffirmed my belief that this community is unique and tight knit in a way that you won't find anywhere else.

When I think about Lumen Christi, what comes to mind is more than a school. It's a faithful community of God's people who promote the traditional faith and reasoning designed to lead all of its members to Heaven.