

Hi, my name is Ara Anderson and I'm so excited to say I will be attending University of Minnesota this year! I am so excited to meet so many new people and join different clubs, like the food club for instance, where you go to try different kinds of foods. I am so excited for the big opportunities that are coming my way this fall. Not gonna lie though, I have my doubts about going to school, like my main one... how am I gonna survive in all this debt? Am I going to get bad grades, or will I never find my group of people? So many doubts can come to my mind about college. One thing that I know for sure is that I'm not alone on this journey. No matter what, no matter where I am, God will always be with me. I have a lot of doubts in life but for some reason I have always had in my head "it's all gonna be okay Ara." I have always believed that was him telling me "I'm here you got this, you'll be ok." I have struggled with faith from time to time, but I always come back to it. I do because I truly believe God has blessed me, with my family, friends and environment. I see beauty in things everyday and I just think of God. I heard people being kind to each other and I think of God's message. With all of these doubts I have, I still truly believe because with all the good and beauty in the world there must be a god out there.

I'm not gonna lie, I could do better on my church involvement. I wish I could make the time to go to church more. I know I am more than welcome at the church even if I haven't been in awhile. So I do believe and realize I need to take more time and go more often. Church made me realize how much I love to volunteer. My first time volunteering was because of the youth program, it was at Kids Against Hunger. Afterwards I was so proud of myself and it felt good that I did something that not only helped others but helped me. It made me feel good because I liked doing things for others. I've always been a people person and volunteering helped me realize that. I used to love helping out at the church gargle sales as well. Not only was I helping my other church people, I got to know them better than things like this. I have to say though one of my favorite times volunteering was with my confirmation group and we went to Duluth to plant apple trees. Not only was it the first time going to an apple tree farm it also helped me realize how much I love the environment and respect and want to take care of it. I feel like I learn new little things about me every time I have experiences with that. So my goal is to take more time and spend it getting involved with not only church but the opportunities and lessons that they can give.

I care a great deal about the world, its people and environment. I enjoy working with Special Olympics as a Unified Warrior and also as a helper for Adaptive Phy.Ed. I think it's important to be an includer and make sure teens with different needs feel the joy and laughter of hanging out with peers. I have also been involved in Eco Club for a couple of years now. I've always been passionate about recycling since I was in elementary school. I believe it's good to study conservation and listen to our environmental scientists about our many world issues. I worry so much about plastic waste, pipelines leaking, the melting of the polar ice caps from the effects of global warming. I also believe in good stewardship, knowing we can work together as people to make a big impact. This year I also joined "The lighthouse project." The Lighthouse Project strives to educate teens and youth about suicide prevention. As I stated before I believe in being an includer and I run in many different social groups. Being Chinese in a mostly white community has made me have a true sense of empathy for others. Brainerd has had too many suicides over my years here at school and I really believe there is a huge need for mental health services and awareness. I am also involved in Key and Interact Club, where I get the opportunity to have more chances to volunteer. So far I have done blood drives, soup kitchens and sold root beer floats at lunch to raise money for Ukraine.

Scholarships

1. What are your future plans?

I plan to attend the University of Minnesota and go into elementary education.

What were your most memorable school and church experiences?

I have so many church memories that I just love. I loved participating in Sunday School, my favorite was the play of how Jesus was born. I was one of the 3 wise men and I was the one who brought myrrh. I also loved the middle school church retreat, where we stayed overnight at Maddens with a whole bunch of other churches. I made a lot of connections with other teens on that trip and shared so many stories about our faith and worries about God. I'm still good friends with 2 girls from the retreat. The best part about it was it made us even closer to God than I ever would have thought imaginable. Every summer I attended vacation bible school and eventually became one of the teen leaders. My mom would paint the backdrop murals and my sister Ella and I would help her. Vacation Bible School was such a blast, especially when we were leaders and the little kids looked up to us. The best memories though were during confirmation. Which is where I learned my love for volunteering. We made Christmas cards and gave them to people in the nursing home when we visited, singing Christmas carols at church members' homes and of course my favorite was packing food for other countries in need. Service is a great way of being a disciple of God and where I can feel good by helping others.

3. What scripture passage has helped you live your life?

My confirmation verse is Joshua 1:9 "be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." It's telling me not to be scared because wherever I go, God will always be with me. I also like the verse at the end of church where the minister says...

"The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace."  
It always makes me happy and I feel God is with me.

4. What is your dream for the future of your church?

I hope that we can have a great youth program that can get kids excited to go to church and understand a bit more about the messages that are being told during service.

5. What advice would you give younger students?

I say to get up everyday and try your best at whatever you are doing even if you're not having the best day. I also believe one of the best things to give kids is Jesus Words. Go to church and learn about God's love and how he will always be there for you. I like to go to church because I feel accepted there, our Church has always been a part of our family. I love having a Church Family.