Love Out Loud 2

by BackseatGaffer

Summary

The Spring 2019 semester at Trinity Lutheran University will be packed with surprises galore. Will Shelley finally drive a wedge between Erin and Steph? Will Marc's wife find out about his relationship with Dani? Does the athletic department's monkey business get exposed? Most importantly, how does the lacrosse team do in their first season as the Thunder, both on and off-the-field?
Back From Break

All non-winter athlete students began moving back into the dorms at Trinity on January 11th, with classes for Spring semester scheduled to commence on Monday the 14th. Over in Luther Hall, Marc was about to preside over his first official peer ministry meeting with Erin, Steph, Alyssa, Stefan, Julie, and Corey in attendance.

Marc: Welcome back, everyone! I hope break was good to you all. Today is the first day of your new existence here at Trinity. The six of you will be my office's extension into the day-to-day lives of the student body. I know all of you have questions about what is expected and whether you have the chops for peer ministry. Let's get all of that out in the open so I can best guide you in doing this important work.

Julie: When we talked before break, you told me that I shouldn't compare myself to the others you've chosen, and that they might have as many doubts as I do about my ability to reach out on this campus and be light in the dark places. While home, I spoke with one of my best friends who attends ASU and she gave me a good primer for what you're seeking to accomplish through the six of us. I feel a bit more confident that I can do what you want, but it might be in fits and starts.

Marc: I don't expect perfection out of the gate. In fact, I don't think we'll really get off the ground until after the training event on the 26th. By the way, that night we will be hosting the synod's Chili Cook-off fundraiser for Lutheran Campus Ministry on campus. Several congregations provide the food and there are prizes for the best and most original versions. If you're game, perhaps we could put in an entry.

Erin: Hmmm. I think that might be fun. I can get my mom to send me her recipe for Mexican Chili. It has chocolate in it, which in Mexico is typically spiced with cayenne pepper.

Steph: Serious?!

Julie: I'll ask Christen if she can help with this as well.

Corey: Our conversation before I went home after finals dealt with my feeling inadequate for the task given who else you have at your disposal. My mom showed me the letter that the Bishop wrote about campus ministry and how it's made up of many different levels of Lutherans, from Erin, who was born into it, to Steph whose father works at a Lutheran college, to Alyssa and Stefan, who are preparing for seminary and careers as pastors, to Julie and myself, who are the regular, in-the-pew type who get involved and learn from those around us. Reading that gave me some reassurance in answering your call to peer ministry.

Marc: That letter from Bishop Emerson was an intentional plea by myself and the pastors at Marquette and UWM to reach out to the parents of our synod's college students informing them of our existence. The start of second semester usually sees a small uptick in involvement, as freshmen have gotten a semester under their belts and can better manage their time outside of class and studying.

Alyssa: I know you're giving me some real opportunities right away this semester, having me lead worship with Rachel in your absence on Wednesday, then assisting you next Friday with the wedding in Chicago. What if I don't measure up to what the two of you expect from me?

Marc: I wouldn't put you in these positions if I didn't feel like you could handle it. You did fine during the Christmas Eve service both in leading your portions of it and as part of the three-way
homily with myself and Stefan. You'll have Rachel by your side on Wednesday and you'll have me plus a host of other coaches around you next Friday. Pick Steph and Erin's brains if you want a bit of a preview for how I handle weddings and what I might have you doing.

Stefan: Bishop Emerson and I are supposed to meet on Tuesday to go over his plans for the February 13th service. Since the two of you have pegged me to perform the homily on that day, will I be able to run through my ideas with you before then?

Marc: Of course.

**********

On Sunday, Erin and Steph visited Marc and Danielle for a small post-Christmas celebration. While the Packers/Falcons playoff game was on the big screen, the four of them shared what happened with their families over the holidays.

Danielle: This was the first Christmas since my mom passed away, which meant that my sister Brenda hosted the Christmas Eve get-together at her place. It was a bit surreal having it be just her and her family, my brother Roger and his wife, and Marc and I. No Dad, no Mom, no Grandma Burgess. My Aunt Jeanette and Uncle Alan were down here visiting my cousin Angela and her family, so after returning from Osseo, we were able to catch up with the lot of them a bit.

Erin: Did Marc tell you that two of our teammates ran into them at the Norske Nook over Thanksgiving break?

Danielle: No, he didn't. Those the pair from the Twin Cities?

Erin: Yes.

Marc: Speaking of the Twin Cities, my nephew Matt has applied to Trinity for next year. Apparently, he got to sprinkling my name around to the chaplains at Augsburg and St. Olaf and gave them a very skewed version of what I actually do.

Steph: Uh-oh. We know you don't like people tooting your horn for their own benefit. How did you handle it?

Marc: My sister and I talked a little bit about what he should expect if he happens to come here, that I won't be babysitting him and wanting to play helicopter uncle on campus, just like I don't do it to Erin.

Erin: Is he at least cute?

Marc: He's me about 30 years ago, only extroverted. Therefore, his immaturity and pomposity can get to be annoying. If he tries to mirror how I operate, he can do some serious emotional damage to people since he's Type-A, me-first, and a name dropper. Laurie got a little miffed with me when I told her that I wasn't pleased by his plugging me to make himself look good. I REALLY hope he takes the easy and free ride to U of M.

Erin: But IS HE CUTE?!

Steph: Why does that matter to you, Erin?

Erin: I'm just curious, that's all.

Marc: I don't rate guys, so Danielle will need to offer her opinion on that.
Danielle: He's alright. Not movie-star gorgeous, but can outdo Marc in a side-by-side comparison. That said, Marc is correct about him needing to cool his jets and not use people to get what he wants.

Steph: When my parents and I went to Christmas Eve service at Laurier, the pastor made a special mention in the announcements about my participation in Becca and EJ's wedding and his recommendation for me to enter candidacy. Marc, you should be getting a copy of the interview transcript and his official position on the matter shortly.

Marc: I look forward to receiving it and giving it a once-over before I send it onto Paul.

Erin: We spent a good portion of the holidays in Florida and Tennessee seeing family. The general consensus from the distant relatives upon hearing that I was gay and dating Steph was surprisingly positive, which I didn't expect.

Following dinner, the girls returned to campus to get a good night's sleep before tomorrow's opening day of lacrosse practice, which would begin with 7am lifting in the rec center.
Right at 8am on Monday morning, Lexi Millen showed up at Deacon Schmidt's office to face the music over her false charges against Coach Dillon at the end of Fall semester. After being ushered in, Marc began the hearing, with TLU Sports Information Director Elly Dismore sitting in as witness for the athletic department.

Marc: I am going to ask a series of yes and no questions based on the testimony I have from you from our meetings on December 4th and December 14th. All I want is a yes or a no. First, did you bring charges of sexual harassment against Coach Danielle Dillon to the Office of Human Resources on November 28th?

Lexi: Yes.

Marc: Did you testify on December 4th in my office that Coach Dillon had messaged you on 17 occasions in the time span between October 24th and November 25th, confirming evidence that existed in your phone logs?

Lexi: Yes.

Marc: Did you recant that testimony on December 14th?

Lexi: Yes.

Marc: Did you intentionally falsify said charges, meaning there was no truth to them?

Lexi: That's not...

Marc: Yes or no.

Lexi: Yes.

Marc: You hereby attest that you bore false witness against Coach Dillon with first the filing of these charges, then the testimony of December 4th, only recanting when the evidence did not ultimately confirm your explanation of events?

Lexi: Yes.

Marc: I find you guilty of bearing false witness. The sentence I will hand down today is much tougher in total than what I had planned to deliver before winter break, but a series of events involving yourself and the Office of Human Resources made that possibility unavailable to me. Alexandra Millen, the following sanctions are levied against you:

1) Academic restriction of enrollment in no more than 12 credits for Spring semester 2019. Casey Schultz, academic advisor for the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics, has your new schedule for this term and will give it to you when you meet with her at the conclusion of this hearing;

2) Suspension for the women's soccer team's Spring game against Cardinal Stritch; and

3) The forfeiture of the equivalent of three meals per week from your semester's board plan.

A copy of this decision will be sent to head women's soccer coach Sara Manning, athletic director Gavin Winchester, TLU Residence Life, and Casey Schultz for implementation. This court stands in recess.
Following morning classes, a number of students met up in Siebert for lunch, with them catching one another up on things from break and the first few hours of the semester.

Kristie (to Morgan A.): How was break back in Madison?

Morgan: Not overly eventful. Dad was still recovering from his most recent cancer treatment, so we had a low-key Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, just the five of us. I heard that you, Sam, Alyssa, and her sister had a bomb of a time on New Year’s Eve up here.

Kristie: We DID! Alyssa and Amanda planned out the whole day and we went to a number of places in the city. The Mitchell Park Domes were free, as was the Zoo. That evening, the four of us went to dinner at AJ Bombers before seeing the Harlem Globetrotters play at the new Bucks arena. After the game, we went down by the lake and just spent time together, the four of us, talking about this upcoming weekend with Convention and the wedding Alyssa is leading alongside Deacon Schmidt. At the stroke of midnight, we exchanged kisses, all of us, and went back to Port Washington where Sam and I stayed the night before going back to Evanston the next morning.

Mal and Lexi saw the two lacrosse players and asked if they could join them. After a slight nod from Kristie, the two sat down.

Kristie: Mal, how much longer do you have on restriction?

Mal: Until the end of the month. I'll be glad to have it be over, and I definitely won't be dancing with the devil again, no matter how good things could have gotten if I stayed with it.

Morgan: Lexi, aren't you signed up for the Sports Broadcasting class this term?

Lexi: Yes, but one of the sanctions I got for making up the story about Coach Dillon was that my academic load was reduced to 12 credits for this term, so I was dropped from that course.

Morgan: That sucks. Unless you take it in summer, it won't be back on the schedule until Spring 2021.

Lexi: I know, which is why I wanted to take it this Spring. Otherwise, I'd be a bit behind in trying to finish off my individualized minor in Sports Media Studies were I to take it two years from now.

Kristie: Any other penalties?

Lexi: My board plan was reduced from 20 meals to 17 meals a week and I was suspended for our spring game in April against Stritch.

Morgan: Those three together just look really harsh.

Lexi: Yeah. I'm not sure lying to protect my secret life was worth the punishment. The only positives are that I didn't lose my car for the semester and that I'm not on campus restriction, so I can still come and go and make my money.

Mal: Lucky you.

Erin walked past the table with the four of them at it, knowing that she would not be able to hold her tongue if she sat down with them. Noticing that Steph and Jessie had secured a table and were joined by Sofia, Vanessa, Christen, and Julie, Erin took a seat, followed shortly by Cali.
Erin: How is everyone feeling heading into today's first practice of the season?

Steph: Ready to get this thing started. I’m itching to show that I’m the heir apparent to Nicole and should be her back-up when we play Ripon for the home opener.

Sofia: I hope to keep my nerves in check and not have a meltdown on the field. If I survive Day One without that happening, I'll be happy.

Christen: I've been looking forward to this day for a while, to finally get to play alongside my Jules here at Trinity.

Julie blushed slightly, then grinned and sent an air kiss to her girlfriend.

Vanessa: We don't start Acro practice until tomorrow, so I get an extra day to fret over how I'll do in my first practice.

Erin: I'm not all that interested in seeing Shelley again today. She had a bit of a sneer going this morning when she and Steph Mac were on the machines, and I'm sure it was directed at me.

Steph: Erin, she's our teammate. No matter what any of us feel about her personally, we need to be on somewhat tolerable terms with her so that her behavior and attitude don't become a bigger problem for us to handle.

Erin and Steph finished first, then left with Jessie and Cali to visit Marc in his office prior to their afternoon class.

**********

As the players changed and taped-up for practice, Kelley and Lauren chatted with Lindsey and Emily, sharing tidbits about winter break. Shelley walked into the locker room and threw her bag down before removing her lacrosse stick and cleats. She picked up her training gear from Sarah and then went about changing. When Steph Mac, Kristie, and Sam entered, the sisters went to their lockers and Steph sidled up next to Shelley, eager to talk to her about their plans to get her in good with the team on the field this afternoon. Lauren arrived and called the team meeting to order.

Lauren: Welcome! Today, most of you will get your first taste of college-level lacrosse training. Believe me, it is MUCH harder, MUCH more exhausting, and LESS forgiving than what you've experienced elsewhere to date. We expect you to keep up, but we also don't want you killing yourself to do so. We have six weeks or so to get this team into peak physical condition, so do your best today and through this first week of practice. As you know, there is no practice on Friday due to the long holiday weekend. Therefore, we will be jamming what would have been our focus on that day into portions of training tomorrow, Wednesday, and Thursday. Thunder on three. One, two, three.

Team: THUNDER!

**********

Lauren split the team up by position, with the goalkeepers, defenders, and Sam and Morgan Andringa training with her and the attackers and remaining midfielders working with Sarah. As the session moved along, Sam noticed that Shelley was being a little overaggressive in her defending battles with Erin, which led to her fouling her twice and getting burnt another couple of times. When the roles were reversed, Erin managed to keep Shelley at stick's length and in front of her, deflecting one shot at Nicole and forcing a shot on C.J. wide.
On the other side of the field, the three seniors (Morgan B., Megan, and Jess) assisted Sarah in laying down Lauren's traditional training regimen for players in their group, pointing out things that she will look for when determining position, side, and placement in the starting lineup. Steph Mac allowed the chip on her shoulder to get the better of her when Morgan was able to jostle the ball free from the pocket on her stick, causing a turnover.

Steph M.: What was THAT all about? I thought we were only doing shadow-defense, not the full thing.

Morgan B.: You play how you practice, McNamara. Laying off on turning players over in practice would translate to a meek defensive structure in games.

Megan backed up Morgan's assertion and told Steph to take a run at her. Steph worked to move Megan off her, but made an error by not keeping high-handed control on her stick, allowing a slight bit of a nudge by the midfielder to pop the ball out of her webbing.

Sarah: Steph, you have to take better care of the ball, especially in the center. Outsider attackers can get away with what you seem to do because the worst that happens is the ball rolling out of bounds or a turnover in isolation near one of the touchlines. In the middle, a turnover like that can easily lead to an odd-player break against the defense and potentially a goal in short order.

Steph muttered under her breath slightly, which Kristie noticed. She knew that Sam and her would need to get their friend's head straightened out after practice if only to help her start fresh the next day. Lauren called the two groups together, then said a few words concerning her philosophy for managing off-field issues.

Lauren: You don't have to like each other. You don't have to be the best of friends. Frankly, I don't care what you do away from the park. What I will NOT tolerate is drama either on-the-field or in the locker room. Check your egos at the door and leave your pride in your backpack. We are a team of 24 and we need to act like it. That is all. See you all tomorrow.

The players headed across the parking lot to Buuck to store their equipment and collect their belongings. Once the field was vacant, Lauren and Sarah sat in the bleachers and had a frank talk about what the head coach said a few minutes ago.

Sarah: Was drama a problem with your teams at Carthage?

Lauren: I never had it, but that was mainly because the environment at the school in effect required the players to rely on each other for entertainment and camaraderie. Up here, the big city is just so close to campus and the potential for cliques in the squad is so much greater, especially if players "get together". I don't ask who is with who, because that sort of thing should have no impact on how a player performs and, if I did, it would lead to the aforementioned drama in the team.

Sarah: Do you have an issue with players dating?

Lauren: Like I said, I don't really care if they do or don't. Just keep it out of the team dynamic. In a perfect world, all of these young women would find suitable men on other teams here and the possibility of them hooking up with each other wouldn't exist.

Sarah mulled over Lauren's last comment, but decided not to inquire as to her opinion on people in the LGBT community. Lauren got up and went over to the athletic center to check on the players before leaving campus for the evening.
Marc arrived at the Downtown Intermodal Station in Milwaukee around 9:30am, plenty early to check his bags and get his boarding pass for the 11am Amtrak going to Chicago's Union Station. A few minutes later, Dani came in and went to the desk to take care of her business. Shortly after 10:00, Alyssa dropped off her sister, Amanda, and helped her with getting her bags into the station. She gave Marc and Dani hugs and talked shop with them for a couple of minutes before leaving to return to Trinity and prepare for weekly worship, which she would be co-leading for the first time in Marc's absence. There were no delays on the in-bound Hiawatha, with it having arrived just before 10am. At 10:40, boarding commenced for the 90 minute trip to the Windy City. Marc staked out space in the lounge car so he could have a face-to-face conversation with his two travel companions and prep them for the few days ahead.

Marc (to Dani): Is this the first Convention you've attended?

Dani: It is so rare that it comes to this part of the country that I haven't had a chance to get to one before now.

Marc: The last time Convention was in the Midwest was 2013 in Indianapolis. The last few years have seen it go to Philly three times, LA once, and Baltimore once. Last year's looked like so much fun that I wished I'd been able to commit to the time to go. The footage the Hearts were pumping out from their events surrounding Convention was better than Lifetime's coverage of the NWSL Draft and Fox Sports 1's Thursday night show from inside the Exhibit Hall.

Amanda: How realistic is it to run into big names at random?

Marc: VERY! They lead sessions, they walk around the floor going here and there, they're at a number of the receptions that happen after hours. In 2013, I attended the MLS SuperDraft, met Tom Sermanni, then newly-installed as US Women's National Team coach, at the Women's Coaches Reception, saw Marta and her rumored girlfriend at Circle Center Mall, and crossed paths with some others of note.

Dani: So you're saying there's a chance to meet some heavy hitters in the sport?

Marc: Yes. If the two of you do nothing else tomorrow, you should come with me to the NWSL Draft. Dani, you met a few of the people that will be there when we were in Cary last month, and I'm also expecting a bit of the Red Stars contingent to be on-hand. Speaking of which, I wonder if Sam and Abby will be there. They weren't part of our meeting at the hotel following Becca and EJ's wedding and I'd like to find out what they are thinking in terms of special touches for the 14th ahead of our getting to Philly.

Amanda: I have to ask this, and if it's too personal, I apologize in advance. I know that you're married, Marc. I saw you with your wife at the Reformation Day dinner. That said, you and Dani look so comfortable together. Is there anything going on between the two of you?

Marc didn't want to answer the question, especially since it was coming from someone outside his Trinity circle of influence. Dani, sensing Marc's discomfort, stepped in.

Dani: He's like a mentor to me and has been for a few years. He gave me opportunities to lead when I played for MUSC in 2014 as well as while I was out after surgery the next summer. He's taken me a bit under his wing at Trinity as I develop my coaching skills working with players who aren't that much younger than me. He's also a really good friend and someone who knows a few of the
instrumental people in my non-Trinity life. As for dating, I'm seeing one of the coaches at the school. It's early, but we're having a good time of it thus far.

Marc: At times, Dani is a bit of a stand-in for Danielle if there is something on-campus where it would be uncomfortable to attend solo, or like the wedding in North Carolina, where Steph and Erin had one another and I would have been operating stag otherwise. Bishop Emerson isn't overly fond of me doing church-related events alone because tongues could get to wagging and ultimately harm the synod or the university.

Amanda accepted their answers and then brought up something personal concerning her and Alyssa.

Amanda: Marc, can I count on you to keep privilege if I tell you something?

Marc: If it's done with Dani sitting here, privilege doesn't exist. However, anything you tell me will be kept in confidence.

Amanda: Well....Alyssa and I are sort of sharing Sam, similar to Kristie and Sam sharing her.

Marc: Is everyone in your foursome OK with the arrangement?

Amanda: Yes.

Marc: Then what is the problem? You're not an athlete at Trinity or a candidate for the ELCA roster, and the new code at the school which covers the other three declares that their triad is a legitimate form of relationship.

Amanda: What about if Alyssa and I were to couple up?

Marc: Again, so long as there is no abuse to or by one of you, it's not the outside world's place to step in. Our new rules on the matter in a way harken back to an arrangement that existed in the pre-Stonewall days. Back then, you would see sister spinsters who'd live together and not even consider marriage or courtship. My belief is that something like that was done to keep the lid on one or both of them being attracted to their own biological sex. We had a pair of teachers at my high school that had the same last name. We knew they were sisters, but the question of why they both seemed to keep their maiden name never came up. Upon further reflection and after reading the obituary of one of them, the impression came to me that it was possible that one if not both were gay but not able to be out. Alyssa has a legitimate relationship with Kristie Mueller. If she wants to present just that and leave the rest out of view, I'm not going to prod. On the other hand, if she were to expose the rest, I would expect those around her to be accepting. The Social Statement does not forbid it per se, so it's not my place to invoke any personal bias I may have in opposition to that.

Amanda: Sis is right that you really ARE a different type of chaplain and minister than what we grew up around. Thank you, Marc, for giving me your ear and your open heart to hear what I needed to say.

Marc: You're welcome, Amanda. I was looking over the schedule for Friday, and I found one session that us three and Alyssa could attend together while her and I wait for the MLS Draft to finish so we can get into the space and re-arrange it a bit for Alex and Ashlyn's wedding. The topic is on female coaches and why there is still this struggle for them to break through despite having more elite-level athletes enter the profession every year. I'm curious as to the general thinking out there and if it's the same as I've heard elsewhere, that the only way for females to ascend and break through is to get more of them further up the administrative ladder.

Dani: Are you hoping that you might have one or two disciples in that room who can extol the
virtues of the module?

Marc: Hoping, yes. Likely, I don't think so. It's still primarily used in the greater Milwaukee area and there is only one college that has even considered adding it to their academic catalog, our friends at Alverno.

Conductor (overhead): Welcome to Union Station. Remember to take all your belongings with you from the overhead areas and under your seats. Thank you for traveling with Amtrak.

**********

Check-in at the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place was reasonably smooth for the three of them. Dani and Amanda decided to partner up on a room to save on money for the college student, with the two of them discussing later on their plans for the weekend, which included Dani staying with Marc for a couple of nights and Amanda having the room to herself on Friday night to entertain Sam. Once changed, they went over to McCormick Place to get their swag bags and complete registration for Convention. Having traveled from Milwaukee over the lunch hour, food needed to be next on the agenda, with the eating options surrounding the Grand Concourse looking like the best choice for everyone. Once lunch was procured, they met up and sat down. A few minutes later, Marc noticed Sam Schumer talking with Wendy Gebauer Palladino and Erica Dambach at a table near theirs, which he didn't think odd considering that Sam had worked Erica's summer camp at Penn State a couple of years while he was coaching at Ripon. As they wrapped up, the threesome walked by the Milwaukee-area folks and stopped for a second. Marc introduced Amanda to the three of them and filled in some blanks as to how he knew her. Dani remembered the women from the wedding and Sam from Karaoke night in Mooresville, but remained silent while Marc conversed with them.

Marc (to Erica): Why isn't Carm (Moscato, Philadelphia Hearts assistant coach) with you and Wendy?

Erica: She's still on her honeymoon. Her and Emily decided to do three weeks in Australia instead of being here with their teams. We have Steph (Labbe), Ali (Krieger), and Diana (Matheson) coming in later today to help us with the draft and making our new players feel welcome.

Marc: I thought Ali was planning to retire before the 2019 season.

Erica: She's on the fence right now. We expect to take a player tomorrow that we hope can play anywhere in the back five in case Ali decides to hang it up before we go to camp at the start of March.

Wendy: She's given so much to the game, both at the domestic and international level, in Germany as well as in the US. She deserves to go out on her terms, but we're hoping to convince her to ride out 2019 because of the absences we're expecting to face for the World Cup.

The Hearts' brass and Sam said farewell and departed the food court area. followed shortly thereafter by the others.

**********

Amanda attended a field session conducted by Canadian National Team coach John Herdman called, "Triangle To Death", which referred to his team's method of breaking down their opposition over the entire length and width of the field. He had a U14 girls' team from the Chicago Parks District demonstrating for the crowd the movement of the ball as well as off-the-ball advancement which led to the opening goal in their 2-0 upset of the US in November 2017 in Vancouver, the country's first win over the three-time world champions since 2001.
John Herdman: The point of using triangle play to maintain possession is that you're looking to eventually get a mismatch between one of your wingers and their outside back opposition. In our case, after moving the ball out from Steph to Ashley and then to Diana, it was dropped back quickly to Des and then jolted forward to Sincy, which gained us a good bit of field position. As their center backs tightened up on her, the pass back and out to Sophie caught Sam Mewis and the US' right back a bit out of position, with the first a little deeper than desired and the second too far up in defending against Jessie. The lead pass that Fleming got on the end of after streaking past her marker almost went for naught as she had played a hard set-up touch and had to crank in her cross before the ball went out. hooking it past the penalty spot. Thankfully, once we break the line of confrontation, the entire front six and the outside backs push forward in case the ball comes out of the box. Diana was able to one-touch Jessie's cross back into Sinc, who popped it past Naheer on the fly.

Amanda remembered the game and wondered how the Americans got caught more-or-less flat-footed by the Canadians and surrendered the opening goal of the match inside of 10 minutes. Having seen the development of the play at a slightly-slower speed than displayed in that match, she got a greater grasp of the intricacy of their midfield's play and how the team's most important and dangerous players took advantage of their strengths (Matheson always getting to good supporting positions, Fleming's soccer IQ and sneaky speed, and Sinclair needing little or no space or time to unleash a shot) to make the opposition look second-best.

**********

Following a trip with the coaches from Grand View, Wagner, and Gettysburg (all ELCA institutions) to visit with Presiding Bishop Beth Ellering, Marc and Dani returned to the Hyatt and settled in for the evening.

Marc: What's on your mind, princess?

Dani: Nothing. Just content being here with you.

Marc: We haven't had a chance to talk since before break. Anything new with you or those around you?

Dani: Me, no. Cali and I got into a bit of a tussle when the family got together for Christmas because she saw the locket the girls gave me and wanted to see the inside of it. After I made her swear not to tell anyone about it, I let her open it and see you and me together, along with Erin and Steph. I wish I could help her find someone who could bring her the kind of joy you give me, or that Erin gives to Steph and vice-versa.

Marc: If she can hold out a few months, I might have a suggestion. Only trouble is I wouldn't trust him to be a good fit for anyone at the present time.

Dani: I reckon it's someone you know fairly well.

Marc: Yes. My nephew Matt has applied to Trinity for Fall 2019 admission. He's like me 30 years ago, but with a bit more bravado. He got me a little ticked when we saw each other on Christmas Day because he had mouthed off to the chaplains at Augsburg and St. Olaf about my profile when asked what college chaplains do.

Dani: Not good.

Marc: Definitely not good. I've never liked people using my success and position for their own benefit. I don't mind helping others gain a foothold as a result of who and what I know, but it's sort of a two-way street where I'm aware and part of that process and not just having my name tossed
about for the heck of it.

Dani: Well, I'm grateful for all that you've done for me these first few months at Trinity. I don't take advantage of knowing you or your clout, but that's not to say I don't like what I get from you using it.

Marc: See. Two-way street. I feel good about helping you and giving you opportunities to build your resume and develop professionally, and you appreciate the lengths I go to sometimes for you.

Dani: Just don't ever think of killing yourself because you can't satisfy my wish list.

Marc: I learned that lesson after Cali read me the riot act over what you went through that night after finding out about the near-attempt.

Dani: I love you, Marc, just as you are. You don't have to impress me with gifts or perks or anything other than what is in your heart, which is quite special.

Marc: I am so deeply in love with you, Danielle. I never thought someone like you, as young as you, would take to someone who is only a couple of years from joining AARP. I treasure you, I adore you, and I hope someday to be able to repay you for the blessing you have been to me since we met again at Trinity.

Dani turned out the light and the pair spooned, with Marc's arms wrapped warmly around her body. As their breathing came to a rhythmic harmony, Dani fell asleep with Marc doing so as well shortly after her.
The first full day of the 2019 United Soccer Coaches convention is typically the busiest for coaches in the women's game, as the NWSL Draft and the Women's Coaches Reception take place along with the opening of the Exhibit Hall, a 21+ event (since alcohol is on hand and pretty free-flowing) where convention-goers get their first chance to visit with vendors in the equipment, camp, and travel tournament business along with representatives of the various leagues and governance bodies in the US.

Marc awoke to a strange text from Erin about some sidewalk chalking that occurred overnight at Trinity calling for his ouster. He called her to find out what was up.

Marc: Erin, what's this about my good name being denigrated?

Erin: I don't know who is behind it, but the perpetrators chalked out a series of negative traits on the sidewalk from Bonhoeffer to Luther and then what students should do about it, leading them to Stuenkel where the phrase "Boot the Brute" was right in front of the main entrance, along with a website that had some pretty nasty claims about you on it.

Marc: Do you remember any of the derogatory words or phrases?

Erin: I took pictures of the ones I saw. I'll send them to you.

Marc told her he'd look at them and prepare a response for the school's communications director when he had time. Dani came up behind him and wrapped her arms over his shoulders, then pressed her chin onto the top of his head.

Dani: What was that about?

Marc: Overnight, someone apparently chalked the campus sidewalks with negative attributes of me. Erin took pictures and is sending them to me.

Dani: Very few people hate you at Trinity, so going out of their way to expose things about you seems to be the act of someone looking for revenge.

Marc: Correct.

Marc's phone beeped at him to indicate that he had a new message. He opened it and clicked on the series of pictures, which included words like "Power-hungry", "Philanderer", "Narcissist", "Groomer", and "Cruel and Unusual Punishment". The last few, in order, said "Donald Trump?", "No. Deacon Schmidt.", "On February 1, let's Boot The Brute.", and "BootTheBrute.com".

Dani: What does all of that mean, and how does Erin know it was referring to you?

Marc: The last one probably refers to part of the punishment I gave Lexi for her lies against you. I had her board plan for Spring reduced from 20 meals per week to 17. Sunday night, after I get home, I'll pen something for Trinity's communications director to release on Monday against the negative campaign and counter whatever is on the website named. The date at the end of that list is the next Board of Trustees meeting, meaning that this group is going to seek a no-confidence vote and ask Paul to recall me from the position.

Dani pressed into Marc's back and kissed him on the temple. "Like you told me when I got the message from Cali right before we left for Raleigh, nothing is going to happen until we get back so
push it out of your mind and enjoy your time here."

Marc: Thanks, babe. We should grab breakfast, make sure Amanda is up and running, then head over to the Lakeside Ballroom for the draft.

Dani left Marc's room to go shower and change in her own, leaving him to clean up and get dressed for the day at hand. Once Dani and Amanda were ready, the latter knocked on Marc's door to let him know. He came out and the three went down to the Market to pick up food on their way to McCormick Place.

**********

A wide array of women's coaches, players, and other interested parties were gathered in the Lakeside Ballroom for the 2019 NWSL Draft. Marc got seats for himself, Dani, and Amanda in the first row, just behind the 12 teams' tables in the front portion of the room.

Dani (to Marc): Do you know any of the execs?

Marc: Only ones I've had any real contact with are Wendy and Erica. Knew a good chunk of the Red Stars' front office, including the inaugural president, but they've all moved on since its founding.

Amanda: Players?

Marc: The ones I've married or will in the next few weeks, the head of the Players' Union, a few others here and there.

Dani looked up and saw someone walking over to her and the others. Marc stood and greeted their guest.

Marc: Speaking of the players' union....Elysa, how have you been?

Elysa Friedman: Doing well, Marc. You saw that I'm now with Sky Blue, right?

Marc: Guess I missed that. So you didn't follow FCKC to Salt Lake City after its purchase?

Elysa: No. After breaking up with Aaron, I finally felt like I was free to look out for myself and wanted to return to New Jersey. Sky Blue offered me a two-year deal at decent money and the ability to join the team's staff when I decide I'm done with playing, which I think will be after this contract is done.

Marc took a moment to introduce Dani and Amanda to Elysa.

Marc: Here for fun or on business, or both?

Elysa: I will be announcing some of the third-round selections plus holding a quick primer tomorrow morning for the draftees on the union, the CBA, and some of the roster rules changes with 2019 being a World Cup year. Then, there's Alex and Ashlyn's second wedding tomorrow evening.

Marc: We're trying to squeeze in the session on Women's Coaching tomorrow afternoon because I'm curious whether any of our work will come up in the discussion of why things are still a little behind-the-times in terms of getting more women to enter the profession and having them start higher up the ladder.

Elysa: I want to go to that as well. Save me a seat?

Marc: Sure. I see things are close to starting, so I'll let you get back to work.
Elysa turned and walked toward the Sky Blue FC table, where head coach Christie Pearce and general manager Tony Novo were seated. Next to them were the management from the North Carolina Courage (head coach Tiffany Roberts Sahaydak and general manager Cindy Parlow Cone) and a table filled with Chicago Red Stars personnel (head coach Paul Riley, owner Arnim Whisler, captain Alyssa Naeher, Sam Mewis, and Vanessa DiBernardo). Marc made a note to try and talk to Sam about a sit-down with her and Abby on Saturday morning.

Amanda Duffy (NWSL Commissioner): Welcome to the 2019 NWSL Draft. The Utah Royals are on the clock.

Utah, having replaced FC Kansas City in the league this past off-season and assigned their rostered players and draft picks, selected Hailie Mace from UCLA with the first overall pick. The Boston Breakers, up next, took Tegan McGrady from Stanford with the Vancouver Legacy picking up Marie Lavasseur from Memphis third. As the draft rolled along, Amanda got pictures of some of the newest NWSL players plus a candid of Alyssa Naeher that she was planning to share with her sister. A trade at the start of the second round sent Jane Campbell and Andi Sullivan plus 2nd and 4th round picks from Houston to Utah for Alex Morgan and Ashlyn Harris, at the request of the former FCKC players. The 48th and last pick, taken by the 2018 NWSL Champion Chicago Red Stars, was Grace Hagan, a forward from Kansas. As the ballroom emptied, a number of on-lookers tried to get autographs and selfies with players and coaches exiting. Marc, Dani, and Amanda went up to Red Stars table, where Marc introduced himself to Sam Mewis and asked about meeting with her and Abby Saturday morning between the Women's Breakfast and the Sectarian Action Group's introductory confab. She said that she would get back to him either by text or at the Women's Coaches Reception later.

**********

Alyssa and the Mueller sisters had recently arrived at the latter's home in Evanston. Following the perfunctory hellos between the women and Bob and Melissa Mueller, they went upstairs and took their luggage to their respective rooms. Once settled, Alyssa texted Amanda to check in on her day at the convention.

GoalieBear: Hope you're having fun with my boss and my lifting partner in Chicago.

AmandaPanda: It's been cool. Got a pic with your secret love at the draft. Also met one of the brides your group will be marrying in Philadelphia.

Amanda sent pics of her with Alyssa Naeher and Sam Mewis to her sister, getting a response back indicating her jealousy but also stating that she'd get her chance tomorrow to meet them up-close-and-personal.

GoalieBear: Tell Marc that I need to talk to him when I arrive about something that happened at Trinity last night and this morning.

AmandaPanda: Will do. Have fun with the girls tonight, but don't tire them out TOO much. I want to get in on the action with you three when you come down tomorrow.

GoalieBear: Love you, sis. MUAH.

AmandaPanda: Love you more, twinnie. SWAK.

**********

The Women's Coaches Reception at the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place was a who's-who of
figures in the women's soccer world. US National Team coach Laura Harvey made the rounds, as did NWSL Commissioner Amanda Duffy and Amanda Cromwell, head coach of the 2018 NCAA champion UCLA Bruins. Marc and Dani did some people-watching before being approached by Houston Dash head coach Lisa Cole, who Marc knew from her days with the Boston Breakers and as previous chair of the NSCAA Women's Committee.

Lisa: Marc, it's been a while since I've seen you at Convention.

Marc: Yeah. 2013 was my first and only until this year.

Lisa: Also looks like you haven't been at a loss for things to keep you active in the soccer community. That module you developed, how easy is it to replicate in various settings?

Marc: You can do the full-year seminar approach, which is the original design for it, or a weekly college course that runs over two semesters, or a series of in-services at the school district level, or any combination of those. There is even a means of using Convention to replace certain segments of in-class learning. Are you thinking of possibly using it with your players?

Lisa: Yes, and also pressing the Dynamo to grant us access to their DA and Academy teams to accelerate the learning curve for our players looking to transition in the future to coaching.

Marc: If you want to know the benefit of the module, this young lady to my left can tell you how it helped her move into college coaching. Lisa Cole, Danielle Dillon. She coaches at Trinity Lutheran University, where I am the chaplain.

Lisa: Please to meet you, Danielle. What would you consider the biggest takeaway from the module for new or future coaches?

Dani: Pretty much everything in it is valuable and will impact your coaching and knowledge of athletic administration, but the biggest thing for me was the group work where you were able to test your ideas in answering realistic questions in the field. I gained immense confidence in my own coaching skills and instincts as a result of it.

Marc: For your players, the underground network and informal mentoring gained might not be a big advantage, because they're all above the bar in terms of knowing people in the game's higher ranks. What they probably will gain most from it is the awareness of what you don't yet know that will influence your ability to get on the coaching ladder and ascend it.

Lisa: Are you planning to attend the session tomorrow on women's coaching and the perceived concrete ceiling?

Marc: Yes, and I'm trying to talk a few others to take the time for it. I don't believe it is so much a concrete ceiling as it is climbing the stairs or rock-climbing to the top where others get rides on the escalator or elevator. It takes longer to get from A to B, and you don't typically get any help along the way from those who are ahead of you. Even the traditional philosophy that women need to be in positions of authority to advance their cause negates the effect that men in the system can have in advocating for and encouraging women to stick their neck out.

Dani: I didn't know it at the time, but through the module, Marc was repeating things on paper he told me face-to-face when I was with his WPSL development team in 2014 and 2015.

Lisa: Looks like you have one satisfied customer here.

Marc: Ask Elysa Friedman for her opinion. She helped me with some of the curriculum. Also, I ran a bit of it by John Herdman to see how it mirrored his "Women Leading Women" initiative to get his
players into coaching while still part of the National Team so they could move quickly into the system when they decided to end their playing careers.

Lisa: Thanks for the suggestion. I should let you two mingle. Hope to see you Saturday at the Women's Committee meeting.

Marc: We'll be there, hopefully with some news about the Sectarian Action Group launching.

Dani was beginning to get a bit tired and inebriated from the alcohol available in the Exhibit Hall and at the reception. Marc told her that he'd make sure she got to her room before things got worse. Following another circuit of the room and some additional glad-handing, the two of them left to go upstairs to their rooms. Marc held Dani up as they walked to her room, where they exchanged a tender goodnight kiss. She grabbed his hand and squeezed it before the two went their separate ways for the night.
Another long day laid ahead for the Wisconsinites at the USC Convention. Alyssa, along with Sam and Kristie, arrived at the Hyatt at 8:30. Alyssa checked in and got her room key, then went upstairs with the Muellers to unload their stuff before splitting up for the better part of the day. Right on 9am, she went down and knocked on Marc's door. He answered and let her in. The pair sat down at the table near the window and started running through the preliminary order of service.

Marc: The basis of the service is the wedding liturgy you find in the Green Book, which is out of fashion these days. I stick with it because it has the greatest flexibility in terms of going formal or informal or in-between. As you will come to learn the more you participate in and officiate weddings, every service is different. I try to respect the wishes of the couple, which is why I go with a very bare outline. As you are aware, the only thing that HAS to be done for it to be legal and official is the declaration of intent and the "I do's". Everything else is at my discretion or that of the couple.

Alyssa: Wednesday night after practice and dinner, I stopped by to see Erin. She showed me video of the wedding you two and Steph did last month, so I got a good feel for what's in it and how you run the show. I'm sure you're planning a couple of funnies at the beginning. Care to tell me what they are?

Marc: The line dealing with marriage and insanity will be in there. I'm pondering one that takes a stab at Alex's ex if she'll let me do it. I'm also thinking about one at the start where I have the wrong script in front of me. Any others will come by way of what we add to the ceremony and the mood the brides want to set.

Alyssa: What's my role?

Marc: The biggest one is getting me vested-up and keeping me on point. Did you bring your alb and cincture with you?

Alyssa: Yes. After service on Wednesday, I just took it back to my room and packed it immediately into my garment bag for the trip, along with my jumpsuit.

Marc: Smart move.

Alyssa: Before Alex and Ashlyn arrive, I wanted to show you what was posted on campus yesterday as well as some scraps that I found in the trash bin of my room.

She handed Marc a handful of flyers, one which looked like a wanted poster and another that named some of his "high crimes" against the university. He thanked her for bringing them to his attention and placed them in one of the folders in his laptop bag.

Marc: So some of this stuff was in your room? Carli's somehow involved in this, then. I'm going to see if Dani can text Cali about snooping around a bit over the weekend.

Another knock came at Marc's door. He had Alyssa answer it. Alex and Ashlyn entered the room and sat down across from Marc, with Alyssa standing against the radiator. Marc handed the couple his outline of the service and went over where things could be added and where he was looking to inject his trademark one-liners. Alex mentioned that she was having the ceremony videotaped for her and Ashlyn's future viewing and as evidence of her re-marriage to halt any future incursions by Servando.
Marc: OK. That means I won't do the Purple Rain gag and instead might add the sports TV one.

Ashlyn: What's that?

Marc: It's the warning that is said near the beginning of any televised sporting event, where viewers are told who holds the copyright to the broadcast and giving others access to the event without consent of said individual or organization is prohibited. Hopefully, there won't be any papos trying to get video or comments after the fact of what went on.

Alex: I think we've done our due diligence to make sure word of the ceremony wasn't widely spread outside of our personal circles and the USC. It's not officially on the schedule for Convention and with it occurring in the dead period between the MLS Draft and the Youth Soccer Gala over there, my hope is that it won't get spread around much or hunted out.

Marc: Alyssa and I will try to be at the Skyline Ballroom right around 3 so we can get in almost immediately after the MLS Draft concludes. During that time, no one is to be in the room besides us two, McCormick Place staff, and a designee of yourselves to make sure we get things set up as you would wish. We need the changeover to be done absolutely no later than 4:00 so we will have a chance to get a quick run-through in before allowing for the doors to open at 4:30 for guests. This is one occasion where being overly early isn't a good idea, because all one will be doing is standing around outside the ballroom.

Alex and Ashlyn discussed briefly who they should have in the room on their behalf. From there, Alex texted Tobin Heath and asked her if she'd be willing to supervise the changeover with Marc and Alyssa, to which she said yes. After a couple more questions, the brides left, leaving the officiant and his assistant to wrap up the loose ends and finalize the order of service before splitting up to change and prune before lunch with the others.

**********

Following lunch together, Marc, Dani, and the Norman twins attended a session in the Lakeside Center titled, "Cracking The Concrete Ceiling: Why Is It So Hard For Female Coaches To Advance?". Marc saw Elysa talking with Lisa Cole at the front of the room and brought Amanda with him to meet the Dash head coach as Alyssa and Dani grabbed seats for the group.

Marc: Lisa, this is Amanda Norman, sophomore defender at UW-Oshkosh and Secondary Education major. She's interested in possibly coaching after graduation, but with few schools in Wisconsin offering minors or certificates in coaching, the likelihood of getting in the front door despite her playing experience is slim. It is for her and others of their ilk that I fight for expanded educational and clinical opportunities in the theory and practice of coaching.

Lisa: Sounds like a plug for your module/seminar.

Amanda: After what he did for my twin sister this past semester at Trinity, I've learned not to doubt his commitment on things close to his heart.

Elysa: Norman....OH! Your sister's Alyssa, then, the first women to be accepted to TLU's Pre-Sem program after Marc got the ban repealed. Is she here?

Marc: Yes. She'll be assisting me with the wedding later. Speaking of which, Amanda, can you and Dani hang around after the session here in case there are questions about UCP or a desire for an impromptu session on it tomorrow? Alyssa, I, and I presume Elysa will need to book it out of here for wedding pre-game.
Amanda: That shouldn't be a problem. Make sure she knows as well.

Everyone took their seats and the session began, with Boston University head coach Nancy Feldman introducing the topic and the current lay of the land in college and professional coaching. On the panel with her were Seattle Reign head coach Lesle Gallimore, Philadelphia Hearts general manager Wendy Gebauer Palladino, and University of Chicago athletic director Erin McDermott. Each of the individuals gave their perspectives based on where in the system they resided, with Gallimore bemoaning the lack of professional players seeking out college-level positions. She tipped her cap to Lori Chalupny and Stephanie Cox for their willingness to bypass assistant jobs at the pro level or posts within the club or USSF system to enter intercollegiate athletics at schools that were not their alma maters.

McDermott gave a bit of her history in college sports, having been Deputy Director of Athletics at Princeton before coming to Chicago. Her criticism of the lack of women at the Division III level was that, in most places, their positions weren't on twelve-month contracts unless he or she was employed in some other area of the university, which creates huge turnover for less-successful programs, thus a vicious circle that leads to decreased player numbers, less on-field success, coaching turnover, etc. By contrast, men who are in stable spots in the club system or bring a broader professional and academic resume to the table generally are able to handle the short-term perspective of the position or be hired for an non-athletics opening at the school.

Gebauer Palladino gave both her club's head coach, Erica Dambach, and Gallimore kudos for running against the trend of successful college coaches not willing to give up the stability of their current jobs for the opportunity to become a coach in the NWSL, which now had a majority of its head coaching positions filled by women (Dambach, Gallimore, Cole, Christie Pearce at Sky Blue, Tiffany Roberts Sahaydak at North Carolina, Maren Meinert at Boston, and Andrea Neil in Vancouver). Feldman moved onto discussing how those in the game should carve a path that helps the next generation get on track and be able to stay on it, asking for input from the audience.

Elysa: I'm sure I can speak for some of us in this room when I say that there is a lack of educational opportunities outside of USSF and USC for future coaches to build their knowledge base, especially when they're not associated with a high-major college program or NWSL team. I know that my future in coaching will be an easier trek than that for a couple of women who I've met this week because I've played at North Carolina, been a part of WPS and NWSL, plus spent time with the US National Team. What has to happen is that women need to be given a means of leveling the playing field with men, who decision-makers presume know more about the game and leadership than an equally-qualified female candidate. Men also tend to have informal networks that help them make the leap from interested party to potential candidate and are more willing to take risks in getting started than women. These obstacles are tackled head-on in a coaching module designed by the Urban Coaching Project in Milwaukee. I was privileged to work with UCP's founder on the curriculum, which along with its seminar-based model is currently being used by over a dozen school districts in the greater Milwaukee area and which is under consideration for inclusion in the course catalog at Alverno College. I have seated next to me said founder, Marc Schmidt, and one of the coaches that has benefited from this continuing education. We are willing to hold an impromptu session tomorrow following the Women's Committee meeting for those interested in learning more about UCP and how it can help put permanent cracks in the concrete ceiling.

Several more members in attendance brought up additional truisms that exist, such as: women being given less room for failure both as coaches and administrators, which leads to hiring choices that reinforce the status quo; the intricate work/life balance that is ALWAYS brought up when women interview for positions or consider advancement; and the continued belief that coaching women is not as difficult as coaching men, so anyone can do it. Feldman wrapped up the session, after which Marc did a small bit of glad-handing before he and Alyssa made tracks first to the South Building to
pick up their garment bags from the Grand Ballroom (first floor), then walk over to the West Building, where the Skyline Ballroom is located. Elysa headed back to the hotel to change for the wedding. Dani and Amanda took some questions about UCP and the module and got the names of around a dozen individuals who were interested in meeting tomorrow to learn more and see if this might be something of use for their universities, clubs, school districts, or leagues.
Sweet Surrender

The wedding of Ashlyn Harris and Alex Morgan was a celebration of love finding its way despite obstacles and tamped-down desires. Following the USC Awards Banquet, all in attendance were invited to a dessert-and-drinks reception in the Regency Ballroom of the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place. As well-wishers mingled with the brides, the wedding party, and one another, Marc was seated at a table with a couple of mini cupcakes and an Irish Coffee, watching the festivities. Alyssa, Amanda, and Sam came over to join him, leaving Kristie and Dani to be the social butterflies they were.

Marc (to Alyssa): How do you think you did?

Alyssa: For not knowing until 15 minutes before the ceremony that I'd be handling one of the readings due to a bridesmaid contracting laryngitis, I thought I handled myself well. Was nervous, of course, but getting my first cap here in what is a pretty friendly environment will make doing the next one less daunting, even though it involves a LOT more people.

Marc: I'm glad they chose to get the legalities out of the way ahead of time and then decided to bring the party up north. I can't imagine trying to manage the travel down to Orlando and back or putting you in that kind of pressure cooker for your first time out, because the pseudojournalists would have been out in droves trying to get access to the ceremony and reception, plus any pre-wedding activities.

Amanda: I told Marc on the train down here that you were correct about him being a different type of minister than what we saw growing up. The fact that you had the confidence to step into that role today on the fly is a change from your pre-college self, the goalkeeper who would throw up before games in high school because the fear of giving up a goal would literally make you sick.

Sam: You too? I would dry heave before games because the anticipation would overwhelm me. That's when I got the smart idea of carrying brown lunch bags with my lacrosse equipment, so I could use them to control the attacks and release the balled-up nerves before we'd get onto the field for warm-ups.

Marc: Philly is going to be a LOT more public and might require a bit of PR on our part, since I am sure the media will play up the Valentine's Day theme and the accessibility of the ceremony. This will be something that the five of us doing the wedding will talk over before we leave.

Dani and Kristie returned to the table and, with everyone there, opened up the can of worms they discovered before the wedding.

Dani: Now that the wedding is over and all your official duties are done, we need to tell you something and we also would like you to be honest with us about it. While Amanda, Kristie, Sam, and myself were getting ready, I pulled up that website that was being bandied about on campus concerning you. There were some serious allegations on it, from an attempt to overthrow a church leadership team to several trysts with other women to your results on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. The pictures that Erin sent you from the chalking fall in line with what one would think if they look through the site and saw these claims. Are these things true?

Marc: Based on what you're describing, I'd say yes. What puzzles me is how anyone at Trinity would be able to GET information like that. The only place the MMPI assessment exists is in my synodical file. No one outside of people associated with InterVarsity at UWM even knew me when that "overthrow attempt" happened in the summer of '94. The trysts or supposed ones would only be
known by my therapists and Paul. Either someone inside the synod office leaked this information to one of the soccer players or somebody on-campus with a decent knowledge of the school's computer system and access to the HR server was able to hack into the synod's file system and download the information.

Sam (to Marc): I might know something that could help you figure this out. When we were still Concordia, Human Resources had a back door to the mainframe at the LCMS offices, since a lot of hires would require HR to check with the synod as to the moral fitness of the candidate and their spiritual resume, and it wasn't efficient for HR to make multiple formal requests a day for that information. You've said that the office at Trinity is more or less the same as the one Concordia had. If the back door wasn't closed, and the server address changed to direct access to the ELCA synod's file system, a person who was able to get into Trinity's server would only need to click a link to immediately go through the door into the synod's.

Marc: Hmmmm. Unfortunately, we have no way of finding that out since none of us have access to the Trinity HR system.

Kristie got a slight smirk on her face, which caused Sam to inquire about what she was thinking.

Kristie (to Sam): Remember how Steph says a door swings two ways, that if you can get through it in one direction, you should be able to retrace your steps and go the opposite direction as well?

Sam: Yes, but I don't think she was referring to computer hacking.

Kristie: Nevertheless, if we can't get into Trinity's system to see if it is linked to the synod's, can we get into the synod's and see if there's some passage back to Trinity?

Marc: Hmmmm. I can try the credentials I use to get into the authorized sections of the GMS website and dig for a means of linking to TLU. Not sure I'll have a chance before Sunday morning, with another fairly full day ahead tomorrow.

Alyssa told the others that she was beat and was heading up to her room, which spurred the rest of them to call it a night.

**********

Marc and Dani entered his room full of anticipation for what was about to come. She pressed his back against the closed door and attacked his lips with hers. After a bit of back-and-forth, Dani broke the lip lock and started walking toward the bathroom, where she hid a certain surprise for Marc before the wedding.

Marc: I hope you're not going to leave me half-hung.

Dani: Not on your life! I've got something special to show you, something I've been waiting to do until a time when I knew we wouldn't be trying to beat the clock for a shag.

Marc thought about what might be forthcoming and licked his lips. Dani emerged from the bathroom in a black strapless corset, black seamed stockings, and the 4" Steve Madden patent black heels she had worn with her outfit for the wedding. Her nether region was neatly trimmed and her hair was no longer in its side bun but rather cascaded down her back. Marc was literally speechless at the sight of her, which left it to Dani to commence the verbal foreplay.

Dani: I take it this meets with your approval?

Marc: I'm speechless. You are the sexiest woman I have ever laid eyes upon, and I can think of a
Dani: Because I know we'll have time to have our way with one another and I wanted to up the heat factor that I backed off from when we were in Cary. That night, I wanted to win your heart by way of our lovemaking. Tonight, I want you to do me every way possible and I want to show you just how hot and bothered you make me.

She sauntered over to the bed and wasted no time in trying to get at the bulge in Marc's pants. Once exposed, she quickly wrapped her mouth around the semi-erect organ, moving between hard sucks on the tip, teasing kisses along the outside of the shaft, and engulfing its entirety between her lips. Not wanting to make him come just yet, she removed her mouth from his throbbing manhood and finished taking off his pants and boxers. Climbing onto the bed, she sat on top of his pelvic region and rubbed her vaginal lips over him. His mouth immediately went to her now-hardened nipples and he sucked each of them in turn while rubbing his crotch against hers. Dani got off of Marc and lied on her back, allowing him to take up a position between her legs.

Dani: Ready, tiger?

Marc: I don't think I've ever been more ready for you, princess.

She spread her legs a bit wider than usual, showing Marc how wet she was and how easy it would be for him to sink his full length into her. He scooted forward a bit and rested the tip of his penis against her most intimate of openings. From there, he pushed ahead and easily slipped inside her. She tightened up a little to allow for the development of friction between their sexual organs. As he pumped to and fro, she squeezed her vaginal muscles just below the tip to give him the tightest feel possible, touching every inch of his erection as it passed between her lips. A slow and steady rhythm allowed him to hold off his first orgasm until after he had given his lover one, looking into her eyes deeply once she came down from the high up to the point where he came inside her. The pair kissed passionately as he rode out his climax. From there, he withdrew himself from her and positioned himself on his back, with his head against a pillow at the top of the bed. Dani climbed on top of him with her back to his face, then took his semi-hard member and pulled it up to her quim before sinking slowly down onto it. She leaned back against his chest and they worked one another toward another orgasm. Marc's hands roamed over Dani's chest and hips, pushing her harder onto his stiffness. A couple of minutes later, Dani released him from her love canal and took him into her mouth again, this time offering up her own lower set of lips for his oral pleasure. He buried his face into her womanhood and gave soft, teasing licks over the lips and a tantalizing suck on her clit. He pressed a thumb against her anal opening before rubbing the area a bit. She bucked back against his tongue and lips, then clamped down tightly on his cock and forced him to shoot a stream of cum down her throat. Not expecting that, he bit down somewhat on her clit, sending off a thigh-rattling set of sensations that led to Dani's second orgasm of the night. She turned around and sunk into Marc's arms, content with being held by him. A few soft kisses between the pair led to deeper ones, from which Dani pushed her butt backwards in an attempt to get Marc inside her again. Once that was accomplished, she pounded up and down with wanton desire to make him come again. He grabbed onto her butt and let her ride him roughly. He whispered in her ear, "Come with me this time", which was all the inspiration she needed to slow her tempo a bit to match his rise. As he warned her of how close he was, she sped up and got to her apex just before him. When her muscles gripped him and pressed down, he exploded and filled her a second time.

Worn out from that, Marc wrapped his arms again around Dani and held her close to him.

Dani: That. Was. Incredible. How did you store up so much stamina for tonight?

Marc: Well, over break I didn't really have time to go off and take care of my own business, so the
reserve built up. The six weeks since we last had sex along with the intermittent frustrations which occurred during that time contributed as well. Add on the effect eye candy has on me and you going all-out to appeal to my carnal side, and you get what happened. I want to take advantage of you dressed like that, but I'm going to need a bit of time to get recharged. Keep it on and let's sleep for a bit, then do another few rounds in the morning.

Dani kissed Marc on the heart before replying, "Only if you promise to hold me all night with you inside me."

Marc: Like in Cary? I can do that, I WANT to do that, and I can't think of a better way to end this day, love.

The couple adjusted themselves to get into the sleeping position just described, then drifted off to a blissful repose.
Saturday at Convention had Marc leading two sessions and participating in a third. Following a leisurely awakening with Dani, the pair went to the introductory meeting of the proposed Sectarian Action Group. Among the 20 or so people who attended were: the new head women's coach at Eastern University; both head coaches from Canisius; Nick Cavan, the men's soccer coach at the University of Portland, who Marc knew from his playing days at Kalamazoo College; and both head coaches from Concordia University Chicago.

Marc: Thank you, everyone, for attending this morning's first meeting of what I hope will become the Sectarian Action Group of United Soccer Coaches. My name is Marc Schmidt and I am the chaplain at Trinity Lutheran University in Mequon, Wisconsin, a northern suburb of Milwaukee. TLU is in its first year of existence, having been created as the successor to Carthage College in Kenosha on the former Concordia University Wisconsin campus. Now you may ask why a college chaplain would have an interest in religiously-affiliated colleges and universities working together in the field of intercollegiate athletics. Part of it comes from my background as a coach, a coaching educator, and a soccer club administrator combined with my position as a Churchwide Diaconal Minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, or ELCA. The other part is that I believe sports is and has always been the great uniter in society. The presidents of Martin Luther College and Augsburg University may not ever want to cross paths, as they come from two divergent points of view on the Lutheran spectrum. Their coaches, however, understand the value of having good in-state non-conference opponents on their schedules and thus they compete against one another in a number of sports, including soccer. Same goes for Concordia-Chicago and Trinity Lutheran, who are both members of the Northern Athletics Collegiate Conference. The higher-ups at each school might view one another with disdain, but the coaches and athletic directors work together on a regular basis to bring the highest level of athletics possible to their conference members. No matter where you come from on the religious spectrum, coaches at sectarian colleges and universities deal with a number of the same issues, such as the balance between one's personal faith and the doctrine to which a school holds fast and to which it expects its employees to comply, the recruitment of athletes who may or may not practice what they nominally preach, and the intersection of faith and sport in the university community. My friend, Jeanne Hecker, who is the women's volleyball coach at Kalamazoo College, taught me during my athletic administration internship at the school how these two facets of internal joy, one's participation in the church as a whole and his or her participation in intercollegiate athletics, did not need to be held apart but could spur a person onto great things in both arenas. The potential for this group to be a voice to the greater coaching community on matters of importance regarding the multiple hats a coach at a religiously-affiliated school might wear and the expectations of professional and spiritual excellence laid upon them by various segments of university administration is quite great, and I hope you all will consider being part of this.

The coaches in attendance took turns expressing some of the issues they face on their campuses, from ambivalent administrators who decry the amount of energy high-level athletics takes away from students' "greater pursuits" to the reluctance of academic leaders to expand the course catalog and list of undergraduate majors to allow for greater diversity of academic pursuit on campus beyond the professions to the rise in non-religious students seeking out playing opportunities at their institutions. After a bit of discussion, Marc wrapped up the session by asking for people interested in joining the SAG to place their name, school, and email address on the sheet at the front of the room.

During the Women's Committee meeting, the group's board passed a resolution in support of the USC partnering with the Urban Coaching Project to deliver additional coaching education opportunities, particularly in underserved communities. Following the meeting, around half of those in attendance stayed to hear Marc deliver a short introduction to the UCP's coaching module. He
then allowed Elysa and Dani to offer their personal experience with the curriculum and seminar. Once the impromptu session finished, Marc was asked for contact information by a handful of coaches to pass along to their athletic directors, club directors, and superintendents. Marc took down the names and email addresses of those coaches, saying that he'd send them copies of the first seminar session's lesson plan and the standard licensing agreement. After the room cleared, Marc, Dani, and Elysa went to the food court for a quick re-fueling and debriefing of the day's business.

**********

Back in Milwaukee, three of the lacrosse team's couples met up for dinner at 2 Mesa in the Martin Drive neighborhood, not far from Christen's home in the Washington Highlands.

Christen: Julie, you're from Arizona, so you should be sort of comfortable with wickedly spicy food, I'm guessing. The rest of you, this stuff might burn you a bit, so be prepared.

Erin: My parents are originally from the south, so I've picked up a bit of a taste for Caribbean and Cuban food. Mexican shouldn't be any worse, right?

Christen: Probably not.

Their server, Marina, came over prepared to take their order. Christen gave her a warning in Spanish about the others' palates and asked if the chefs could possibly temper Steph, Lauren, and Kelley's dishes.

Marina: ¿Entonces esos tres son débiles en el departamento de especias? ¿Cómo les convenciste de venir a un restaurante mexicano, entonces?

Christen: Está cerca del lugar de mis padres en Wauwatosa y quería darles a mis compañeros la oportunidad de ver dónde crecí. Además, será gracioso verlos disparándose vapor de sus oídos y boca.

Marina: Haré todo lo posible para que los chefs suavicen el perfil de especias para sus platos.

Once Marina got everyone's order, she left their table and went to the kitchen to report it.

Kelley: Christen, should I be concerned about what you and the server were discussing?

Julie: Yes. She told her that you, Lauren, and Steph were wimps when it came to spicy food and asked if the chefs could lighten up on the seasonings in your meals.

Lauren: I can probably tolerate medium-level spices, but yeah, the other two are going to be screaming if the normal profile comes with what they ordered.

Erin: Marc is an absolute weakling when it comes to spicy food. Even the weakest salsa is still too hot for him. Same for pepperoni on pizza.

Christen: Does anyone know how they determine the roommate pairings for road trips?

Erin: I asked Megan about that after training on Thursday. She told me that Lauren tended to put on-campus roommates together along with people who already were connected somehow. If that's the case, then the four of you could end up being roomies.

Lauren: Would she put two sets of roommates together, or mix in a couple of singles to fill out a room that has one pair?
Steph: Good question.

Kelley got a slightly-worried look on her face, which Christen noticed.

Christen: Whatcha thinking about, Kelley?

Kelley: That Lauren and I could end up stuck with Shelley, since she and I WERE high school teammates.

Julie: That definitely would not be a good thing.

Christen: Definitely not. Jules, we might get Sofia if that's the case.

Lauren: I looked up the two schools we're scheduled to play over Spring Break. Both either are or were women's colleges and are located in Raleigh, North Carolina. Meredith College is all women for undergraduates and William Peace University started admitting men in 2012.

Steph: Any idea how good they are?

Lauren: William Peace is a first-year program, while Meredith has won their conference five years running.

Julie: So a REALLY tough test in the first match and a winnable second one, then?

Lauren: Probably. Erin, how close is Raleigh to where you and Steph went last month?

Erin: We stayed in Cary, which is more or less the first suburb west of Raleigh. Wonder if we'll be at the same hotel for this trip as we were then. Steph, think we could get Kathy to come out and see us play one of the games on this trip?

Steph: Proctor? Can't hurt to tell her about it and see if she'd be interested.

Julie: What do all of you think of Lauren and Sarah after our first week?

Lauren: I think Sarah is going to be the good cop and Lauren the bad cop. I just get this feeling from her that she's not all that satisfied with the roster we have.

Christen: Technically there is no signing day in Division III, but the D-I date is February 6, so we'll probably learn around then how much she's looking to turn over the squad for 2020.

Kelley: Which means we have about three weeks to prove to her that she shouldn't be looking to replace us.

The check came and, after everyone chipped in their portion of the bill along with a decent tip, the group left to return to campus.

**********

Carli was giving a couple of her soccer teammates, Allie Lerner and Emily Bowman, a short orientation to the world of "alumni relations".

Carli: Sara sets up the appointments for us. We get a 40% cut of the price our guests pay, but no money ever changes hands on-site. Everything is done electronically, with checks available from the bursar's office on the 15th and 30th of each month. Lexi can attest that the more you're willing to do, the more you can entice your guest, the more you can make.
Allie: Are our guests required to be, well, appropriately attired for our appointments with them?

Carli: It's not required, but it is heavily encouraged by Sara as well as the Thunderkats, our top-of-the-line ambassadors. Agreement is that they are responsible for any harm which comes to one of our employees by way of their actions.

Emily: Have any of you been in that position before, where a guest wasn't conscientious about the potential for harm against their ambassador?

Carli: Not to my knowledge. Either of you nervous?

Emily: A bit. What if I don't provide good service, or am asked for something that I'm not comfortable doing, or plain freak-out when I'm with a guest?

Carli: The first interaction you have with someone will be a bit awkward, but remember that for a good portion of your visitors, the nerves will be there for them as well. If you can get him or her to relax, it usually helps you to relax and get on with things.

Allie: I know we get schedules sent to us on Wednesdays, but are those days and times firm or can we end up with a larger or smaller number of meetings?

Carli: There is a bit of a wash-out rate, so you might have an additional meeting dropped into your lap on short notice. We try to have a couple of our people off during every shift to monitor the others and reallocate appointments if there is need.

Having a good feel for what was about to happen, Allie and Emily checked themselves over and prepared for the evening's business to begin, with Carli laying a kiss on the back of each of their necks to loosen them up a tad.
Age Is Just A Number

With all of the activity of the past few days, Marc and Dani spent Saturday night in her room lounging, having room service, and enjoying each other's presence.

Marc: This trip has been a whirlwind. All the get-togethers, the meetings, the wedding and everything attached to that. I'll be glad to get home and rest in my office for a couple of days before needing to be on my game for service on Wednesday.

Dani: What about the situation with what looks to be a portion of my team wanting your butt in a sling?

Marc: If you don't mind, I will probably use the train trip back to write my response for university communications to release on Monday. I am pretty sure the synod's computers were hacked and that's how they got the information they published and spread around campus. The reason I'll write it then is because it keeps Danielle out of the line of fire and you'll be able to help me not bash your team too harshly for this attempt to defame me.

Dani: Do you know if Lexi has her hand in this at all?

Marc: I don't. On one hand, she could be involved as a means of retaliating against her sanctions. On the other, I think I had her fairly frightened and I don't believe she has the audacity to attack me two days after passing punishment. Anyways, that dilemma will be dealt with when I get back to Trinity on Monday. We have one last night together here and I'd like to spend it connecting with my charming, delightful work spouse.

Dani smiled and wrapped her arms around Marc's waist, laying her head against his shoulder before placing a kiss on his neck. "What do you want to do, or is it obvious what's on your mind?"

Marc: If it gets there, OK, but I want to get to know you beyond what I already do, which is a fair bit.

Dani: 20 Questions?

Marc: Kind of. We each ask five questions, with both of us answering them. Nothing is off-limits.

*Dani: OK. I'll go first. What has been the greatest day of your life up until now?

Marc pondered for several seconds before responding. "It might not be the exact date, but June 27, 2017. It was when the pharmaceutical cocktail I'm on 'kicked in' and the fog lifted. It led me to take the risk with releasing and licensing the coaching module, to steamroll through finishing Diakonia, which together led me to the job at Trinity, and ultimately to you."

Dani: Mine would be October 4, 2018. That was the day when two major things concerning my future came to pass. One was getting the waiver from Faculty Senate so I could apply to and begin graduate school. The other was finding out that my attraction to a certain someone was mutual and him showing me that.

*Marc: Interesting choice there. I wouldn't have guessed that day was so monumental for you. My turn. What is one feature that you would change about yourself? Can be physical, emotional, mental.

Dani: My tendency to retreat when faced with conflict. I just feel like I can't stand up for myself because others see me as the person who aims to make everyone happy and that keeping the peace is
what I want most. Comes back to the self-esteem thing, the lack of confidence I have in myself and
my opinions and feelings.

Marc: I'm sure you can guess mine. It's my inability to open up to people because I feel like they can
use what they learn to hurt me in the future. Putting my heart out there only to have it stomped upon,
that's not a good feeling.

Dani: Guess we both have walls we need the other to scale in order to build on what we have.

Marc: Guess so.

*Dani: Name one thing you would change about me if you could.

Marc: This may come off as being odd, and if it offends you I apologize in advance, but your breasts.
I'd like them slightly smaller. Don't get me wrong, I love your body as it is, and I love how you
respond when I touch them, but they're just a little bit big for me. I like giving them attention, yet
sometimes I feel like I am pawing at them, with no rhyme or reason to what I'm doing. You?

Dani: You just did it in answering my question, the extensive prefacing of what you want to say. I
know that you have that hesitance to tell people what you really think, but I wish you would just fly
with it sometimes. 90-95% of the time, what you say isn't as bad out loud as you seem to think it is in
your head.

Marc: I'll try to be better about getting to the point and not spending 30 seconds at the beginning
distancing myself from what I want to express.

Dani: Please do, darling.

*Marc: Back to me. What one relationship in your past or present do you wish you could repair?

Dani: My sister Nicole and I have always had a "tense" relationship. Out of the four of us, she is the
one that has had I'd say the least amount of outward success in life. Also, with me being the
youngest, our parents doted on me a bit and helped smooth out my path for me to get where I have.
Olivia is the sister I'm closest to, and Angela has gifted me twice with the opportunity to be an aunt,
but Nicole and I just don't get on like she or I do with the other two.

Marc: That's deep, love. I have so many bust-ups in my past, relationships that I either ran from or
torpedoed or made less-fulfilling because of my arrogance or narcissism that I don't think I can pick
one. I'm more focused now on not ruining the ones I still have, like the one with my sister Laurie,
especially with Matt now looking to come to Trinity for college and me not being in favor of the
idea. I've never been the best brother to her or uncle to Matt or my niece Sam, but I'd like to make up
for lost time with them and if Matt will allow me to shepherd him a bit instead of trying to ride my
coattails, things can get better.

*Dani: Greatest professional accomplishment.

Marc: Despite the hits and misses that came with it, founding and running MUSC is still the crown
jewel on my resume. Getting it off the ground, then finding players willing to buy into the
philosophy of being a club for the overlooked, underappreciated, and ignored was a big thing. The
success we had on the field with a player set that could easily be said were a grade or two below that
of some of our opponents, which included the blitzings of RUSH Wisconsin in 2014 and 2015 and
beating Racine United two of three years, I couldn't be happier with how things went. Did I want to
win more? Yes. Did I want us to eventually grow and make more of an impact on the Milwaukee
soccer market? Yes. Would I change how we went about things in order to have that happen? Not a
Dani: Being that I'm so young, I haven't had many things that stick out, so I'm going to say that speaking yesterday in front of so many women's coaches about UCP and the seminar would be it so far. Having the confidence to just tell my story about how the module and seminar impacted my ability to ascend on the coaching ladder despite my age and inexperience at anything above U10 is something that I'll remember if I have future successes in the game or life in general.

Marc: Trying to flatter me?

Dani: No, just telling the truth, hubs.

Dani placed a kiss on Marc's cheek, after which he turned to face her and placed one on her lips.

*Marc: Most embarrassing moment.

Dani: I had just taken a shower and was in my room getting dressed. Olivia had brought her boyfriend over to study and she needed to get the card table and a couple of folding chairs so they could set up shop in her room. She didn't know I was home and came into my room as though it were unoccupied. Jason was standing at the door with her and got a full view of my naked body. Olivia ran out, shut the door, and told me to let her know when I was decent. I stayed in my room for like a half hour just feeling so bad about him seeing me like that.

Marc: Wow. That is REALLY bad. Mine won't top that, I'm sure. I was probably 14 and had a dentist's appointment that I did not want to attend. I hid out in the basement rec room hoping that my parents would believe that I either had already left for it or had forgotten about it and made other plans. I was planning to sneak up from the basement after my mom went to work and my dad laid down for his morning nap. They called the cops who came over and took a statement from them as though I was missing. I felt guilty as hell after that and came upstairs almost immediately after the police left.

*Dani: Nowhere near as bad as mine, but still a rather uncomfortable thing to face. What is one place you haven't been that you want to go?

Marc: I've been in this city's airport for maybe a half-hour, but not in the city itself. Las Vegas. Just for the experience and to see if I might have any luck at the poker tables.

Dani: Also would work if you were trying to get re-married and didn't want a huge to-do.

Marc: Wait......you're the one who has said that marriage isn't her cup of tea, but now you're hinting that I'd like to take you there someday for that purpose.

Dani (chuckling): I meant nothing by that statement outside of what I said, so no trying to pin your wishful thinking on me. Mine would be Prince Edward Island in summer. I was so taken by the beauty of the place in the Anne of Green Gables books and movies that I've always wanted to see it for myself.

Marc: I've only seen it in winter, but Charlottetown is quite nice and is fairly walkable if you want to be touristy or run errands.

Dani: Why does it not surprise me that you've been there? I can't compete with you, can I!? Actually, that quality, your knowing everyone and having been everywhere, it's something that I find rather comforting when I think about the possibility of you and I as partners.

Marc banked Dani's declaration away in his mind and went onto his next question.
Marc: What would be the perfect romantic dinner at home for you?

Dani: Tapered candles, maybe some flowers in the middle of the table. Chicken Alfredo with a bottle of wine. The two of us staring at each other through the candlelight, lost in one another. Then sharing a pint of Kopp's Swiss Chocolate custard for dessert side-by-side.

Marc: Shit, Dani. You've got me drooling over that vision. I'm not much of a cook, so coming up with something I'd actually be able to make is hard. Let's see...Candles, of course. Rose petals leading from the front door to the kitchen, where I'd be working on a meal of Meat Loaf, Garlic Mashed Potatoes, and Green Beans. A bottle of sparkling cider to drink. For dessert, a pint of Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough and a pint of Midnight Chocolate Cake. And we fight over who can get the most out of both of them.

Dani: Who told you about my affinity for those?

Marc: Cookie Dough is my favorite flavor of the day, and I think I remember you and some of our players talking about hitting up Kopp's on the way back to the North Shore one night after training because Midnight Chocolate Cake was on the menu.

*Dani: Good memory, oh wise one. My last question for you. What TV character do you think you emulate the most?

Marc: Gosh is that a toughie. There are probably ten or so that are different parts of me. Boiling it down to one, I'd say Jason Seaver from "Growing Pains". Thoughtful, a bit quirky, a good guy in general, and someone who loved his family even when they made bad decisions.

Dani: At my age, I don't find anyone I say is me. Thinking maybe 5-10 years into the future, I think I would probably be like the long-suffering mother and wife on "Home Improvement".

Marc: Uh-huuuh?

Dani laughed at Marc's impression of Tim "The Tool Man" Taylor. "Let me guess. He's one of that list of ten or so you mentioned."

Marc: Yep.

Dani: Should have known.

*Marc: Final question, and it's extremely personal. What is your greatest relationship fear?

Dani thought through the question for a solid minute before beginning her response.

Dani: Paring it down to one is tough, because I have a few. I'd say that my biggest fear is that I'll end up the pinch-hitter for both you and Sarah, available for a good time and some tender moments but with no commitment from either of you to me. Does that make sense?

Marc: It makes perfect sense, sweetheart. The biggest fear I have is that, even though I will have found the absolute perfect person to be with, someone who fills in all the broken places I have and loves me without reservation or condition, that it won't be enough to keep me from doing to her what I've been doing to Danielle for the past 20+ years.

Dani took Marc's confession to heart, because she felt as though he was referring to her as that perfect person.

Dani: Marc, are you saying that you're worried that, should you and I get together, whatever we have
won't be enough to stop that "chase" mechanism of yours?

Marc: Crazy, right? I KNOW you're everything I want and that there is nothing I'd need to seek from someone else, but I don't know if I can trust myself to stay faithful to you.

Marc and Dani just lied there in a warm embrace, with nothing needed to be said. As Marc began drifting off to sleep, Dani summoned up the courage to let her guard down completely with him, whispering into his ear, "Four words and I'm yours forever."
University Communications sent out a press release on Monday morning with Deacon Schmidt's response to the actions on campus against his office and person during his absence.

"It came to my attention while I was attending the United Soccer Coaches Convention in Chicago that a group of Trinity Lutheran students made derogatory statements against myself and questioned my fitness for the office of Chaplain at the school. Following reflection and a bit of research, it was found that the Greater Milwaukee Synod's file system had been breached by someone within the TLU community, which allowed for classified documents to be accessed, leading to the on-campus chalking and the creation of BootTheBrute.com on Wednesday, January 16th. I admit that, for the most part, the actions mentioned are true, that the Bishop had full knowledge of these transgressions, and that they occurred more than 10 years ago. It is my belief that this calling for my head is in retaliation for actions my office and I personally have taken against members of the university's athletic community. The claims of embezzlement, money laundering, and misappropriation of funds are false, and I look forward to presenting the truth before the Board of Trustees on February 1st."

In his office in Luther Hall, Marc got down to business and contacted Bishop Emerson to set up a meeting for Wednesday following Lunch Bunch on campus. The bishop said he would bring Rev. Sherman with him and would make sure all files needed to refute the claims of financial mismanagement were with them. After that, Marc called Tom Sinclair to see if any movement on the Diakonia-level survey courses had been made so that he could request that the Faculty Senate approve the Practical Ministry certificate at their next meeting on February 7th. The pair set up a sit-down for Thursday morning to finalize the proposal and draw in the relevant co-sponsors from the Schools of Education, Nursing, and Health Professions. He then cleared up his bring-home work from Convention and got a handle on the backlog of email and phone messages he received last week. Over the lunch hour, he met with his nascent peer ministry team (Alyssa, Steph, Erin, Julie, Corey, and Stefan) to go over the plan for Saturday's training and how each of them would be helping either lead or co-lead breakout sessions for students.

Just shy of 3 o'clock, athletic director Gavin Winchester stopped by Marc's office.

Gavin: Marc, do you have a few minutes?

Marc: Sure, Gavin. Have a seat. What can I do for you?

Gavin: I wanted to tell you that no one in my direct line of supervision had anything to do with the public relations campaign against you. That said, I disagree with your sentence on Alexandra Millen and will be overturning your suspension of her for the spring game against Stritch. Also, why a meal plan restriction instead of something less punitive but more impactful?

Marc: The original sentence was to be the 12-credit restriction and the loss of parking privileges for Spring semester, but Dr. Baines didn't dismiss the case against Coach Dillon until after Ms. Millen had left campus for the semester, making that second sanction unavailable as a part of her sentence.

Gavin: I see. Onto happier news. I received a call from Jim Hauser, the athletic director at Concordia-Ann Arbor. Apparently, word of your comments at the United Soccer Coaches Convention related to the founding of a Sectarian Action Group made the rounds and he's interested in developing a long-term scheduling contract between us and them along with pre-match activities involving the competing teams. He was wondering if you'd be willing to speak with their school's campus pastor about releasing a joint statement supporting the endeavor.
Marc: I'd be pleased to do so. As I said on Saturday, Don Garrett and Patrick Foster might not be able to sit in the same room and be civil, but you and Jim or Jamie and their women's volleyball coach can do it because sports is the great uniter. So long as their chaplain doesn't try to use the statement to bring up our religious differences and turn this arrangement between CUAA and TLU into some kind of holy war, there's no reason for he and I to not be able to support our athletic departments' commitment to collegiality and goodwill.

Gavin: The contract goes into effect starting with the 2020-2021 school year, but teams that wish to play CUAA next year can do so and take advantage of the interchange opportunities. Speaking of those, with women's lacrosse scheduled to play at Ann Arbor at the end of March, do you have any ideas for an interchange event?

Marc: With the game being Saturday afternoon and them playing the next day in Kalamazoo against the Hornets, the team would need to travel Friday in order to have any opportunity to do something with the Cardinals' players. My suggestion is, since this will be more than likely the first competition between the schools since the relocations, a Friday night banquet for the players, open to the public, with proceeds going to a reestablished Luther's Promise scholarship fund.

Gavin: Luther's Promise?

Marc: It was a joint scholarship fund set up by Concordia-Wisconsin and Concordia-Ann Arbor that would grant between $16,000 and $20,000 a year to students at the two schools who met certain eligibility criteria, such as being the child of a Concordia graduate, being a graduate of a Lutheran high school, or being a member of a Lutheran congregation. The third criteria was not restricted to just LCMS members, so ELCA and WELS congregants could apply as well.

Gavin: I think I like your train of thought here. Let me bring up all of this with Jim and see if he'll bite. We would return the favor when CUAA comes here I'd presume in Spring 2020?

Marc: That's my thinking. Given the relative places the schools occupy in the lacrosse world presently, the pre-game banquet might be the closest the ladies get to a conference championship weekend or the Division III Final Four/NAIA National Tournament where those are part of the general schedule.

Gavin thanked Marc for his time and went back to his office to move forward on the agreement with CUAA.

**********

After practice, several of the freshmen had dinner together in Albrecht, with kvetching about the start of pre-season the primary topic of discussion.

Maggie: Is it just me, or does Lauren seem to be putting the screws to certain players and letting others sort of slide on their mistakes?

Becca: I think we all figured the seniors would be allowed to coast a little, but I'm surprised how she's riding Sam and Morgan A. I know they're the more defensive of our midfielders, but their height really make them offensive assets on top of being troublemakers for the opposition.

Jane: I don't have a clue at the moment if I'm going to be given a chance to make a case to be Nicole's backup. It seems like she looks at Steph and sees another Nicole, while my physique isn't that well-developed.

Savannah: Steph's a sweetheart. If you ask her for help on building up your musculature, I'm sure
she'll give you some tips. I can also help you out a bit with suggestions based on your current build.

Andi: Did anyone else hear the comment Sarah made about Sofia's trickiness with the ball?

Emily: Yeah. It made me wonder if that's something Lauren is seeking out since we don't have the level of pure shooters and speed merchants that other squads might.

Lindsey: Any idea if she's looking at us in specific spots or wants us to be more well-rounded, able to play anywhere within our line or between two lines?

Becca: I can go mid or D, but not really a wide player.

Savannah: I feel like I can play anywhere in attack, but further back is a different story.

Maggie: On the spring break trip to North Carolina, does anyone know how roomies will be determined?

Lindsey: Megan told Steph Lafleur that Lauren likes to keep on-campus roommates together as well as people who already have a connection, like Christen and Sofia. How the singles come into play, I don't know.

Becca: So couples who aren't roomies aren't guaranteed to be together, I take it.

Lindsey: Probably not.

Emily: Maggie, how far is Largo from where we'll be playing?

Maggie: 10 1/2 hours on the ground, about 2 by air. 675 miles, give or take.

Andi: So less than it is here to there, which I think is around 15 hours.

Jane: Any struggles yet with balancing everything?

Emily: Schedule-wise, no. Physically, yes. The mixture of lifting or cardio in the mornings, practice, and dance classes are running me down a bit. Can't really back off on any of them. Maybe I need to prioritize that list and get relief from Sarah or Lauren on the morning work.

Becca: Nothing too bad yet.

Lindsey: It's a breeze at the moment. The Gen Ed courses aren't overly taxing, my language courses are essentially repeating what I learned on study abroad, and practice the first week or so hasn't really been rough.

As dinner wrapped up, the players headed back to their dorms for the night.
Mounting A Defense

Marc's homily at Wednesday's weekly worship focused on the reasons people choose hate over love. It was a particularly cogent topic as he had experienced a fair bit of it since his last service of Fall semester on December 5th, with the most recent attack being the charges levied against him by the Boot The Brute Brigade. Dr. Baines has been called upon to present the group's evidence against Marc at the Board of Trustees meeting on February 1st. With Bp. Paul Emerson and Rev. Matt Sherman in attendance, Chaplain Schmidt laid out for the congregation his perceived faults and the truth of the matters on the table.

Marc: Hate as an emotion is harmful to every party it touches. So why do so many people choose it rather than acceptance or even love? Mainly because it is less emotionally risky to be negative out-of-hand than to deal with the potential to be hurt by caring about another person. The number of hate-filled actions involving students over this academic year has been disturbing and I for one am disappointed in those who have chosen that path. In recent times, that hate has hit closer to home. A member of this school's athletic staff, someone who played for me several years ago and is now a rising star in the coaching profession, who I consider a close friend, was accused by a player of hers of unimaginable offenses, claims that eventually were proven false. After delivering the appropriate sentence for her false claims, fellow student-athletes chose to air some serious allegations against me, ones that include financial mismanagement and philandery. Why would someone deliberately do either of these things? The answer lies in the reverse psychology of emotions. People believe that hate brings strength and love is a sign of weakness, when the opposite is actually true. Hate robs a person of the ability to be empathetic and to build up another, whereas love is mutually edifying, allowing both individuals to become better and stronger people. I am going to wrap up with a quote from a great Canadian politician, Jack Layton. "My friends, love is better than anger. Hope is better than despair. So let us be loving, hopeful and optimistic. And we'll change the world." Amen.

Following the words of institution, worshipers came forward for Communion, with Erin assisting Marc in the task. When Steph came by to dip her piece of bread into the chalice, Erin got a big smile on her face, but forgot to say the line in the service that comes at that point, "the blood of Christ, shed for you." When all had gone through the line, Marc and Erin served one another, then placed the remaining elements on the altar. Marc said the Post-Communion Blessing, then the Benediction before Erin gave the Sending.

**********

Lunch Bunch was heavily attended by students, faculty, and staff who were eager to break bread with Bishop Emerson and offer feedback on the first few months of congregational life at Trinity under Marc's leadership. Paul finally got the opportunity to meet Dani, who thanked him for interceding for her and making her trip to College Cup possible. Alyssa and Steph questioned Paul about the possibility of Diakonia being part of Trinity's curriculum.

Paul: I told Marc that he would need to get appropriate backing on-campus for the certificate and the courses involved before I would endorse it. The two of us are still debating the proper balance between Trinity and the synod in educating and consecrating synodicaldeacons. He wants the balance tipped toward certificate completion, while I would like there to be some form of subjective review of candidates.

Alyssa: Will there be a difference between those who pick this up as a tack-on to their secular degrees and those who take the courses as part of Pre-Sem and get consecrated as a first step toward
the pulpit?

Paul: Depending on where the four courses are placed in the Department of Religion's offerings, there COULD be a difference between the two "tracks". Marc, when are you and Tom meeting to work that out?

Marc: I have a meeting with him and representatives from the Schools of Nursing, Education, and Health Professions tomorrow morning to talk shop about the courses' content and how the other three partners want to address the seminar portions. At this point, I have no idea how Tom is designing the survey courses his department plans to add that will be the foundation of the ones used to complete the Practical Ministry certificate. Alyssa, what is the angle of your question?

Alyssa: I was wondering if I would need to re-take course matter at LTSC that I passed as part of the certificate.

Tom Sinclair: I'm sure you're aware that lower-division courses don't count toward a graduate degree, but upper-division ones would as they are generally crosslisted in both the undergraduate and graduate catalogs. Paul, how would grade out the content level of the courses offered by the synod in Diakonia?

Paul: Because of the variety of students in the program, the course offerings aren't taught at or designed to be seminary level. I probably wouldn't grade any combination of three five-week classes as meeting the rigor of a 300-level course, which would be the minimum in order for it to be considered for advanced standing or credit as part of an MA or M.Div.

Marc: I'm going to pipe in here, and I hope Paul will agree with my assessment. In the ELCA, the diaconate is not considered to be transitory as it might be in other denominations, where you get the designation on the way to eventual ordination. Because the purpose of Diakonia is to get more individuals theological training to use in their day-to-day lives in service to the church, it is not designed to be a stepping stone to a two-year MA or four-year M.Div. Breaking this down into the three branches of peer ministry that we'll be employing at Trinity, the Practical Ministry certificate is aimed at that middle group, the Residence Hall Peers, who pick it up and then implement it into their professional lives. The Community-based Peers would be the ranks where the consecration would lead to assisting or leading in the church or a church-based organization in a service capacity. The Student Chaplain level are really those for whom future theological education and a career in the church is a strong possibility, especially if he or she is looking to go straight from undergrad to seminary. Both you and Steph are going to take enough courses in the department to breeze to consecration if you choose to seek it, but it will only be useful if you're not looking at starting seminary right away.

Paul: That sums up well how we at the synod view what Diakonia is meant to do. Marc is also right when he says that it doesn't really do much for you if you go from Trinity to LSTC or another seminary on the fly. If you're looking at finishing your BA and then waiting a bit before starting your M.Div. or will be doing your degree on a part-time basis, it's a good thing to have in your pocket in the interim, I would say.

Steph: How would I factor this into my future academic planning? I am sort of torn about doing the two-year MA and the Diaconal Minister designation that Marc has. I know having an MA would make me eligible to be hired as an athletic director and being a DM opens doors to chaplaincy, but it would seem that I'd need separate MAs to accomplish both.

Paul: You have Marc here, who is one of the best in-college people I have met when it comes to finding ways around stuff like this. If you want a pathway to get both or a super-MA that would meet both possibilities, the two of you should talk about it.
Marc told Steph and Erin to plan on coming over on Sunday, when he could give them some time with academic planning as well as the regular chill-and-study-and-laundry activities. After that, he, Paul, and Matt went to his office to go over the ledgers of his synodical account, the United Coaching Project, and the Office of the Chaplain in order to compile the evidence they would need to refute the allegations of misuse of funds and money laundering.

**********

After a tough practice this afternoon, Erin, Steph, Lauren, Kelley, Christen, and Julie bolted campus for the evening and had dinner at Noodles and Company, wanting to talk without the potential of noisy ears around in the dining hall.

Christen: Erin, why has Lauren been getting in your grill so much this week? You're making a LOT less mistakes than Shelley or Andi, yet getting more of her bite than them.

Erin: I think with me being the only natural left-sider, and her not being particularly fond of my having no real competition within the team at the position, she's trying to put me under the gun a bit. Could also be my being one of the golden children on campus and her not liking that.

Steph: I've gotten the impression in the first week-plus of practice that she's got something against players gravitating toward certain combinations or certain individuals, like she almost wants to force certain ones to interact or tries to keep others from doing so.

Lauren: It's weird, Steph. She knows who lives with who, so it should be common knowledge that they're around one another a lot.

Julie: I understand not wanting cliques to form that eventually could cause rifts in the team, but some of the combos she's run seem, I don't know, wacky.

Kelley: I'm also thinking Christen is right about her trying to wash out some of our class so she can bring in a bigger set of players for next year.

Steph: Enough about her for now. We have other stuff on our plate, such as two of my favorite people needing our help.

Erin: I think Marc is in good hands with the Bishop and his right-hand money guy on his side to prove he hasn't been acting out-of-step. Who's the other?

Steph: Dani. She and Michelle are moving into their new place next weekend and are looking for a few able bodies to assist. Alyssa can't do it because of a game later in the day, but I'm in and hope I can find some people to help out.

Erin: I'm sure Dad 2.0 is going to be there, so I know the two of you will end up wrangling me into this. Therefore, I better say yes so I don't get brow-beat. I'm also guessing Cali will be helping if at all possible.

Kelley: Danielle and Sarah are ex-classmates and friends, so I'm thinking Coach is going to pitch this around the team between now and then.

Christen (to Kelley): I know you didn't overlap with the two of them at Nicolet, since they're both '13s and you were an '18, but did you know either of them before the three of you landed at Trinity?

Kelley: I knew of Sarah's reputation from my WNS teammates who had played with her. Dani went to college literally across I-43 from Nicolet, so I'd see her on the practice field on their side of the interstate and I'd stop and watch Stritch practice for a few minutes on days when I'd be heading
home right after school let out.

Julie: Erin, do you remember what time Marc said the Peer Ministry training starts on Saturday?

Erin: 9am, running until 4pm probably. Then the Chili Cook-Off fundraiser at 6:30.

Christen: Chili Cook-Off?

Steph: Yes. A number of ELCA congregations around Milwaukee compete for bragging rights and the proceeds of the event go to the Lutheran Campus Ministries at UWM and Marquette, and starting this year I'm presuming us as well. We're hosting it in the Melanchthon Center following the Peer Ministry training. We're even putting in an entry, based on Erin's mom's Mexican Chili, made with chocolate as part of the base.

Christen: Need help?

Erin: Sure.

Christen: Are you trying to win or burn the heck out of the guests’ palates?

Steph: You know a way we can do both?

Christen: I think so. I'd need to work with Erin and Julie to kick up the flavor profile of her mom's recipe.

Julie: Let's talk tomorrow after dinner and compare ideas.

As the group left the restaurant, Erin got a notice from the SGA Twitter account with a link to the minutes of today's meeting. As Christen drove everyone back to campus, Erin read through the document and saw that the SGA had passed by acclamation a resolution in support of Deacon Schmidt that President Chad Markham was designated to present to the Board of Trustees at their February 1st meeting.
Marc's meeting on Thursday morning with Drs. Sinclair, Oliphant, and Wingate plus Lauren Fowler produced a written proposal for the Faculty Senate to create a certificate program in Practical Ministry to be housed in the Department of Religion and Theological Studies. Dr. Sinclair was chosen to present the proposal at the Faculty Senate's February 7th meeting, which would be Fowler's first one as an interim senator for the School of Health Professions. After the meeting broke up, Marc asked Ben Oliphant if they could speak on a separate academic matter.

Marc: I was in Chicago last week for the United Soccer Coaches Convention. Great time and I got to lead a couple of impromptu sessions, one on the creation of an action group for coaches from sectarian colleges and universities and the second a short introduction of my Urban Coaching module/seminar. In the few days I've been back, my inbox has had close to 30 requests, including a handful of Carnegie Level I Research institutions, seeking information. I would like to see Trinity be able to offer this to its Secondary Education and Physical Education majors and to potentially house the Urban Coaching Project in the future. Do you know anyone in the Phy Ed department who might be willing to run this idea up the flagpole with Faculty Senate?

Ben: I know a couple of adjuncts that teach in the Sports and Entertainment Management program. If you can get me a general synopsis of what the course would look like and what the educational level/base of it would be, I can take the lead on putting it in front of the Senate with one of the SEM instructors being a co-sponsor of the proposal.

Marc: That would be quite helpful. I had done a number of licensing agreements with school districts after it was completed, but then the chaplain's job here came up last spring and I couldn't expand on the agreements I had or investigate the possibility of the module/seminar becoming a course offering at one of the local universities. I'll send you a PDF of the module along with the proposed schedule. It would likely be a two-semester course, 6 credits in all that would only be credited at the conclusion of the second semester.

Ben: Like the Student Teaching credits for K-12 subjects or Elementary/Middle School majors, where you have two teaching assignments that would carry into a second semester but only get the credits at the completion of the entire practicum.

Marc: Yes. Students would get an I at the completion of the first semester, receiving the appropriate grade and credits for that portion after the second semester is completed.

Ben: Get me the documents and I'll go to work on making the plea for it alongside Phy Ed at the meeting on the 7th.

Marc: Thanks. How were the holidays for you and Megan?

Ben: Great! We got some very good news just before Christmas. She's pregnant and is due around the 4th of July.

Marc: Congratulations! How did your two families take it?

Ben: Her parents and brother were happy as heck for us and the impending arrival. Dawson seemed cool with it, but Lily was a bit miffed that I would want another child so long after she was born. I think she sees Megan and I having a baby as a way for me to totally close the door on my marriage with her mom. She was only 2 1/2 when Natalie was killed by a wrong-way drunk driver on I-94. I had just turned 30 and focused everything I had after that on raising her and Dawson, not even
LOOKING for someone until after both of them were in high school. The two of us went through this when I decided to get serious about Megan, then again when we chose to elope between Fall and Spring semester two years ago. Lily's been a bit slow to warm up to the idea of me being married again and now having a baby with Megan seems to have sent her back into a deep freeze.

Marc: If she needs to talk it out or yell/cry/scream/argue without facing you, have her come see me. She lives on-campus, right?

Ben: Yeah, in Regents.

Marc: Most of our peer ministers are in Augsburg, but hopefully we will gain coverage in all dorms after Saturday's training.

Ben: I think her roommate is planning to attend.

Marc: All the better. She will acquire the tools and knowledge to help get Lily to open up about her thinking concerning you and Megan, the baby, and her feelings surrounding all of it.

The two men got up and left the conference room in Rincker Library. When Marc got back to his office in Luther, he emailed Ben the information he needed to develop a proposal for the module/seminar to be added to the list of course offerings from the School of Education's Physical Education department. He then looked over his inbox and saw another two requests for information on the Urban Coaching Project's curriculum. He forwarded those to his folder of requests and began to think about hiring a person to deal with the inquiries, do the early-on negotiating and sending out of materials, and link all aspects of the process together in a logical way. Marc’s afternoon was spent at the Corner House at UWM, where he and Pastor Rachel along with a couple of her peer ministers fleshed out the topics and schedule for Saturday. He then stayed for worship with her students, with Danielle as well as Revs. Jessica and Matt Sherman showing up near the end of service with a post-worship meal of lasagna and garlic bread for the student congregation.

**********

Friday morning at Trinity was fairly quiet in most locales. Students were looking forward to the upcoming weekend, as Chemnitz Hall would be hosting Casino Night for the on-campus community beginning at 7pm tonight and the women's hockey team was playing Lake Forest in a Friday/Sunday home-and-home series, with the opener at 4pm at Ozaukee Ice Arena. Alyssa, Steph, and Jane met up at the athletic center for an early-morning lifting session, while Cali, Erin, Kelley, and Vanessa did some cardio on the ellipticals.

When Marc got to campus, his inbox had requests from Bill Molitor, commissioner of athletics for Milwaukee Public Schools, and Damien Glover, director of the Midnight Basketball League, for him to give presentations at their upcoming end-of-season coaches' meetings about the module and to send onto them copies of the licensing agreement with price list and description of what is included at each level. Knowing that he had no time to tackle this today with the amount of work he had to do for tomorrow's Peer Ministry training, he saved the emails to his requests folder and reached out to a member of his posse by text.

DeaconMarc: Swamped between Peer training curriculum, UCP, the BoT hearing, and Diakonia. Can we do lunch today, 12:30 at Culver's? Bring your laptop if so.

After a couple of minutes, he got a response to his plea for help.

DaniPDillon: For sure. See ya then, mon ami. XOXO.
With that out of the way, Marc settled in and finished off his planning for tomorrow's training event as well as penning an all-campus email promoting tomorrow night's Chili Cook-Off, touting the TLU entry and the opportunity for faculty and staff to support the university's ministry endeavors.

**********

Dani and Marc met outside Culver's, where he pecked her cheek and she nuzzled her head against his face. After going in and placing their order, they sat down.

Dani: Why the sort-of panic call? I know you're swamped and of course I would never turn down a chance to see you, but why today?

Marc: This week, I have gotten between 30 and 35 requests concerning the coaching module and seminar. I can't handle it on my own since my work with UCP has to be done on my own time. Therefore, I'm looking to hire some help and thought of you. You have experience with the curriculum, you need some degree of steady income now that you'll be living on your own and going back to school, and frankly I want to help you add another credential to your resume. I've come to enjoy your presence around campus and believe that we'd make a good team in handling this side business of mine.

Dani: Is this a serious deal or just a means of keeping me around and quiet, like some men do with their side women?

Marc: The offer is legit. Running the numbers from the UCP books, I'm thinking $150 a week for what should average out to be 7 to 8 hours a week of work. You would be responsible for handling the inquiries, doing some negotiation, passing along agreed-to specifics to me, and sending out materials to those with whom we make licensing agreements.

Dani: Before I make a decision, I'd like to know if there will be a chance to get involved in other parts of the project.

Marc: I'm still working out some pieces that would expand UCP out of my basement and into an official institute or center at Trinity. To do that, we need to get the two-semester course into the school's catalog and get buy-in from the School of Education to have it be accepted to fulfill degree requirements for Physical Education and Secondary Education majors. I talked with Ben Oliphant yesterday morning after my meeting with him and the others that are sponsoring the Practical Ministry certificate proposal. He said that he knew a couple of adjuncts associated with the Sports and Entertainment Management program and, should he be able to get one of them to sign onto the proposal, he would present it to Faculty Senate on the 7th. Since you've taken it, you're eligible to teach it.

Dani: Any restrictions on where I can teach it?

Marc: As a clinician, no. Were you to want to teach the course at Trinity or another college, you'd have to go through the process of becoming an adjunct instructor, which would go through the Phy Ed department most likely. I am sure they would require an MA to hire you in that capacity, so it'd be a couple of years before you could get that assignment.

Dani: You're serious, aren't you, about this?

Marc: Yes, dear. I created the module and went about licensing it because I thought that would be my next chapter after getting my illness under control, not aware that I'd have the opportunity to become chaplain at Trinity. I will need to clear some of this with Paul, even though I made him aware of my continuing with UCP when we talked last spring about the opening, so that the
parameters for my involvement are spelled out. For now, I need someone who can get me out from under the overload. Think about it. I have Steph and Erin coming over on Sunday afternoon. Why don't we do brunch at my place? I'll have the paperwork ready with everything in black-and-white and it will be a regular, no-frills contract listing what you do, what I do, and the money aspects of everything.

Dani: Danielle going to be around?

Marc: It's her weekend to work, so if we get our stuff done by 2, there should be no means of the two of you crossing paths. The girls usually arrive somewhere around Noon. Say 10:00?

Dani: Yes.

Once they finished eating, the pair left and drove back to Trinity, with Dani following Marc to his office to take a look at the requests he had gotten in the past week. The two of them spoke for a few minutes about next Saturday and what she was looking at for help in moving.

Dani: I've got my mom and dad, Olivia, Cali, Steph and Erin, and Sarah. Michelle I think will have her parents and her brother.

Marc: I'll be there. Does anyone in your circle outside of Michelle, Sarah, and Cali know about us?

Dani: No. Olivia knows that Sarah and I are keeping time, but I haven't told her about you.

Marc: Are you free next Friday to attend the Board of Trustees meeting? I'm meeting with my "advocate" on Monday, a professor from the Political Science department who oversees the Pre-Law program. Not sure what his strategy will be, but it could involve character witnesses and testimonials. SGA passed a resolution in support of me and the faculty are circulating a letter in support as well.

Dani: When do they meet?

Marc: 9:30am.

Dani: I'll pencil it in.

Before Dani left, she and Marc spent a couple of minutes embracing and sweet-talking one another. The two shared a loving kiss and Dani then left, allowing Marc to wrap up his work for the day and head home for the evening.
A Jury of One's Peers

Trinity Lutheran University was buzzing early on this Saturday morning. The men's and women's basketball teams were on their way to Rock Island, IL for a doubleheader against Carthage's former CCIW conference rival and fellow ELCA institution, Augustana College. The Acrobatics and Tumbling team took advantage of the empty field house to hold an extra practice in preparation for their first competition next weekend at Urbana University. Over in the Melanchthon Center, Marc, Rachel, and Jessica were getting ready to begin the opening session of today's Peer Ministry training. Alyssa, Steph, and Erin were gathered with the three ministers and some of their counterparts from UWM and Marquette. Julie arrived a few minutes from the start, with Christen alongside. Corey was unable to convince Ali to take part, but Lindsey and Emily were there, along with Becky Sanderson and Elizabeth Edwards from Student Government. Matt Benning also decided to check out the training as the music department tends to be notorious for tunnel vision and lack of empathy amongst its students.

Marc: I'd like to thank all of you for braving the cold and getting out of your warm dorm beds to be here today. Peer ministry can be best defined as the active means of allowing the priesthood of all believers to extend the Gospel to their fellow human being, alongside them as opposed to from the pulpit or the head of a classroom. I mentioned in this year's opening service that a vibrant campus community was a place where people came to know and be known, love and be loved, celebrate and be celebrated. Peer ministry is one of the avenues to make those three transactions happen, with us on the giving side and them on the receiving end. With me today are Pastors Rachel Belding and Jessica Sherman, who head up the Lutheran Campus Ministries at UW-Milwaukee and Marquette, respectively. Also up here are the first draft of peer ministers at Trinity, students chosen by myself to be light in the dark places and extend my office's ability to minister into the dorms and classrooms at TLU. We will start by having you break into groups of eight with one of us joining you for a series of ice-breakers.

As the students formed their groups, Marc studied their compositions and directed certain individuals to "lead" them. He also plugged Julie, Corey, and Cali into groups alongside Erin, Alyssa, and Steph (Cali with Erin, Julie with Steph, and Corey with Alyssa) to give the on-the-fencers a chance to watch and learn a bit from the more-experienced women. The groups spent around an hour getting to know one another, with the leaders interjecting follow-up questions or dialogue where appropriate. Marc walked around the room and checked in on each of the groups, banking away nuggets of information he overheard for use later in the day. Everyone was released for a bathroom break around 10:30, with the next session beginning promptly at 10:45.

Rachel Belding: I hope everyone feels chipper after that first session, because you should be. All of you were taken a bit out of your comfort zone, both in sharing things about yourself that others might not have known as well as inquiring of others for greater detail about their stories. This is what doing peer ministry looks like by and large. You glean information from others through opening up yourself to them, building a connection which then may lead you to get involved with the problem or problems the other person might have. There are two ways that opportunities come to you as a peer. One is that, in the course of daily life, you and another person interact and a point arises where your training kicks in to step forward and draw out what is happening below the surface. The other way is that an individual will seek you out specifically to get assistance about a situation. Turn and face the person next to you. In the first role-play, the two people interact and one of you drops a bomb on the other, leading to a discussion of the problem and solutions. The second will have you going to the other person with an issue that he or she will help you handle through encouragement and guided discussion.
Emily turned to her left and role-played with Matt Benning. The two got into a discussion about life in the arts and the cutthroat nature of it.

Matt: A lot of my classes are with performance majors, which makes collaboration on work a tough thing for us who aren't. They just seem so, I don't know, pissed-off most of the time, like it would hurt them to be even the slightest bit friendly to someone else in the department. Hanging out with the other band geeks who are Music Ed like myself can get boring, you know. Same jokes all the time, which you've heard over and over from your first days of band camp in high school. It also doesn't help matters that most of the women in the department are aiming either for MRS. degrees or "internships" with the instructors. Anything like this happen over on the theater side?

Emily: There is a good amount of that last thing you mentioned. The ultra-competitiveness that happens with auditions and how our department tends to use the courses as a means of pre-selecting actors for future productions puts everybody on edge. The male-to-female ratio is heavily skewed in the department, which makes the dating environment that much more cutthroat for women seeking a partner from the inside. I'm lucky in that I play lacrosse and thus am not with fellow theater majors all the time. Also glad that I came to school with my significant other, who's also one of my teammates and my roommate.

Matt: That must be odd, first to play for the other side, then to have your person be both your roommate and a teammate.

Emily: The combination has been quite relieving for me. Coming in already together, sort of, made the transition a bit easier, because we were both going through it and most of the time were doing it alongside each other. Most of the other roommate relationships on our team came about once they were here, so you have that whole navigation of finding out if you can tolerate each other's quirks before you even start thinking about them in a romantic sense, and what happens if you try and fail, knowing that you're both still going to be members of the same team even if things aren't positive one-on-one.

Matt: I just want to be able to find someone who is semi-normal, who hasn't bought into the "I need to be anywhere but here to make something of myself", and who understands that being a music teacher isn't going to make me famous. I would like to make a CD at some point of jazz hits, on mellophone as opposed to trumpet, but that's more a personal project than a money-making endeavor.

Emily: That person I'm sure is out there. Have a bit of faith and maybe escape the department a bit. If you need help in that regard, I'm sure Marc or one of the big three can point you in any of several directions to spread your wings and expand your circle of potential friends.

Rachel called the large group back together and had a handful of pairings share with the others some of the techniques they used in developing rapport and getting the more introverted of the pair to open up. After Jessica provided a second set of role-playing scenarios (setting is the annual Campus Activities Fair, with some being interested students and others organizational representatives) and those gathered went at it for a bit, Marc dismissed the group for lunch, with the afternoon session to commence at 1:00.

**********

Cali, Erin, Steph, Julie, and Christen placed their things on a table in Siebert Dining Hall and went to the line to get lunch. When they returned, they noticed the other three seats had been taken.

Erin: I wonder who's joining us.
Cali: I think I saw one of the guys from the training place his stuff down.

Christen: I saw Ness when I was coming out of the line and she said she saw my backpack and nabbed a seat at our table.

A couple of minutes passed before Vanessa, Matt, and the third person came to their table and sat down.

Steph: Hi, Matt. How did you think the morning went?

Matt: Easier than I thought it would be when I signed up for the training.

Erin: You've got some real superstars up there teaching. Rachel was an elementary school teacher before going to seminary and has been at UWM for 8 or 9 years. Jessica's been at Marquette around the same amount of time, while Marc's been in the biz on and off since 2001, plus the coaching career before that.

Matt: Good to know we're being taught by people with a fair amount of experience in the field.

Julie (to Abby): I don't believe we've met yet. I'm Julie Jacobsen.

Abby Davidson: Abby. You're part of the lacrosse team, right?

Julie: Yes, as are Steph, Erin, and Christen. Do you play a sport here?

Abby: No. No time with trying to knock down the BSW/MSW double in four years plus a summer.

Erin: Freshman?

Abby: Sophomore.

Vanessa: Christen, what time are we getting together to start cooking for the Chili Cook-Off?

Christen: Those of us in the training are tied up until 4, so we'll be there as soon after that as possible. You and Sofia will probably need to get things started with the prep and base. Do you have anyone else you're looking to bring along to help?

Vanessa: Mal Putnam from Acro. We've been spending a fair amount of time together since I'm technically responsible for making sure she gets back to Augsburg after training on Tuesdays and Thursdays due to the campus restriction.

Erin: Be there at 3, Vanessa. Knowing Marc, he's already figured out how to let me get out of the last hour of the training so I can work on the chili. I'll make sure he knows that Christen and Julie are helping.

Abby: I think my roommate's dad and Deacon Schmidt know each other.

Steph: Who's your roommate's dad?

Abby: Ben Oliphant from the School of Education.

Erin: I recognize the name from one of Marc's homilies last semester on the subject of relationships that outsiders don't understand.

Abby: Makes sense he'd put his marriage with Megan in that category since she's 18 years younger than him.
Steph: How does your roommate get along with her stepmother?

Abby: She doesn't, and it's starting to cause a bit of a rift between her, her dad, and her brother. She feels like the odd one when it comes to not being happy for them. Now that they're expecting, she's even more crabby about it. For her, living in the dorms allows her to shut out that part of life for a good portion of the year. I'm taking the training so I can possibly help her open up as to why she's against this next chapter of her dad's life.

Erin: You might want to talk to Marc at some point. My guess is that he's aware of the issues from talking with Ben and can steer you in a direction to inquire about it.

Vanessa: So 3:00 at Coburg Hall, CP?

Christen: Yep. Hope was supposed to contact their hall director about us coming over to use one of the kitchens. You may want to check with her to make sure all is a go.

Vanessa left to go back to her room in Augsburg, with the others returning to the Melanchthon Center for the remainder of the day's training.

**********

Jessica led off the afternoon with a discussion involving her, Rachel, Marc, and a peer minister from each of the campuses. Marc had asked Julie to represent Trinity as she was the most representative of the ones currently on board.

Jessica: You've learned how to do the basics of peer ministry and have had a chance to try out some of the skills with your fellow students. Now, we're going to get into how the three forms of peer ministry intertwine and what you can expect if you choose to pursue one of those paths at Trinity. At Marquette, we have ministers in the residence halls as well as within LCM as a whole. UWM has everything going through the Corner House but some peers live in the dorms or in the house itself. At Trinity, you'll have all of these options, from being a standard member of the campus congregation to a residence hall peer to the equivalent of a student chaplain. I'll let the students explain what it is they do in their roles, and then Marc will go into what he seeks for each of the branches.

Nicole, from Marquette, described the many hats she wears at the school, from being a graduate student and thus not as close to residence hall life as others, to being Jessica's backup when dealing with university administration or the rest of the peers, to assisting with worship on a regular basis and leading the campus's outreach efforts in the Milwaukee community. Noah, from UWM, gave a short run-down of his responsibilities, from offering meditation at the Corner House on Wednesday mornings prior to the ministry's weekly breakfast gathering to setting up the worship space on Thursday afternoons to handling minor repairs as he lives in the house.

Julie: Unlike Nicole and Noah, my role is not nearly as defined at the moment. I will be assisting Deacon Schmidt with worship once or twice this semester and am helping a few others with preparing our entry for tonight's Chili Cook-Off. Others at Trinity, such as the big three you saw up here this morning, do things like assist with weddings, represent the Peer Ministry Alliance before Student Government, and manage things on-campus in the chaplain's absence. I am hoping that by the end of this first semester on-board, I will have more of a specific role within the PMA, one that will go along with my playing on the school's lacrosse team.

Marc: Thank you, Julie, Nicole, and Noah. I am sure you're all wondering, can I do what the three of them have described as a member of the Peer Ministry Alliance? Do I have the ability to stand out amidst my fellow students, be it in the classroom or the dorms or, dare I say, in chapel? There are
certain profiles that tend to draw people to one of the three branches. Students in the "helping" professions, such as nursing, education, social work, and the sort tend to lean more to the one-on-one aspect that residence hall ministry offers. Those who are looking at a career in the church or a similar field probably will find themselves most desiring the leadership opportunities and public aspect of serving that would come out of the chaplain's office. The remainder will find themselves most comfortable practicing what they know in the context of their day-to-day existence at Trinity. In a few minutes, we will be moving into break-out sessions based on those three branches. I will head up the one for student chaplaincy, Jessica will oversee the one on Residence Hall ministry, with Rachel leading the one on general peer ministry. I'm expecting that the third group will need to be divided. Can I get a show of hands of those desiring to attend either my or Jessica's group?

Around 30 or so rose their hands, leaving between 45 and 50 for the general session.

Marc: We're going to take a short break to discuss the staffing for the general groups. Grab a drink, use the can, and be back in 10 minutes.

Before Marc talked to Rachel and Jessica about the next session, he asked Erin about their entry in the chili competition and learned what had been planned. He told her to have Julie and Christen join her in his group, because he would then release them to work on it at 3 if the session wasn't finished by then. Marc asked Rachel how big of a group she could reasonably handle and they decided to split hers in two, with Nicole taking the other half of it.
Vanessa and Sofia were in the 3rd floor kitchen at Coburg Hall getting the space organized when Erin, Julie, and Christen arrived. Vanessa introduced them to Mal, who knew of the three from being on the same floor in Augsburg.

Erin: Christen is looking for a tongue-killer chili, so I gave her my mom's recipe and asked her to spice it up a bit. I know we'll have Cayenne in the Mexican chocolate, but what other peppers or spices do we want to throw in?

Julie: The Southwest/Tex-Mex I eat usually have chili powder, cumin, and maybe jalapenos.

Vanessa: Since my family is Argentine, chimichurri is a classic add-on for our chili, but you can add crushed red pepper flake to the chili itself if you're looking to kick up the heat.

Erin: My parents grew up in the South, so they got accustomed to Caribbean and Cuban spice profiles, like jerk seasoning.

Sofia: How hot do you want this?

Christen: Hot enough that our Minnesota guinea pigs will be crying in pain, but not SO hot that it's inedible for the guests.

Erin laughed at the thought of Christen suckering Lindsey and Emily into being the test subjects for their concoction.

Sofia: We're going with ground beef instead of chorizo, because the meat will pick up some of the spices and we don't need a double hit of some of them.

Julie started working on the base, with Spicy Hot V8, undrained crushed tomatoes, water, and Mexican cocoa powder. Sofia was on the meat, with Erin rinsing the beans. Christen mixed the spices to get the right amount of heat injected. Vanessa diced up jalapeno and habanero peppers.

Christen had Mal try a small pinch of her spice cocktail.

Mal (coughing): Yow! My dad likes Caribbean Jerk, but this mix is sort of beyond that.

Christen: Good!

Erin: What tricks do you have to temper it for eating?

Christen: You can add sour cream to kill the spice a bit. Also, for a thick chili, thinning it with a little water helps as well.

The handful of amateur chefs brought their portions of the dish to the big stockpot on the stove and added them to the liquid base. While the chili cooked, Erin talked with Mal, as the other four were having too much of a good time among themselves.

Erin: I'm sure you will be glad to get your freedom back next weekend.

Mal: Don't you know it! Seriously, this being stuck on campus for two months not counting winter break has been shit for the birds. It's not like I'm pining to go shopping or have a boyfriend somewhere that I can't see because of it. More the feeling that, were I to WANT to go off-campus, I'd be able to do so. I also don't understand why I got a much tougher sentence than my roommate
Erin thought about whether to debate the sanctions Mal and Lexi received, but decided it was useful to paint the conundrum that Marc had been left in due to Dr. Baines’ foot-dragging to better explain how things came to pass.

Erin: I know you got your sanctions from Hope because Deacon Schmidt was away the weekend of your incident. Were it up to him, you’d probably not have gotten something like the campus restriction you did. Lexi isn’t getting off light, even if it looks like she is. The academic restriction will bite her down the road if she can’t take summer school or overload one semester, since it probably forces her to take an additional semester of classes. As for the meal one, it was an on-the-fly decision because the case against her coach wasn’t cleared until after Lexi left for the semester. Marc wanted to ban her car from campus this semester, but couldn’t punish her until Spring semester started, after she had her Spring parking permit secured.

Mal: How do you know so much about what happened?

Erin: The chaplain is my godfather, sort of my home-away-from-home dad. The case against Coach Dillon nearly killed him, as he was thinking about jumping off the overpass onto I-43 when he couldn’t get her cleared before finals. He wanted to throw the book at Lexi, but Dr. Baines in Human Resources sat on the dismissal until she was gone.

Mal: I see....he scares me, honestly.

Erin: The external bad-ass is really a cover. He is very sweet and caring, as some of my teammates can tell you. You should come tonight and see for yourself.

Mal: Maybe I will. Thanks for the chat, Erin. You girls aren’t really as bad as Lexi tends to think you are.

Erin: We love out loud, we defend one another like life-and-death, but we also care about everyone around us.

Christen and Sofia were making minor adjustments to the chili to get it to both the right consistency and the proper level of hellfire for the palate. When it proved to be just past too spicy for Sofia, they put it on simmer and let it finish the cooking process.

**********

A decent-sized crowd braved the icy conditions to come to Trinity for the Greater Milwaukee Synod Lutheran Campus Ministry Chili Cook-Off fundraiser. A total of 12 churches and synodical organizations entered the competition, with last year’s champ from Redeemer Lutheran hoping to win again (or at least beat out their next-door neighbors from Marquette). Christen and Julie brought over Trinity’s entry from Coburg Hall and placed it down behind their placard. As people were still arriving, Erin asked Lindsey and Emily to taste-test the chili so they were sure it was good and the right level of hot for the event. The two of them took small dishes and scooped in a couple of spoonfuls from the pot, then tried it.

Lindsey: Meaty, with a faint taste of chocolate? Also, tastes like someone dropped an entire bottle of chili powder in it.

Emily (choking): Anyone got ice, milk, maybe some aloe vera lotion? This stuff is HOT! What did you put in there?!

Erin: Jalapeno and habanero peppers, some cayenne, a bit of cumin, crushed red pepper flakes,
cinnamon, and Spicy Hot V8 as the main liquid.

Christen: We didn't test it for a Scoville rating, but based on what we put in, it's probably over 500,000.

Lindsey: You girls are crazy, you know that?!

Julie: We know.

Lindsey and Emily went to find some cold liquid to rinse out their mouths of the spices from the chili. They also came up with a possible gag to pull on the their teammates should the TLU entry win something. The three campus ministers along with the Bishop moved to the front of the room to begin the evening's proceedings.

Paul Emerson: Good evening, everyone. Welcome to Trinity Lutheran University, the first post-secondary institution to be born under the ELCA flag. I would like to thank Trinity's chaplain, Deacon Marc Schmidt, for offering to host tonight's fundraiser and Chili Cook-Off, and ask him to say a few words.

Marc took the microphone from Paul and launched into his comments. "Thank you, Paul. Like he said, Trinity Lutheran is the first school to come into existence since the ELCA was founded in 1988, and we are proud to be hosting tonight's event. You can try as few or as many of the 12 chilies as you wish. The prize for Best Chili will be decided by guest voting while Most Original Chili is determined by a panel of five individuals, those being Bishop Emerson, LCM Board Chairman Tom Williams, UWM Adjunct Professor of Physics Russell Fuller, UWM graduate Megan Harper, and Marquette graduate Matt Lasalle. With that said, let the party begin."

As those in attendance worked their way down the tables to get samples of each church's offering, Marc, Rachel, and Jessica moved about the room greeting and speaking with as many people as they could. Seated at one of the tables, Danielle, Kurt Belding, and Matt Sherman kept each other company while waiting for their spouses to stop by for a few minutes of a break.

Matt Sherman: Danielle, excited to do the weddings in Philly in a couple of weeks?

Danielle: Not particularly. I've only done one to date, and nothing as big or as public as the one on Valentine's Day will be.

Matt: You know how Paul feels about Marc being on the road on his own, so you going to Philly with him is a big thing. *I* know you're not a fan of the the spotlight and that you're making a huge sacrifice taking on the responsibility to marry at least one of the couples that day.

Kurt Belding: Some people have that "something" that makes them good at officiating anywhere, anytime. Rachel has it, Marc seems to have it in spades due to his past stops in the game of life. I've gotten used to playing the good spouse and staying out of the way while she does her thing, like tonight.

Danielle: I just get this feeling that he likes doing the big-time ones in order to satisfy his ego and to scope out possible options for afterwards.

Matt: Which is why we've demanded he take you or one of his students, to keep him out of that trouble. He's also had one of his colleagues from TLU with him for the last two.

Danielle: Oh? He hadn't mentioned anything about that.

Matt: Yeah. One of the school's coaches attended events coinciding with the two weddings in the
Danielle: The Chicago one was during the USC Convention and the North Carolina one was the same weekend as College Cup. Hmmmm.

Danielle looked around the room and her eyes landed on Dani, who was with Sarah, Wil, and Michelle. Seeing the possibility for a confrontation, Marc shot a quick look at the two coaches, which Dani responded to by grasping Sarah’s hand. Erin, noticing the unspoken tension between the Schmidts and her sister-from-another-mister, went over to the four Nicolet grads with Steph and Cali. With that potential flare-up under control, Marc checked in with Julie, Christen, and Alyssa at their station in the chili line.

Marc (to Christen): How does it seem to be going?

Christen: People seem to be willing to try it since we’re offering a few possibilities for them to temper the heat.

Marc: Not a chili fan and I have a very sensitive palate, but I’ll give it a shot.

Marc took a spoonful of the chili and ate it. "Whoa! Y’all weren’t kidding when you said it would be hot." He got an idea and talked to Russell about testing the samples to find the hottest chili there. Russell made the rounds and was able to get the relative Scoville Heating Units of each offering. As more people checked out the dessert tables, the competitors began shutting down their stations.

Rachel and Jessica tallied the votes from the ballots submitted for Best Chili while the five judges compared notes and came to a consensus on Most Original Chili. Russell then gave Bishop Emerson the scoring of the chilis on the Scoville scale.

Paul: We have the results from the Cook-Off. First, I would like to thank each of the churches and organizations for participating and sharing their culinary wizardry with us. The award for Best Chili goes to Mount Carmel Lutheran Church, former congregation of Pastor Belding.

Trish Liebold came forward to accept the traveling trophy from Bishop Emerson and said a few words before returning to her congregation's table.

Paul: The Most Original Chili award goes to Village Church.

Gwen Westphal accepted the award for her congregation, then gave a short description of what was in their submission before sitting back down.

Paul: Unknown to the competitors, a third award was created for Hottest Chili. This one is purely objective, determined by the number of Scoville Heating Units in each entry. There was really no contest for this one. With a Mexican Chocolate Chili that registered 658,000 on the Scoville Scale, the winner for Hottest Chili is Trinity Lutheran University.

Steph was nominated by the rest of the students to go up and accept the award. After shaking hands with Bishop Emerson, she took the mic and said a few words.

Steph: A handful of us discussed over dinner on Wednesday night what we wanted to do for an entry tonight, with Erin's mom's Mexican Chili being the starting point. Our lacrosse teammate and floor mate in Augsburg, Christen Prince, asked if we wanted to win or to burn the palates of those in attendance. What you got tonight was their attempt to do both. Let me bring up our chefs. First, the leader of the pack, Erin Matheson. Next, the mastermind of the kitchen, Christen Prince. Her partner in crime, Julie Jacobsen. Lastly, the tag team of Sofia Hernandez and Vanessa DiGregorio.
The five of them came up and joined Steph. Erin took the mic from her.

Erin: This victory wouldn't be complete without recognizing our taste-testers, Lindsey Hoffman and Emily Sommer.

The roommates and girlfriends waved from their spot in the room, with Lindsey wearing sunglasses and Emily munching on crushed ice while her tongue was covered in gauze. Jessica Sherman wrapped up the event by stating that tonight's cook-off raised $6720 for the ministries at UWM, Marquette, and Trinity.
Making Assumptions

Sunday morning started off with Danielle leaving for work under the cover of darkness. Around 7:00, Marc rose from his slumber and stumbled into the kitchen for a bottle of Pepsi to use for taking his medication and supplements. After spending some time getting a better grasp on the emails he had been pushing off all week, he drew up a standard contract for Dani’s hiring at the Urban Coaching Project. While he was in the kitchen trying to make something edible for his new employee’s arrival, the doorbell rang. Marc answered it and showed his guest to the dining room.

Dani: I brought donuts since I know you’re not much of a cook. What are you making?

Marc: Nuked up some sausage and microwave pancakes. There’s also fruit and cereal if you wish.

Dani helped herself to an apple and some pancakes, along with a couple of the donuts she got from Pick N Save. Marc made up his plate of pancakes and sausage, plus a banana and a bowl of Frosted Flakes. As they were eating, Marc went over the content from this past week’s inquiries.

Marc: I read through the stack of emails I had been saving to see what was being asked. A large portion of them aren’t licensing requests, but wanting a bit of a primer on how to engage their faculties or other interested parties in the district about coaching education and its benefits. Trying to juggle the back-and-forth of that with my day job would create unnecessary delays, since they’d mail during regular business hours and I’d be responding after I got home, thus losing most of a day in terms of answering their questions or moving things towards an agreement. That’s why I need you to act as a go-between, to shorten that time gap.

Dani: Sounds pretty simple. You said I’d also be able to develop agreements with inquirers, correct?

Marc: Within reason. You’ll have a checklist of things that are or can be included in a licensing contract between UCP and the entity desiring use of the module, with a price list to be able to give them an estimate or quote. All agreements would need to be signed by me and I would want a copy of the preliminary document sent to me at the time you send it to the potential client.

Dani: Is it all reactive, or can I engage districts on behalf of UCP as well?

Marc: You can do that. If you do, and something comes of it, you’d get the equivalent of a finder’s fee based on the size of the eventual deal. I have all of it laid-out for you in the contract.

Marc handed Dani a copy of the contract and asked her to read it over.

Dani: Why is there an addendum to the standard listing of responsibilities and wages?

Marc: The second page is a sample of what I’d be seeking in a day-to-day coordinator for a possible Coaching Education Institute, along with a list of benefits that could be offered through Trinity’s HR department should the school agree to house it.

Dani: Typical Marc, always looking two or three steps ahead of where things stand currently. Aren’t you making assumptions about how well I’ll do in this job and/or how many of the inquiring entities will become licensees?

Marc: You call it assumptions, I call it projections.

Dani read through everything one more time, then signed the document and handed it to Marc. He put his signature on both copies of it, then handed the second one to her. With that out of the way,
and around an hour before Erin and Steph were expected to arrive, the two of them cleared the table, put the dishes in the sink, then went into the living room for some cuddle time.

Marc: I didn't get to come over and talk to you and the others last night, so I wasn't able to thank you personally for coming out and supporting our students.

Dani: You're welcome. Sarah suggested it as a way for her to see some of her players in a non-lacrosse environment, plus it gave me an excuse to see you and get Michelle and Wil out of their houses.

Marc: I also want to thank you for saving my bacon a bit. Danielle was talking with Rachel and Jessica's husbands while the three of us were circulating the room. Jessica's husband is Bishop Emerson's assistant for administration and I'm guessing something came up about Philly or the weddings I had done recently. He must have told her something, which is why I saw her stare the hell out of you and look like she wanted to confront you. I think your little gesture with Sarah, along with Erin, Steph, and Cali going over shortly thereafter kept her appeased, for the time being. I know I'll probably have to explain why I didn't tell her you were on those trips with me, but my hope is that she believes you and Sarah are a thing.

Dani: The past couple of months have taught me in a way how to be "the good wife" while also not being milquetoast about it.

Marc dwelt on that comment and saw a huge amount of truth in it, that she was secure enough in herself and what she and he had determined as the framework for their relationship that she didn't need to seek out affirmation from him in settings where the consequences could be damaging. It's what she had done at the two weddings they attended together, what she did at the TLU holiday party, and what she seems committed to doing when those situations arise in the future. The two curled up tighter on the couch, not noticing that the girls had arrived.

Erin: Should I get you a blanket or will you be returning to your upright positions shortly?

Marc: Lost track of time, I guess. Aren't you early, actually?

Steph: Yeah, a little bit. Thought we'd get my academic stuff out of the way before Danielle returned from work.

Marc: We can do that while her and Erin are cooking.

Erin ducked into the kitchen to put the food for dinner into the refrigerator, then came back with two bottles of water, handing one to Steph as she snuggled up to the goalkeeper.

Dani: You two make me jealous.

Steph: How so?

Dani: You're pretty much free to let the world know about you. You don't have the restrictions that come as you get older and begin worrying about how your actions affect the other person or will affect you in the future.

Erin: We don't have THAT much freedom around campus, certainly. The environment in the squad sort of makes the "out" couples have to be cautious about letting it be known to the coaching staff, not to mention having particular teammates that are thorns in the sides of others when it comes to matters of the heart.

Marc: Like Shelley and the two of you?
Erin: Exactly. Dani, can I ask you a kind of personal question?

Dani: Let's see. You know I'm fucking your godfather. You even helped me turn him a bit inside-out once. You also act like you're something between a little sister and a stepdaughter around me. I suppose you've earned the right to ask me whatever you want.

Erin giggled slightly at Dani's justification before moving forward. "What is the deal between you and our coach? I know you went to Nicolet together and your moms are friends, but are you two, well, together?"

Dani mulled over how she wanted to respond. Tell her the whole truth? Let her believe what she believes because it protects Marc? Split hairs about what is and isn't happening? Marc squeezed her shoulder and took her hand, as if to say, "Answer how you want and I'll back you up."

Dani: In one sense, we are together, but not how you might think. Sarah and I decided that, because we're both sort of playing second-string with the people we want, we would team up and see what happened.

Steph: I see. So your "being with Sarah" is sort of a cover to keep outsiders from knowing certain truths about the two of you, am I right?

Dani: Yes and no. We're not doing what we're doing to hide the fact that we're both bi. It's more to protect those around us from being harmed if the full truth were known.

Erin: I think I get it. You're with her in public, especially around school, so people don't associate you with Marc and wonder if you and him are a thing. What's her deal, then?

Dani: You might want to ask her that yourself, as I'm not sure how comfortable she is or will be divulging that. I can help you out in that regard, but it really should be her telling you and not me.

As the afternoon started to slip away, Dani left for home while Marc, Erin, and Steph watched the Trinity Lutheran/Lake Forest hockey game (made possible by Erin hooking up her laptop to Marc's TV and streaming Lake Forest's coverage from the Internet). Just shy of 3:00, Danielle returned from work and greeted the three of them. After changing into more comfortable clothes, she came back out to the living room and watched the remainder of the second period. When the game went to intermission (Lake Forest was ahead 5-1), Danielle paused the telecast.

Danielle (to Marc): I learned some VERY interesting news last night while talking with Jessica and Rachel's husbands. Apparently, your entourage for the North Carolina and Chicago weddings was bigger than I had been led to believe. When I turn down the opportunity to go with you to these events, that does NOT mean you can go find someone else to take. Matt explained Paul's rationale for having you take Erin, Steph, Alyssa, or one of the other peers on this trips, but that doesn't include you taking a female member of your school's athletic department to "play me" for the weekend. HOW DARE YOU do that to me, to her, to your students, to have them PROP UP your narcissistic need to be in the spotlight, to have all eyes on you. Mind you, Deuce is sort of cute if you're into that kind of person who reminds you of your niece or daughter, but that does not excuse your gaming the system to have her on your arm when you're around all the soccer bigwigs. OHHHHHHHHHHHHHH! THAT'S why you're getting hauled up before the Board of Trustees on Friday. THAT'S the financial mismanagement that's being claimed, you using the ministry's account to pay for her to go with you when there is no legitimate ministry purpose for it. Well, are you going to respond, or are you going to just SIT THERE like you ALWAYS DO and let me rant before laying into me?!?!

Marc kept his mouth shut before standing up, getting right into Danielle's face, and attempted to stare
her down with his six-inch height advantage. "You're not worth the jail time I'd get." With that, he left and went for a walk. A couple of minutes later, Steph left to find him, leaving Erin and Danielle.

Erin: WHY did you do that?! WHY have you been lashing out at him every time Steph and I am with the two of you somewhere?!

Danielle: Because I need the two of you to know that he isn't as perfect as you believe him to be. The only person Marc Schmidt has ever cared about over the past 20-some years has been Marc Schmidt.

Erin: You're assuming way too much about what has happened the last three months or so. Why don't you ASK him where the money came from for Dani to go on those two trips? Now, the one to Carolina is a little bit unusual, but the USC Convention is totally legitimate. He's there to perform a wedding and network with other ELCA schools' coaches, while it is her coaches' association's annual conference. The fact they both were going doesn't mean they were going "together". As for Carolina, the College Cups for D-I and D-III both happened to be in the same general vicinity, and the brides set up their wedding to coincide with the event. Steph and I were there with him. We saw most everything that happened. She went to Greensboro for the Division III games on Friday and did some networking, along with a bit of it Thursday in Cary during the D-I's Media Day. Did they spend time together? Yes, but some of that was to give Steph and I a chance to be couple-y and for her not to be by her lonesome on the trip. By the way, you saw she has a girlfriend, right? Our assistant coach and her went to Nicolet together and reunited when Sarah took the job at Trinity.

Danielle: Didn't know she was with someone or that she went that way. All I saw was her, Michelle, and two others. I presumed the other two were a couple, and I KNOW Dani and Michelle are friends from their Nicolet, Stritch, and MUSC days.

Erin: Michelle played for Marc as well?

Danielle: Yes. Their collective recruitment was a bit odd. He got Michelle to sign on just after the end of the 2013 college season, while Danielle came into the fold at the same time her friend Kristy re-signed in winter of 2014. He didn't think he'd get her after sticking his foot in his mouth the first time they met, but I guess the desire to play with Kristy was enough to get her to sign up. You know about what happened right before the start of pre-season, right?

Erin: You mean their friend dying in a car accident on the way back from college? Dani told me that after I confronted her about my suspicions concerning her and Marc back in October.

Danielle breathed a sign a relief that Erin had been looking out for Marc around campus and defending her place in his life among those at Trinity. Marc and Steph returned to the house and, following apologies from both him and Danielle, all was reasonably forgiven. Erin and Danielle went into the kitchen to work on dinner (pork chops and stuffing), which allowed Marc and Steph to go to his office and work on her long-term academic plan.

Marc: I've been looking through the seminary sites and haven't seemed to come up with anything that might let you get the oversized MA or a single MA that will satisfy both the DM designation and the career path you're seeking.

Steph: What are the best options?

Marc: Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University looks to have the potential for you to get it, but you might need to work out an individualized plan. Your other best bet would be to seek out a place to get your professional degree and then take the requisite seminary education via distance learning, as a number of the seminaries have that as an option. I'll keep digging and see if something
lands into my lap that could work. We have eight seminary campuses, so there should be a way to have you do all the schooling in one place and combined it for what you want to do professionally.

Steph: Thanks, Marc. I'll ask my dad if he can do some research on my behalf as well.

The pair went back to the living room and caught the last period of the hockey game on-demand (The Foresters won, 6-3, with Alyssa not playing in the third period). Dinner was served, followed by a game of Phase 10 while waiting for the students’ laundry to finish in the basement. Erin and Steph left about 9, allowing Marc and Danielle to wind down a bit before heading to bed.
Campus Comes Alive

Another week of fun and frivolity commenced at Trinity. Last night, a number of the residence halls held meetings to make plans for Spring semester and hear from their hall directors and residence assistants on topics relevant to the campus community.

When Marc got into his office in Luther Hall, he had waiting for him an email from Heather Mitchell, the director of Wittenberg Hall.

Deacon Schmidt,

At our hall meeting last night, the students in attendance discussed what we should do for our all-campus offering this year. Seeing nothing on Valentine's Day weekend, the thought of a dance came up. As our students want to make it something which not just students but faculty and staff would feel comfortable, they decided on a sock hop. I am writing to ask if you would be available to be the MC/DJ for the event. It will be on Saturday, February 16th, 8pm-12am in the main lounge of Wittenberg Hall. Please respond at your earliest convenience.

Heather Mitchell
Wittenberg Residence Hall Director

Marc wrote Heather back and said that he was free on the 16th and would be happy to do it. She then put out an all-campus blast announcing the event, making special note to state that all members of the campus community were welcome and promoting ”DJ Marcy-Marc” as the table spinner for the evening.

Later in the day, the Gay Athletes Association, in conjunction with Athlete Ally and the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, announced through University Communications their plans for National Girls and Women in Sport Day on Saturday, February 9th. A morning of educational sessions and athletic activities are scheduled, leading into the day's main event, the TLU Acrobatics and Tumbling team facing UW-Whitewater in a dual meet. Jamie Krueger, Associate Athletic Director and women's volleyball coach, was quoted in the release as being pleased that their campus's newest sport would finally be in the spotlight on NGWS Day (ice hockey and basketball will both be on the road that weekend) and inviting the student body to check out the work of these athletes.

**********

Tuesday brought more announcements, starting with Bishop Emerson giving hosting rights for the 2019 Greater Milwaukee Synod Assembly to Trinity Lutheran University, with Deacon Schmidt the point person for the May 18th-20th event. Marc sent out a release thanking Paul for bringing Synod Assembly to TLU and that he planned to work with Matt Sherman at the synod office and the Trinity Peer Ministry Alliance to provide a weekend of energetic worship, inspirational speakers, and dynamic progress in moving the Greater Milwaukee Synod closer to the ideal church community.

Not to be outdone by Wittenberg's upcoming Sock Hop, Regents Hall's residential community sent out an all-campus blast stating that they would be holding Open Mic Night on Friday, March 1st and welcoming any and all acts to compete for the Golden Microphone and a cash prize of $3.76 (the numeric value of Trinity Lutheran University).

Lauren told the lacrosse team after practice that they would be hosting some incoming players tomorrow on-campus. Steph and Erin were given the incoming goalkeeper, Emma Preston, with
Sarah was at Trinity early on Wednesday to oversee the arrival of the five student-athletes who had committed to the school as part of the Class of 2023. Once all had arrived, she handed them over to their campus hosts and sent them on their way. Steph and Erin took Emma with them to Siebert Dining Hall for breakfast and conversation.

Erin (to Emma): Where are you playing currently?

Emma: University School in River Hills.

Erin: The one that looks like a small college on the east coast?

Emma: Yes. Never heard it referred to that way before.

Steph: What are you planning to major in?

Emma: I haven't decided yet. My girlfriend is looking to do Pre-Law. What are your majors?

Steph: I'm a double major in Physical Education and Religion.

Erin: Mine is Management.

Emma: Double major?! Isn't that hard to accomplish in four years?

Steph: It can be if you end up taking courses that don't help you in satisfying either core requirements or departmental ones.

Emma: Steph, how did you get that girth on your upper body? As you can see, I'm not nearly that built.

Steph: Lots and lots of weight training. The size and mass are a trade-off because I don't have a lot of lateral speed or the quickest reflexes, therefore my best way to play goalkeeper is to be big in net and block shots. My teammate Jane, however, is much like you in stature so she needs to be able to move side-to-side in order to close off as much of the net as possible.

Erin: I play defender, mostly left. Getting used to a southpaw in net has been an interesting experience, because I'm so used to being the blind side defender for the goalkeeper that I've made a couple of mistakes blocking her field of vision or standing right in front of her against an attacker.

Emma: I've had that problem with Savannah. She's a right back on the field hockey and lacrosse teams at USM and has been known to screen me now and again. She's planning to play field hockey at Trinity.

Steph: I take it Savannah is the girlfriend you mentioned earlier.

Emma: Yes. We've been together since sophomore year, but have gone to school together at USM since 2nd grade, when her moms moved to Bayside from Hales Corners.

Erin: Are you from River Hills?

Erin: So over by Fox 6, then?

Emma: Give or take. You're listed on the roster as being from Michigan, so how do you know what's where around here?

Erin: My godparents live in Milwaukee. My godmother's cousin works at Fox 6 as an engineer for the evening news broadcasts.

Emma: Cool.

Steph: I better get moving if I'm going to make my 9am class. See the two of you at Chapel?

Erin: Yep. You're assisting today, right?

Steph: Yep. First time. Lucky you got your first time out of the way last week. Love you, Er Bear.

Erin: Love you more, Stephabae.

Emma chuckled at the cute nicknames the two had for one another.

Emma (to Erin): So you and Steph are together?

Erin: Yes, but it's a little complicated. You'll see by the end of the day how so.

Erin and Emma left Siebert for a casual tour of campus before Erin's 10am class in Loeber.

**********

Steph and Marc talked for a couple of minutes before worship began, with her letting him know about the special guests on campus.

Steph: The lacrosse team is hosting a number of future Thunder players today. Erin and I were paired up with an incoming goalkeeper, who is together with a future player on the field hockey team. I'm sure she is going to wonder how accepting the team and the campus in general is to same-sex relationships. Anything in today's sermon that might be relevant to that question?

Marc: I think so. Today, I am going to speak about fighting for love in situations where those around you aren't willing to acknowledge it. Of course, I am going to use some video to show instances of shunning and how couples, friends, even families go on the offensive to try and change minds and hearts. I'm also planning to make reference to real-life examples of people who have had to fight for acceptance, and how sometimes they get it and sometimes they don't.

Steph: Ready, boss?

Marc: I was BORN ready! Lead out, squire!

Steph and Marc exited the sacristy and took their positions at the front of the chapel. Marc began service with announcements, including a greeting for the five members of the women's lacrosse team's recruiting class of 2019. Emma asked Erin how Deacon Schmidt knew that she and the others were on campus.

Erin: Steph told him, I'm sure. It pays to have friends, or relatives in this case, in high places.

Marc and Steph moved their way through the liturgy, leading the congregation in worship.
Following the reading of the Gospel, Marc began his homily.

Marc: Today's topic is one which should resonate with most of you. Who here has been slagged by someone for who or how you love? I bet that number would be very high. All of us at one time or another have run into critics, be they parents, friends, children in some cases, or the community at large. These people who choose not to acknowledge the important relationships in your life do both you and themselves a disservice, because doing so creates a wedge that can do nothing but separate you emotionally from each other. I'd like to show a couple of examples of people standing up for themselves and their loved ones in the face of criticism.

Marc started with a clip from "Fiddler on the Roof" where Motel and Tzeitel tell her father that they wish to marry despite his having agreed to marry her to the local butcher. At first, Tevye insults Motel over his lack of wealth and therefore inability to provide for his daughter. The tailor eventually stands up to Tevye and the couple claimed to have gotten betrothed a year prior. He re-thinks his position when he sees how happy Motel makes Tzietel and eventually gives the couple his permission to marry.

The second video up was a scene from "Necessary Roughness" where Dean Philip Elias walks by Paul Blake (the 40-something quarterback) and Dr. Suzanne Carter (Paul's journalism professor) in an intimate embrace. Phil, wanting Suzanne for himself, chastises them for their relationship which, in the final scene, comes to reality amongst the football team.

Marc: I wish I had something in my library that depicted the dilemma same-sex couples have with both getting acknowledgement and getting backlash for their relationships. As everyone is aware, all rules banning or publicly criticizing LGBT individuals and their relationships were repealed by way of the Code of Student Conduct and the Academic Code of Conduct passed in November. We at Trinity stand with everyone to live and love how they choose, and those who seek to get in the way of that will be handled appropriately by the relevant judicial body. As I have said in past homilies, my goddaughter is gay and is committed to a wonderful woman who has become like another daughter to me. I will stand up and defend her right to love her partner no matter what anyone says, as I will her teammates and all others at Trinity. I want to close with a story about a friend of mine, someone who lost his wife at a very young age, leaving him to care for two small children on his own. He tried to find them another mother not long after her death, but was brought to the conclusion by his son that they were being hurt by his absence. He shelved his dating life until both his son and daughter had entered high school, then found a fellow educator who fit into this next chapter of his life. I found out last week that the two of them are expecting, with the baby due around Independence Day. Most everyone is happy for the pair, but his daughter has been less-than-thrilled with her stepmother, feeling as though she is pushing her out of his life and diminishing the memory of her mother. To her I quote a line from a previous sermon: When you see a couple that looks happy but the pairing rankles you, go with that first feeling and ignore the second. Amen.

The service continued with Communion. Erin and Emma approached the altar to accept the bread from Marc and the wine from Steph. Emma commented to her that she was a little surprised they use real bread as opposed to wafers or another substitute. Erin informed her that Marc makes his own bread for worship and asks students to join him and his assistant in the sacristy following worship to consume the remainder of the elements (what he refers to as Happy Hour). She also shared his thinking on the subject, stolen from several others. "It takes more faith to believe that the wafer is bread than it does to believe the bread is the Body of Christ." At the conclusion of service, Erin and Emma went up front and gave their compliments to Marc and Steph.

Emma (to Marc): That was a very fun service. Erin said that Steph must have told you about the recruits being on-campus today.
Marc: Thank you, and yes she did. She also said that she and Erin were hosting you for the day. Welcome to Trinity. I wish you much success when you begin here in the fall, except when it comes to beating out this gem between the pipes. Family loyalty and all.

Steph: Yeah. Sorry, Emma.

Emma: How are you two related?

Marc: I think the young lady you're with can best explain that.

Erin: Marc is my godfather.

Emma: So that means the story he gave about his goddaughter was about you, and the partner being Steph.

Erin: Guilty. Problem with having a relative in the business is that you always end up being used as sermon material.

Marc: Steph and I need to clean up, then we'll join you in Siebert.

Erin: See you in a few, papi.

Erin and Emma left Bonhoeffer Chapel and walked to the dining hall to join the rest of the Lunch Bunch crowd.
The incoming players and their hosts were in the main women’s locker room in Buuck Field House, with the current Thunder members preparing for practice ahead of the rest of the team. Sarah came by just after 2:15 and sat in on an impromptu Q-and-A session.

Emma: From what I heard in Deacon Schmidt’s sermon, Trinity is a place where being LGBT is accepted and even celebrated. Is that right?

Kristie: Yes, it is. Mind you, there are still haters around and those who don’t approve of same-sex or multi-partner relationships, but they have little in the way of teeth anymore to shove students back into hiding. You can choose to be out if you wish, or you can be more reserved about it. My sister Sam and I went before Student Government in the fall to request the founding of an LGBT Resource Center, which opened officially at the start of this semester.

Sam Keller: What’s the team environment on the subject? Open, not open? Any teammate relationships, either out or undercover?

Sam Mueller, as the only person in the locker room who was at Concordia twelve months ago, and the only non-freshman player, thought about how to answer Sam’s inquiry.

Sam Mueller: It is definitely better than last year when Trinity was Concordia. My girlfriend and I had to be VERY quiet about our relationship, because the penalties for even BEING a lesbian were severe. I think the acceptance within the team of players being gay and even dating one another is quite good. How the coaches feel about it, I don’t know really.

Sarah Hawthorne: I guess I should get this out of the way so you know on which side I stand. I’m bisexual, with both a girlfriend and a best male friend with whom I’m intimate. My girlfriend and I don’t share him, because she has a wonderful man in her life.

Erin took in this information and connected all the dots that Dani had drawn when they talked on Sunday regarding her relationship with Sarah and what her coach’s deal was aside from being with Dani.

Sarah H.: I definitely will back the players to be who they are and with whom they want. I know there are a couple of relationships already in the team. If there are others, I’m not aware of them yet.

Steph: Emma, you already know Erin and I are a couple. We have a few on the team, actually. Most of them are pretty open about it away from the field, but in the locker room things are fairly tight-lipped, mainly because we hadn’t yet found out how the coaches were about the possibility.

Sarah H.: You’ve heard my position. Lauren, however, is a bit more guarded. Her biggest concern with the team is drama on the field and in the locker room, which she thinks teammate relationships will create. She can’t stop them because of the school’s rules, but she told me once that she’d prefer her players find suitable men on other teams at Trinity and thus not date within the team, but she also said at that time she doesn’t much care what players do away from the field.

Sarah Kilgore: I’m what you’d call a lapsed Lutheran. Went through Confirmation, then did like most kids and bailed out on being active. What is the religious atmosphere at Trinity and how much are we expected to conform to it?

Erin: Well, you can be as active or as non-active as you wish. The only school-endorsed parts of life at Trinity are the six credits of religion all students take as part of the core curriculum and there being
no other activities or classes on campus between 12 and 1pm on Wednesdays, when worship is held in the chapel. If you're looking for more, there is a new student organization that I, Steph, and one of the ice hockey players head up, the Peer Ministry Alliance. We have another teammate who is part of our first set of students, with a handful of others on the team taking part last weekend in a training event taught by Deacon Schmidt and the ELCA campus pastors from Marquette and UWM. I do have to say that Steph and I are sort of special cases when it comes to being active, as the chaplain is my godfather and Steph is pre-candidacy.

Danielle Coleman: What's dating like around here for athletes?

Kristie: The athletic bubble does exist and a fair number of athletes stick within it. That doesn't mean everyone does. My roommate intentionally went looking for a non-athlete and found one oddly enough at the athletic center. They seem happy together, although I still question her judgment of dating someone whose future career will be male nurse, like Ben Stiller's character in the Meet The Parents trilogy. I'm dating a women's ice hockey player. If you want to stay in the bubble, you can, but you also can find decent dating material in the general student population.

Hayley Ramsey: I'm undecided about living on-campus, being that I live reasonably close. If I were to do so, what would be some of the advantages to it?

Kelley: I'm from Fox Point, but live on-campus because I have two younger brothers that would make balancing classes, lacrosse, and home life a major hassle. One big advantage of living here is the way you quickly develop a small circle of friends and acquaintances that wouldn't happen if you commuted. As for life on-campus, the residence hall directors are trying to create programming to keep students around on the weekends. Our hall hosted Karaoke Night in November, another hall is doing a Sock Hop on Valentine Day's weekend, and there is an Open Mic night coming up in a few weeks. Going to other teams' games is another way to get involved in campus life, as well as student organizations, all of which are easier to do when you live on-campus.

As others strolled into the locker room, those already there introduced the newcomers to them. Shelley gave Erin a bit of a glare when she and Steph went to her locker with Emma. Emma noticed it and asked the two of them about it.

Erin: Remember when I said things were a little complicated concerning Steph and I. You just met the complication.

Emma: Ex?

Erin: No. She'd like to get Steph for herself and is quite aggressive about it.

Steph: She also allowed one of our teammates to get molested at a party over Fall break.

Emma: I see.....

Steph McNamara greeted Danielle, knowing her a little from games between their two schools (New Trier and Fremd) during the two years they overlapped in the prep ranks. Megan Racicot caught up with her Madison-based teammates and met Sarah. Once Jess got to the locker room and finished changing, the team headed out to Niemoller Field to start practice.

**********

The women's lacrosse team was split into three eight-player training groups for today's practice. Each group had one goalkeeper and were meant to replicate the current pecking order within the roster:

Group One: Nicole, Julie, Erin, Megan, Jess, Morgan B., Steph M., Lindsey
As the groups went through the various drills and game simulations, certain players stood out (Erin, Sofia, and Becca were the best of the field players in their groups) while others didn't exactly shine (Steph M., Shelley, and Andi were deemed the worst of their cohorts). In her frustration, Lauren slung out a bit of invective at some of her players.

"Zembruski, if I wanted to see someone shake their ass in front of me, I'd go to Heartbreakers."

"Last time I checked, Sommer, contact between two players below the waist ISN'T part of the game."

"Johnson, CALL FOR THE BALL! If you can't speak up in practice, how the hell will you do it in a game?!?!!"

Sarah cringed at hearing how her head coach was belittling her players, but knew she couldn't step in and stop it. Her best defense here was to do damage control with them after practice. A couple of the recruits also were uncomfortable with Lauren's tone and wondered what they might be getting into next spring. Luckily, Lauren ended training before getting to the point where endurance work would be used as a means of discipline.

**********

Sarah asked Shelley, Savannah, and Emily to stop by the lacrosse office when they were finished changing.

Shelley: What's up, coach?

Sarah: Ladies, I wanted to apologize for Lauren's ranting at you during training. It was unprofessional, uncalled for, and a bad example of how to handle disappointment or frustration. She may have been right to call you out, Shelley and Emily, for what she was seeing, but not in the way she did. As for you, Savannah, there is no defense for her actions toward you.

Savannah: I know I'm not that vocal around others. I wish I could speak up more. The only people around here that I communicate with beyond hi are my roommate Morgan and my sort-of person Maggie.

Emily: I was probably in the wrong trying to throw Lindsey off through the overly-physical defending. It felt, though, like Lauren was calling me out for being closer to my roommate than as just a teammate.

Shelley didn't say anything in response to Sarah's apology, believing that her attempt to get Steph's attention wasn't out of line, especially since it seemed like everyone on the team was against her when it came to dethroning Erin as the queen of the goalkeeper's heart.

The players left the athletic center, with Shelley leaving campus for home and Savannah and Emily joining up with a good chunk of the team in Siebert for dinner.
Savannah, Maggie, and Morgan Andringa met up for lunch in Luther's Landing following their 11am classes. While chowing down, the three talked about what had happened during training and their opinions on it.

Morgan: I can't believe Lauren went after you yesterday.

Savannah: Yeah. Sarah talked to me afterwards and said that it was uncalled for. I know I'm not the most talkative person on the field. I told her that the only two I really talk to outside of hello are the two of you.

Maggie: We've come to understand that about you, Savs. I don't know what Lauren is hoping you'll do, change into an extrovert like Kristie? Despite being quiet, you get into good positions, our midfield is able to pick you out and play you into the scheme when we get near the goal, and you hold your own when battling against Julie and Erin.

Morgan: You heard what she said about Shelley, right?

Maggie: About her distracting Steph in net with her movements?

Morgan: That's a polite way to say it. The place she referred to is a gentlemen's club on Milwaukee's southwest side. I had to look it up so I'd have context for her comment.

Morgan got distracted by a conversation happening on the other side of a partition. Not meaning to tune out her dining mates, her attention went to what they were saying.

Sara Manning: Lauren, we haven't talked much since coming up here with Gavin. How are things going with your team? Hopefully better than what I faced this past season.

Lauren Heberlein: It's fine. We're very young, with only 6 out of 24 players having any college playing experience. I'm hoping my incoming class of seven next year will help us both on the field and with the alumni. Right now, the two best players on my team for your shadow group both swing the other way, and what we have behind them can be best classified as "cute if you're into that type". Of the seven I have committed, I'd say four of those could find their way into the alumni relations pool.

Maggie and Savannah waved at Morgan as they left to go to class, while the upstart journalist settled in for more eavesdropping on the two coaches.

Sara: How are you getting seven to come in when you have 18 first-year players this year?

Lauren: I'm planning to redshirt three players next year that are in five-year programs, so I can move them into the Class of 2023 if I don't end up cycling them out.

Sara: We only have three seniors, so I'm sort of stuck with adding more talent since Gavin won't let me go above 20. How do you cycle out players?

Lauren: Over-recruit, so you end up with a larger pre-season roster. Hopefully, players will see the writing on the wall and get out of the way, but if they don't, you make cuts.

Sara: I'll have to keep that in mind. I have three coming in to replace the seniors, but I might want to look around for some more. I'm glad you're looking to help us out, because I already have 5 or 6
involved and that's pretty risky if our ambassadors get wrangled by the authorities.

Morgan jotted down some notes about Lauren's plans for next year's roster along with this alumni relations thing she and Sara were discussing.

Lauren: I really need to get those three out. Two of them are too lost in themselves to be good teammates in my opinion, one due to mental problems and the other because she's too scared to speak up on the field. The third, although I think she can be a decent player given time, would do better concentrating on her degree and not clogging up our potential for a prettier team with her averageness.

Sara: Tomorrow will be a great day if we're able to get rid of Public Enemy Number One.

Lauren: You talking about the chaplain?

Sara: Oh, yes. Some of my players dug up a whole bunch of negative information on him, including his persuading the synod to pay for my assistant to go with him and a couple of your players to North Carolina for a wedding and College Cup.

Lauren: Can't say I've had a lot of contact with him, but he does seem to be someone with his fingers in a lot of places around campus. I know he has a chunk of my team in his good graces because of things he's done for them and because of his relationship with Erin Matheson.

Sara: I have a lot of disdain for him. Him punishing one of my players beyond what is considered normal. The way he's trying to pimp his protege/side chick through his connections in women's soccer. The threats he's made about investigating my program.

Lauren: My biggest complaint with him is how he and the Bishop have hamstrung my ability to manage my program with the enforcement of the Social Statements and the new Code of Student Conduct. I'm unable to tell my players, "no teammate relationships", without running afoul of those. I can't force them to closet themselves either, because it would be MY ass in a sling. I'm still the same person Gavin hired three years ago at Carthage. It's everything else that has changed.

Sara: Well, hopefully the evidence my girls got and will give voice to tomorrow will be enough to send him on his merry way and we'll get an unobtrusive replacement, someone who will stay out of the university's business. You're not actually anti-gay, right?

Lauren: I'm not in favor of teammates hooking up with each other, because it takes away from the male athletes valuable mating opportunities. It also leads to unnecessary drama in the locker room and creates cliques in the team.

Sara: I should check in with Gavin about this weekend's client list and determine who we'll plan to use to meet the demand.

Lauren: Stay in touch and I'll do my best to sway my players to look into your group if they're interested in making a few bucks and spreading their love to those around them.

**********

Training for the women's lacrosse team was crap to say the least. Most of the players were on edge after yesterday's stabbing comments aimed at some of their teammates. While in the locker room after practice, Morgan went around and informed some of the players about an impromptu team meeting in her and Savannah's room later that evening.

Erin, Steph, Lauren, and Kelley went to Siebert for dinner, meeting up with Cali and her roommate,
Denise Oliver, a member of the school's softball team.

Erin: That woman is getting to be a bit much. Yesterday, rips into some of us in front of the recruits. Today, makes us all look bad by cluelessly putting players into positions they've not played. What's tomorrow, having Sam and Morgan play goal?

Steph: I'm worried enough about staying ahead of Jane in the pecking order. Don't need to see one of our field players out-do me.

Denise: Our coach has been hard on us so far this spring, but it's because the team was so underwhelming last year, losing games to teams that we shouldn't have, and the errors in the field that would lead to runs and turn a close game into a mini-rout.

Lauren: See, there is a logic to that, working on your weaknesses in practice so you don't make those mistakes in games. I'm also guessing he or she isn't being verbally abusive while doing so.

Denise: You're right about that. It's a straight-forward "this is what you're doing, this is how to stop doing that" as opposed to denigrating us about our ability.

Kelley: I'm sure Morgan got to all of you about tonight's meeting.

Erin: Yeah. Sounded like some stuff from yesterday and some stuff from today has built up and the players need to know about it and discuss how to deal with it, away from Coach Heberlein.

Cali: Any of you going to tomorrow's Board of Trustees meeting?

Steph: Erin and I will be there. Alyssa is going. You going, Cali?

Cali: Dani would like me to, to support her as she's planning to speak in Deacon Schmidt's defense. Either of you thinking about speaking?

Erin: I don't know if I'd be allowed given my relationship with him. Same goes for Steph, possibly.

Lauren: If I were to go, could I make a statement?

Steph: Don't see why not. Let's bring that up in the team meeting.

Cali: Fill me in afterwards?

Erin: I'll be sure to drop you a line.

**********

Morgan A.: Between yesterday and today's trainings, I'm sure all of us are a little beaten-down, and not just physically. The reason I called this meeting is because I felt we needed to air out our frustration, plus I wanted to interject some stuff I overheard while Coach Heberlein and Coach Manning from the women's soccer program were having lunch today.

Lindsey: It looks like the Boss has already determined her starting lineup for the opener, and that's not even for five weeks. I'm grateful she's considering me as one of her top attackers, but it's not really fair to the rest of the team, especially the back line. I understand her wanting the six non-freshmen in the first XII, but the other six spots should be fair game for the other 16 players.

Emily: Has she even laid out a formation? Seems like we've been doing group work the first three weeks, with nothing cohesive.
Morgan B.: Let's me jump in here and dispel some of your opinions of Lauren. First, she has a habit of saying stuff just to say it. She likes getting the team to hate her a bit because she thinks it will cause them to play harder just to spite her. Next, she is quick to decide her best starting lineup, but you all will have chances to prove her wrong about your place in the pecking order if you stick to the belief that you can beat out whoever is ahead of you. She hates drama and is not going to put up with any of it. She said that the first day of training and she is serious about it.

Morgan A.: Thanks for filling us in a bit on where we might be wrong about Coach. Over to Emily's question. How does she like to play?

Morgan B.: Her base is a 4-4-3, but she will mix up the midfield based on the opponent. Sometimes, it's a diamond and she'll leave the top player up with the three attackers. Other times, it's three across and a player in front or behind it. Now and then, you might see a standard 4-3-4 or a 5-3-3 where she'll cheat out one of the middle three into the midfield going forward on attack.

Erin: As much as I'm not a fan of Shelley, Coach's comment about her acting like a stripper was out of line.

Steph: Did you see what she was doing more or less in my face? She was trying to get my attention by way of making me watch her rear end move to and fro.

Morgan A.: Anyways, onto the stuff from lunch. Lauren is looking to redshirt three of our teammates next year so she can bring in a bigger freshman class. She said they were in five-year degree programs and would be part of that new freshman class in the future if she doesn't cycle them out, which seems to be her preference.

Lauren: Do you know who the players are that she wants to do that to?

Morgan A.: Based on the rationale for dropping them, it's Savannah, Sofia, and Andi. The first because she's timid, the second because of her mental health, and the third because she's too average in appearance.

A couple of gasps were let out in the room. Savannah spoke up after hearing her name. "How can I win with her?"

Morgan B.: Play your butt off and prove to her that you should be playing.

Morgan A.: The next thing is that, of the seven players she has coming in, four of them are going to be considered for the athletic department's alumni relations group. Lauren also slagged most of the current team, calling them "cute if you're into that type", while also saying our two best played for the other team.

Kristie: Well, we know Shelley is smoking and also not straight. Who's the other one?

Emily: I'd think that'd be you.

Sam: Probably is, sis.

Morgan A.: The other big thing concerning us that I learned is that Lauren is against teammate relationships because she think they cause drama in the locker room and that we should be spreading it for the male athletes on campus.

Steph cringed, then got slightly angry. "She knows that she can't enforce that, correct?"

Morgan A.: Yes, which is why she and Coach Manning are looking forward to tomorrow when they
hope the chaplain gets his walking papers, because he's been a thorn in their sides for various reasons. Coach Manning said that some of her players dug up a bunch of negative information on him that she thinks will spell his doom here.

Erin: Steph, Alyssa, and I will be at the Board of Trustees meeting tomorrow and I hope will be able to speak on his behalf. Cali from the soccer team as well as Coach Dillon are supposed to be there also.

Morgan A.: I'll be there to cover it for the Trinity Times. According to the information Chairman Strasser sent to our office, tomorrow is a vote of no-confidence. If it passes, Bishop Emerson will be required to recall Deacon Schmidt and replace him with another person, subject to confirmation by the Board of Trustees.

Christen: What's the threshold?

Morgan A.: Simple majority, so 18 in favor of the motion.

Lauren: I told Steph and Erin that I'd like to attend and perhaps speak about how he helped Kelley after what happened over Fall break.

Steph: Any other breaking news from lunch?

Morgan A.: Just the alumni relations group that they both seem to have a hand in with Gavin.

Lauren: That has to be the thing that Carli and Lexi are part of that has them doing the late-night hours and where they get certain benefits from the athletic department. Kelley, remember what we had overheard outside Alyssa's room that one night?

Kelley: Yes, and it was my telling the chaplain about that conversation that tipped the scales to getting Coach Dillon exonerated of the sexual harassment charges Lexi made.

Erin: For which I, Steph, Cali, Dani, and a host of others are grateful. Those who want to join us at tomorrow morning's meeting, let's meet for breakfast at the coffee shop in Rincker, say 8am.

A few of those gathered nodded before they got up and left Morgan and Savannah's room. Maggie stayed and tried to boost Savannah's mood, cuddling her while she talked about how she was feeling. Once Savannah seemed OK, Maggie got up and left for her dorm. On the way out, she mouthed to her person, "I love you, just as you are." Savannah smiled and flashed her the ASL sign for "I love you".
In the hallway outside Stuenkel Hall 103, a handful of Trinity Lutheran University's Board of Trustees were talking with some of the people who would be appearing this morning before them. Morgan Andringa had been able to corner Chairman David Strasser to get a bit more background information of how today's no-confidence vote would proceed, with Parliamentarian Peter Wilkins chiming in with the parameters for the debate ahead of the eventual vote. Off to the side, a crowd of 20-25 people were in a large circle, encouraging Deacon Schmidt with their presence. Among them were SGA President Chad Markham, Faculty Senate Chair Amanda Duckworth, Drs. Tom Sinclair and Ben Oliphant, Marc's wife Danielle, 8 members of the women's lacrosse team, Danielle Dillon, Sarah Hawthorne, Cali Farmer, and Peer Ministry Alliance President Alyssa Norman. Just before the doors to the lecture hall were opened, Marc's faculty advocate, Professor of Political Science Robert Brock, arrived along with Bishop Paul Emerson and Assistant to the Bishop Matt Sherman. Just before 9:30, Gavin Winchester approached the hall with Dr. Cheryl Baines, Sara Manning, and Lauren Heberlein. Interestingly enough, no students associated with the Boot The Brute Brigade chose to attend the hearing.

Chairman David Strasser: The February 1, 2019 meeting of the Trinity Lutheran University Board of Trustees is called to order. As we have several matters on our agenda along with the debate concerning Deacon Schmidt's fitness to continue as chaplain, we will deal with the smaller items first.

Legislative Chair Paul Ridgewell introduced legislation concerning changes to a number of positions at the school, grandfathering their current occupants at their present status but moving future employees in those posts into professional staff designations as opposed to titled designations (ex., Associate VP for Residence Life would be re-classified Associate Director for Residence Life, Executive VP for Finance would become Chief Financial Officer). Trustee Daniel Courtnall brought forth a resolution thanking the Greater Milwaukee Synod for choosing TLU to host their 2019 Synod Assembly, which passed by unanimous consent. The file of legislation passed at the January 23rd Student Government Association meeting was forwarded by SGA liaison Laura Hammond for approval by the Board, which passed by a vote of 31-4. With those agenda items out of the way, Chairman Strasser called for a five-minute, in-hall break so both sides could have a quick discussion with their witnesses before the debate and confidence vote on Deacon Schmidt.

**********

David Strasser: Will Board of Trustees Parliamentarian Peter Wilkins come forward and take charge of the body?

Wilkins exchanged seats with Strasser and brought the hearing to order.

Peter Wilkins: We have before the Board of Trustees an inquiry as to the confidence of this body for Deacon Marc Schmidt to continue as chaplain of Trinity Lutheran University. There will be a total of 60 minutes of debate, equally divided and controlled by the petitioner's advocate and the respondent's advocate. Will the advocates for the two sides make themselves known?

Dr. Cheryl Baines: Dr. Cheryl Baines, Vice President for Human Resources, on behalf of the petitioner.

Dr. Robert Brock: Dr. Robert Brock, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Pre-Law program at Trinity, for the respondent.
Wilkins: The chair recognizes Dr. Baines.

Dr. Baines: I yield myself such time as I may consume. Wilkins: Without objection.

Dr. Baines: Mr. Chairman, I stand before you today representing a swath of students, faculty, and staff who have come to believe that Deacon Marc Schmidt is no longer fit to serve this campus as its chaplain. An ad hoc group of student-athletes calling themselves the Boot The Brute Brigade brought to my office a list of charges against Deacon Schmidt concerning financial mismanagement and acts of moral turpitude. I submit for the record financial transcripts from the Office of the Chaplain for the period of July 1, 2018 to January 15, 2019, inclusive. I also submit letters of grievance from university staff as well as the claims made on the website BootTheBrute dot com. I reserve the balance of my time.

Wilkins: The petitioner reserves the balance of her time. The chair recognizes Dr. Brock.

Dr. Brock: I waive the opportunity to make an opening statement and reserve the balance of my time.

Wilkins: The respondent reserves the balance of his time. The chair recognizes Dr. Baines.

Dr. Baines: As we have no physical witnesses at the present time, I will continue to reserve the balance of my time.

Wilkins: Dr. Brock is recognized.

Dr. Brock: I yield to Rev. Matt Sherman such time as he may consume. Wilkins: Without objection.

Matt Sherman: As Assistant to the Bishop for Administration and Candidacy, I am the person in the synod office responsible for the financial dealings of our non-church institutions, which includes Trinity Lutheran University. The claims made by Boot The Brute as to the mismanagement of funds by Deacon Schmidt are false, as we will demonstrate in short order. I yield the floor to Kathy O'Leary, accountant for the Urban Coaching Project.

Wilkins: The chair recognizes Ms. O'Leary.

Kathy O'Leary: Thank you. I come before this body to refute the claims of the petitioner as to the use of funds from the Office of the Chaplain for non-ministry purposes. Deacon Schmidt is not only chaplain of Trinity Lutheran University, but is also the Founder and Executive Director of the Urban Coaching Project. He requested that I make available the amount of $764 from our Continuing Education fund so that an alumna of UCP could attend the United Soccer Coaches Convention in Chicago. I submit for the record email communication between Deacon Schmidt and myself concerning the funds, a copy of the grantee's registration confirmation, and the organization's ledger for the period of April 1, 2018 to January 15, 2019, inclusive. I return the floor to Rev. Sherman.

Kathy walked the documents up to the clerk, who stamped them and placed them into the case's file.

Matt Sherman: I yield the floor to Bishop Paul Emerson.

Wilkins: The chair recognizes Bishop Emerson.

Paul Emerson: Mr. Chairman, I rise to stake claim to the second charge of financial impropriety against Deacon Schmidt, the one involving the use of funds from the Office of the Chaplain to cover non-ministry personnel. Deacon Schmidt was unaware that I had transferred funds from the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics to his office by way of TLU Business Services. All he was aware of was that I was going to go to bat for a member of the school's athletic staff who had been unfairly denied by Gavin Winchester funding to partake in continuing education and networking
opportunities at the Division I and Division III College Cups in North Carolina. As that trip coincided with a wedding that Deacon Schmidt had been contracted for in the area, it was easier for Matt to handle everyone's travel and lodging arrangements and then bill it against his office's account. If you want to pin the blame on someone for that decision, pin it on me. I return the floor to Rev. Sherman.

A small smattering of applause went up at the end of Paul's remarks, causing Matt to pause a few seconds before continuing.

Matt Sherman: I submit for the record all email and phone communication regarding the North Carolina trip, receipts from the weekend, and the requisite ledger pages showing the transfer of funds both at Trinity and between Trinity and the synod office. I yield the floor back to Dr. Brock.

Dr. Brock: I reserve the balance of my time.

Cheryl, knowing that the facts brought forth by the respondent deemed the charges for financial mismanagement unfounded, and with no one able or willing to stand up on her side of the aisle (Gavin and Lauren left the lecture hall at the conclusion of Bishop Emerson's remarks), yielded back to the chair the balance of her side's time.

Wilkins: The petitioner has yielded back the balance of her time. The chair recognizes Dr. Brock.

Dr. Brock: Now that we have proven the charges against Deacon Schmidt false, we will move onto answering the question of his continued fitness to serve as chaplain. I yield to Chad Markham, President of the Student Government Association, such time as he may consume.

Hearing no objection, Chad gave a short summary of Marc's work with their body during Fall semester and submitted their letter of support signed by all 35 representatives. Following him, Ben Oliphant spoke about his work across departments and colleges, then submitted a letter signed by 84 members of Trinity's faculty asking the Board to retain him. A parade of students then took their turns praising the chaplain for his efforts on their behalf. Danielle Schmidt then spoke.

Danielle Schmidt: I have known Marc for close to 25 years and have been married to him for 21. Is he a perfect man? Not by a long shot. Is he arrogant, self-righteous, vain, and attention-seeking? You bet! Would I want him to think of others ahead of himself sometimes? Definitely. The truth is, Marc is everything that the petitioner stated, plus a lot which didn't find its way into these proceedings. Is he still the best person for the job at hand here at Trinity? 100 percent YES! I yield back the balance of my time.

The next person up was Dani. "Mr. Chairman, the man before you today has made a huge impact at Trinity in the first seven months of his tenure as well as provided a host of individuals with opportunities that otherwise might not have occurred. He stuck up for me when I was accused by one of my own players of misconduct, to the detriment of his own health. He has stood by students in crisis situations and has used his vast knowledge of the university system to cut through much of the red tape that gave rise to this campus's schism several years ago. I echo a number of the things his wife said about him. He IS a bit manipulative. He CAN be difficult to work with at times. He's also one of the kindest men you'll meet, and were I fighting for my life, my career, my good name, I would want him leading the charge to save it. My mentor, my friend, Marc Schmidt."

Erin, Steph, and Alyssa gave Dani hugs as she walked back from the microphone, then spoke about his actions in the early part of Fall semester which led to all three of them achieving major accomplishments by the end of it (Alyssa's admission to Pre-Sem, Steph's approval for candidacy by her home pastor, and Erin's coming out to her parents among others). They then talked about his shepherding of them in the creation and development of the Peer Ministry Alliance and the doors he
has opened for them to exercise their gifts and talents in the university's religious community and beyond. Erin was chosen to wrap up their comments.

Erin: Remember why you hired Deacon Schmidt in the first place, and allow him to continue answering the calling to which he has been called. Thank you.

Dr. Brock: We yield back the balance of our time.

Wilkins: All time having been yielded back, the question is called. So many as declare their confidence in Deacon Schmidt, do so by saying I. [yes votes] Those who withdraw said confidence, no. [no votes] In the opinion of the chair, the I's have it.

Dr. Brock: We ask for a recorded voice vote.

Wilkins: A sufficient number having arisen, the yeas and nays are ordered. Clerk will call the roll.

Each of the 35 trustees in turn were called upon to cast their vote. The gallery was getting slightly excited as the list of yeas grew, then surpassed the 18 required to maintain the confidence of the body.

Wilkins: On this vote, the yeas are 27, the nays 8. The confidence of this body in Deacon Schmidt's continuing as chaplain has been maintained.
Exiting the Board of Trustees meeting, Marc and his entourage were stopped by Amy Roving from University Communications, seeking comment from him and his supporters on the outcome.

Marc: Honestly, I knew the ad hoc group wouldn't be willing to face me today in the hearing, which is what caused their allegations to collapse. The facts in this case were always on our side, and releasing my "mea culpa" last Monday took a lot of the firepower and sting out of their argument.

Cali Farmer: What a handful of my teammates and their friends have been doing to Deacon Schmidt for the better part of two months is disgraceful. I hope they're enjoying their so-called perfect lives, because we're not going to take this attack lying down.

Kristie Mueller: Those of us who have had the privilege to be part of his expanding circle of influence at Trinity knew that Deacon Schmidt was not guilty of any of the financial mismanagement allegations brought up against him.

Morgan questioned Dr. Baines about her view of the outcome.

Dr. Baines: We didn't have enough to win today. With none of the athletes appearing, I was a sitting duck and I didn't have a Plan B to challenge Deacon Schmidt's fitness in general. The student-athletes who left me to fend for them with no support in return should expect a stern wake-up call the next time they choose to take on a high-profile individual at the university. I feel duped by these women and will be licking my wounds for a bit.

Marc walked over to Dr. Baines and invited her to join him and his circle of friends for lunch at Sobelman's, which she accepted. Morgan stopped to ask Marc about coming to see him on Monday morning about what she had overheard on Thursday in Albrecht and to get some additional material for his upcoming profile piece in the Trinity Times. They set up a 9:30am appointment and he told her that he liked her even-handed writing style that was evident in her article on the passage of the Code of Student Conduct in November.

**********

A group of fourteen were gathered at Sobelman's Mequon to celebrate and decompress following the morning's Board of Trustees meeting. Seated around three tables pushed together were: Marc; Danielle; Erin; Steph; Cali; Dani; Sarah; Alyssa; Tom Sinclair; Ben and Megan Oliphant; Cheryl Baines; Matt Sherman; and Paul Emerson.

Marc: Cheryl, I'm surprised you didn't go after me on a number of the things that were in the complaint. There was certainly enough there to start a he-said-she-said argument before the Board. Also, you had Gavin Winchester in the gallery, and I KNOW he's not too keen on me and Paul looking over his shoulder when it comes to decision-making.

Cheryl: When none of the students who filed the original complaint showed up for the meeting, and I was left with just the documents as evidence or testimony, I sort of left it to you to make the case for continued confidence, and you did. As soon as Paul told them that he had made the transfer through TLU Business Services, our side was dead. When Gavin and one of his coaches left during Paul's remarks, that took away my best chance to put you on the hot seat. My opinion is that you scared the students off by your response to their actions, stating they were right about your past and claiming they used illegal means to obtain that information. The sting was taken out of their attack and there was no way to hit you harder than you did yourself in the press release on the 21st.
Marc: You could have disqualified four of our side's speakers for inherent bias. Why didn't you?

Cheryl: Truth is we lost the case after you successfully refuted the charges of financial impropriety. I knew the one concerning the USC convention wouldn't stand up, because there was no linkage between your office's expenses and other departments at the university. Their main accuser should have known better than to point at some added registration and lodging costs as proof of wrongdoing when it was her own roommate who was being covered for her part in you performing a wedding there. The first one was a little harder for you to hide from, since it did involve your getting funds from another department and then paying for someone not part of your office to travel with you to North Carolina and back. Again, Paul beat that one back by telling the truth and logic of what he did and why it was done. At the beginning of this process, I was looking to get you back for your filing a complaint against me with President Garrett. In the end, I felt like I was set up a bit to take the heat while those who wanted you out were able to hide behind me and not have to stand behind their accusations.

Marc: We've all been there, Cheryl. A clever line I heard from a colleague of mine at Concordia-Moorhead is that getting college students to commit to something is like trying to staple Jell-O to a wall. I went through that a lot when I ran the soccer club that Coach Dillon, her new housemate, my accountant, and Casey Schultz in Athletic Advising played at during their summer breaks from college.

Erin: Your accountant played for you, too?

Marc: Yes. Does that surprise you?

Erin: Not really. You must have built something special to still have players in touch with you and part of your circle after closing it down.

Dani: What Marc put together with MUSC was a family-like atmosphere where we were empowered to play as we knew how, to care about our teammates, and to see each other as extensions of our own abilities. He encouraged us to be in contact with each other while at school, he would run informal play dates during winter break, and in the end it made us loyal to him and his vision of seeing us use the game to achieve greater goals in life.

Alyssa: And it looks like he is doing it again with our little Peer Ministry team.

Danielle: Doesn't surprise me one bit that he's using that coaching mentality to build a campus ministry culture that encourages vulnerability, that allows people to use their best gifts and talents, and that will hopefully exhibit the signs of a vibrant university community, a place where one can

Erin, Steph, Cali, and Alyssa (joining Danielle): Know and be known, love and be loved, celebrate and be celebrated!

Danielle: Guess he's already made you aware of that description.

Steph: Yes. Said it in his first sermon in August, to lay the foundation for focusing on love being the way to get our campus past the schism and to merge its three student bodies into one.

Paul: I've never heard that description before. It doesn't seem too far-fetched that it could be used to describe a growing congregation.

Marc: It really isn't much different. You need the people who have already found that inner peace to take it out and help others embrace it. I brought this quote up during our peer ministry training last Saturday to demonstrate how those of us in ministry should focus mainly on the first half of those
give-and-takes in order to provide the second half to those around us.

Dani: Speaking of showing love to those around us, who all here is in for helping Michelle and I move into our new place tomorrow?

Steph, Erin, Marc, Cali, and Sarah all piped up and said they would be there. Ben asked Dani if they could use some additional help since he was looking for something positive to do with his son Dawson that would get him out of the house and make him associate with people as opposed to his law textbooks.

Dani: We can always find something for the two of you, even if it's just lugging heavy furniture from parents' house to trailer to bachelorette pad.

Marc: Dawson's an L1, right?

Ben: Yes. He wants to get into sport law and Marquette is well-known for its Sports Law Institute.

Marc: True. I know a couple of people who have taken courses through it.

Erin: Who DON'T you know, Marc?!

Marc: Hey, it's one of the advantages of being old.

Megan: I've learned in the four years Ben and I have been together that it's not a bad thing to be connected to someone with a wide range of connections. It helped me get my first journal article published and has made it possible for me to adjunct an online course at Alverno in the fall while I'm on maternity leave from Trinity.

Tom: Congratulations, you two. Ben, why didn't you tell me about this?

Ben: Megan's been cautious about letting people know until she starts showing a bit.

Dani told the rest of the diners that she needed to leave to get some errands run before Michelle and her met with their landlord at their new place. She told the moving crew that they should show up at her and Michelle's place at 9am tomorrow and gave them directions. Cali left with her cousin, followed by the Oliphants and Coach Hawthorne. Eventually, the fivesome going to Philly were the last ones left and set up a time on Sunday to get together and work out the particulars for that week, which would be followed by a Super Bowl party at the Schmidts.

**********

Tidbits from the rest of Friday:

* Alyssa stopped all 23 shots she faced as the women's hockey team defeated Finlandia University 7-0 to move into third place in the Northern Collegiate Hockey Association standings.

* Marc received an email from Lauren Green, communications director of the Philadelphia Hearts, asking if he and his team could answer a few questions for a wedding preview she planned to post on the club's website at the end of next week. He forwarded the email to his home account so he could print it out and distribute copies to the others on Sunday.

* Dani and Michelle spent the first night in their new home reminiscing about the twists and turns that have come during the ten years or so they've been classmates and friends (four at Nicolet, four at Stritch, and the almost two years since then in "the real world") and how taking this step together seemed so natural. They camped out in the living room, with comforters, pillows, and air mattresses
providing makeshift beds while they watched the Pitch Perfect trilogy.
Movin' On Up

Groundhog Day kicked off with the Milwaukee County Zoo's resident forecaster, a polar bear named Snow Lilly, stepping out of her housing to let those gathered know an early spring was on the horizon. Up in Brown Deer, Dani and Michelle have risen from their first night as housemates to begin the process of making their new pad into a home.

Michelle: How many people were you able to sucker from Trinity to help us out today?

Dani: Marc, his goddaughter Erin, her girlfriend Steph, Sarah, Cali, one of the professors in the School of Education, and his son, a law student at Marquette. Might be others, but those were the ones confirmed at lunch yesterday.

Michelle: Pretty sizable crew on top of my parents and Darin.

Dani: Mom and Dad are supposed to help on their end to get things loaded out. Olivia was planning to come up at some point to help with the "after" portion of the moving. Don't know about Angela or Nicole, though.

Michelle: I'm going to make a quick run to Pick N Save to get us and the movers some food. Want anything special?

Dani: Donuts, muffins, bananas, the typical quick-grab stuff. Coffee would be nice, but how to get or make it?

Michelle: I'll see what I can do. Probably hit your Pick near Stritch, then down to Colectivo at Bayshore for the coffee, then hit the house for a load to bring back up here.

Dani: Need me to come with?

Michelle: Someone should be here in case people are early.

Dani: True. Be careful.

Michelle: Thanks, Deuce.

*******

Michelle's errands were quick and she was back to the new house by 8:30. Dani had finished changing into her clothes for the day and had her locket hanging outside her sweatshirt, which Michelle commented on.

Michelle: I haven't seen THAT before! Christmas present?

Dani: Yea. Erin and Steph got it for me, with pictures inside it from our trip to North Carolina.

Dani walked over and showed Michelle the inscription on the back and the pictures on the inside.

Michelle: You and Marc danced at the wedding reception?

Dani: Yes. He's got white boy moves, so there wasn't a lot of flair, just staring and circling, but I enjoyed it.

Michelle: The girls look so happy together, and you look absolutely radiant.
Dani: I thought a special night like that deserved a bit more effort than just throwing on something and hoping it would fit. Erin helped me get the side braid in place, and I fitted her with the halo braid she wore.

Michelle: Interesting choice. Why did you go with that? I'm so used to you just leaving it free that seeing it otherwise is, I don't know, weird?

Dani: She suggested it because she knew a certain someone has a thing for that and was hoping that it would "affect" him.

Michelle: I see.......are you and Marc just having a good time or is there more to it?

Dani: There is plenty more to it. I'm in love with him, and I've told him as much.

Michelle: Dang! Never would have guessed the two of you would be a real couple.

Dani: For me, after all the crap I dealt with in high school and college, I wanted and needed someone who saw me as something better than a conquest or bucket list check-off. He treats me so well and is extremely kind and gentle.

Michelle: No shock there. How he handled my back trouble my last year at the club, plus your ankle surgery, plus his compassion for us when Catrina died, it doesn't really surprise me that he'd be the same way one-on-one. At least he's not your dad's age. THAT would be really awkward. Does anyone in your family know about the two of you?

Dani: Just Cali, and I had to swear her to secrecy when she saw the locket at our family's Christmas gathering. I'm going to have him stay up here with Sarah to help load in, since there is just too big a risk of something slipping if he's down in Glendale helping me pack out.

Michelle: Smart decision.

The doorbell rang and Dani went to answer it. After greeting the foursome on the doorstep, she ushered them into the house and introduced Sam to Michelle, as she knew the other three already.

Cali: Nice neighborhood, nice place you picked up.

Dani: We needed something reasonably-priced that was close to Trinity and Maple Dale, and this place met both of those.

Sam went toward the coffee and grabbed a cup along with a cruller, freeing up the others to partake as well. The six of them chatted for a couple of minutes before Marc, Ben, and Dawson arrived. After Sarah made it to the house, the crew split themselves up. Marc, Sarah, and Steph stayed at the house and would help get things into the various rooms as they arrived. Dani had Erin and Cali go with her to her parents' place while Michelle had Ben, Dawson, and Sam follow her to her parents' house to begin the moving-out process.

While waiting for the first loads to show up, Marc, Sarah, and Steph chatted.

Steph: It was awfully nice of Dr. Oliphant to volunteer to help Dani and Michelle today. Not sure how Dawson feels about it, but he seems a good sport.

Marc: From what Ben has told me, he feels he has messed up both of his kids with his relationship decisions after Natalie died. First, he thought he needed to find Dawson and Lily a new mom sort of quickly, but the kids were unhappy with him being gone so much on the weekends in that pursuit. He changed course and pushed off dating until Lily started high school, at which point Dawson was
a senior. Now he has a son whose best examples of male/female relationships have come from his friends and a daughter who seems to resent him replacing her with Megan. Maybe getting him around others might help him break out of the shell and nerves he has concerning women. Ben and Megan's expecting probably is also a stressor on Dawson, even if he doesn't say anything about it. It's like the ending of one life stage without really an idea of what the next one will entail.

Sarah: How does that factor in here?

Marc: Dawson and Michelle are more or less the same age and they're both sort of antsy when it comes to dealing with the opposite sex. A situation like this, where you're around someone and picking up information without necessarily needing to interact with them, and where you have something that distracts you from your own insecurities, might give one or both of them enough confidence to maybe step out into the world and find someone.

Sarah: When Dani, Michelle, and I got together for dinner a couple of months ago and compared our dating lives, she described what she was looking for as "a smart guy who could handle a post-adolescent pile of nerves". Think Dawson fits that description?

Marc: He could. Guess we'll find out by the end of the day if anything comes of it.

Living slightly closer to the new house than Michelle, Dani returned first with a carload of boxes, tubs, and crates. Marc and Steph helped her, Cali, and Erin unload, with Sarah directing them to their intended homes in the house. A few minutes later, Michelle and Sam arrived, followed by Ben and Dawson. The four of them hauled in items and were given directions for where they belonged.

Michelle (to Dani): I think we have one more trip of the small stuff, then we'll load my bed and whatever other furniture into the U-Haul and drive up to your parents' place to get your stuff.

Dani: If that's the case, then I think I'll wait a little before going back down there, since it doesn't make much sense to shuttle back-and-forth if I can get everything else and the big stuff all at once.

Michelle, Ben, and Dawson left again, with Dani, Cali, and Erin doing a little bit of break-out of her stuff in her bedroom. Sam, Sarah, and Steph tidied up the living room so the large items could get to their destinations once they arrived. Marc wandered about taking in the new residents' keepsakes and belongings, learning a bit more about them as a result of it. Dani came out of her room and found Marc in contemplation. She sidled up to him and laid her head just under the left side of his, resting it against his neck and collarbone.

Dani: What ya thinking about, love?

Marc: How much I don't yet know about you, how slightly worried I am about everyone up here at the end and something slipping out concerning us. Your mom and I were never really "cool" with each other when you played for me or when I was at Stritch games scouting. Your dad was better, but that was then. This is now me possibly stealing their youngest daughter while still married to someone else.

Dani: Marc, with all the others up here, there really won't be a chance for it to be just you, me, and my family. Tell Erin and Steph about it and hopefully they'll stick around for support. I'll tell Cali the same thing.

Dani placed a kiss on the underside of Marc's chin. "I love you, and I look forward to you visiting now and again, both for business and personal reasons."

As Marc held Dani against himself, Cali and Erin came out of her room and saw the pair.
Erin: Papi, you might not want to keep that position too long. Who knows how soon Michelle and the Oliphants will be back.

Cali: Finally seeing the two of you together, Dani, I'm struck by just how happy and at peace you are with Marc. The picture in your locket doesn't really do justice to how you light up around him.

Dani: Girls, can I count on you to keep my parents and sisters at bay? No one in the family knows besides you, Cali, and it would make for a pretty big mess if they came to find out.

Erin: I'm behind you. Same tactic as usual?

Dani: Yeah. Just need Sarah to be willing to actually "be out" with me in front of them.

Cali: So you and Sarah AND you and Marc?

Dani: Yes, Cali, and it's not me using one to cover up the fact of the other. It's complicated, sis.

Michelle and Ben returned with more of her stuff. Once Ben's car was cleared out, the two of them and Dawson left again to finish their portion of the move. Dani, Erin, and Cali left shortly after them in Erin's car so they could be at the Dillons' when David Pelphrey brought over the U-Haul.

**********

The U-Haul driven by Michelle's dad, David, rolled down Teutonia Ave. and turned into the drive way alongside his daughter's new home. In short order, Erin and Ben parked their cars on the street in front of the house, followed by that of Dani's parents, Theresa and Dennis. David, Dennis, and Ben hauled in the couch, with Marc and Dawson each taking a pair of kitchen chairs. Steph and Sarah grabbed the kitchen table while Erin and Cali pulled out the pieces for Dani's bed frame. Another cycle got rid of the rest of the large items, leaving some boxes and Sterilite tubs to be brought in on the final pass through the truck. The remaining boxes and unpacked items were gotten from the various cars, after which everyone grabbed some floor or a chair or a seat on the couch. Some quick introductions were made among those who had yet to meet during this adventure. Michelle was sitting next to Dani, with Dawson on her other side. Dani draped her arms around Michelle and Sarah, one-arm hugged them, then hip-checked her best friend toward the first-year law student. Michelle stumbled through an apology, which was accepted by Dawson by way of a simple nod and pat on the leg. Marc texted Danielle to see how her day with her fellow guinea-pig mom Pam was going (they made plans to attend the Great Lakes Pet Expo and stop for lunch afterward in celebration of Pam's birthday) and to coordinate dinner and projected times of arrival back at their house. Erin and Steph curled up together slightly, the sweat from their labor resting on their heads. The two sets of parents took off after a bit, followed by Sam, Steph, and Erin, wanting to stop by campus to eat and change before going to the ice arena with Kristie for Alyssa's game. As Ben and Dawson were leaving, Michelle followed them out and handed the latter a slip of paper with her number and email address on it, then thanked the pair of them for their help. When Marc left, Danielle went out to his car with him, allowing her and him to spend a short bit of time together. Sarah, Michelle, and Cali watched from inside the house as they embraced and exchanged a few kisses before Marc got in and drove off. After Dani got back in the house, she and the others settled in for what would turn into a girls' night. During a showing of "Bend It Like Beckham", Michelle got a text.

DBOliphant: Hope this is actually you. Otherwise, I'll feel really stupid.

Michelle smiled and responded.

Michelleee: It's me, Dawson. :) Why would I give you a fake number?
DBOliphant: I don't know. Girls sometimes do that to mess with guys. Anyways, now that I know it's you, I was wondering if you wanted to go out with me next Saturday. My dad got tickets for Roller Derby for himself and I, but forgot that he would be speaking at a conference that weekend. I don't know if that's something you'd be interested in, but I thought I'd ask.

Michelle showed the texts to Dani and Cali and asked how she should respond. They both suggested she show interest, but make him work for a yes.

Michelleee: Not really a fierce girl, but living with Dani I know I'll have to become more assertive. Dinner at Major's beforehand?

DBOliphant: First bout is at 6, so it would have to be an early dinner. Pick you up at 4?

Michelleee: YES! :D

DBOliphant: See you then. :)
Super Sunday

Super Bowl Sunday at the Schmidts' was a doubleheader of activity. First, Marc met with Danielle, Alyssa, Erin, and Steph to go over the itinerary and schedule for their trip to Philadelphia next week. Marc handed out copies of the day-by-day schedule, flight numbers, the assignments for the week [i.e., which couple(s) each person would have primary responsibility for coordination and appeasement], the liturgy as it current stands, and a list of questions Lauren Green from the Philadelphia Hearts sent to Marc for his team to answer and return.

Schedule:

Monday, Feb. 11: American Airlines 4883 MKE-->PHL; Depart 10:22am, Arrive 1:37pm; Hotel: Le Meridien Philadelphia; 6:00pm Dinner with couples at Maggiano's Little Italy

Tuesday, Feb. 12: 9:00am Mewis/McCaffrey; 10:15am Dahlkemper/Mewis; 11:30am Horan/Sonnett; 2:00pm Wilkinson/Matheson; 3:15pm Krieger/Labbe; 4:30pm Andrews/Prudhomme

Wednesday, Feb. 13: 11:00am Run-through at LOVE Park; 2:00pm Tour of United Lutheran Seminary Philadelphia

Thursday, Feb. 14: 8:00am Last meeting with couples; 8:30am Suit up; 10:00am Onsite; 10:45am Couples stashed, crowd somewhat in place; 11:00am SHOWTIME; 11:55am GET OUT OF DODGE; 1:30pm Reception

Friday, Feb. 15: American Airlines 4902 PHL-->MKE Depart 10:50am, Arrive 12:22pm

Marc: Any questions about the schedule?

Alyssa: Why are we doing a tour of the seminary in Philly?

Marc: It serves two purposes. First, I will be able to meet with the pair of on-call ministers we will be using on Thursday should we end up with more than four couples exchanging vows. Second, Paul and Matt are doing a little bit of a shuffle with the budget for this trip, and if we do the tour, part of it can be written in for candidacy expenses since you and Steph are in the process.

Danielle: Is it necessary to do individual meetings with the couples rather than one longer one with all of them?

Marc: In order to get everything in place and pieced-together, I think having all five of us focusing on a single pair at a time will make it less stressful and confusing.

Steph: With both Alyssa and I on this trip, which one of us is going to be your right-hand person on the day?

Marc: Alyssa will be my liturgical assistant and will be part of the ceremony if there should be a need. You will be our event assistant, what Erin did in North Carolina. Whereas Alyssa will help with the wedding from my side of the pulpit, you will help with it from the other side, making sure people are where they're supposed to be on-time and knowing what they are to do, plus dealing with the last-minute snags that are bound to happen. Erin is the personal assistant for Danielle and myself. Pretty much, she'll be playing refree so we don't kill each other before the wedding is over.

Erin: Why am I assigned Sam and Abby? I was hoping to get one of the comics.
Marc: I didn't think it would be fair for Lindsey and Emily to tag-team you with their brand of humor, and I didn't want Rhian to have to deal with both Diana and you. Bad enough they're all dealing with me.

Danielle: Any jokes yet?

Marc: Got a few in mind. Moving onto the questionnaire in front of you. Lauren Green, a friend of mine from way back in the WPS days, is creating a special section on the Philadelphia Hearts website for the wedding and wants to put up profiles of the five of us. As you can see, the questions aren't that hard or overly personal. Please email her back with your answers at your earliest convenience.

Steph: I know you must have some kind of logic for how Tuesday is scheduled. Can you share it?

Marc: Since Kristie is doing most of the coordination for the couples, it only makes sense that she and Steph start and lay out the collectively agreed-to design for the day. From there, her sister and future sister-and-law get to add their individual touches to that, followed by Lindsey and Emily. The afternoon starts with the two couples that I have the most interest in and thus want to have them stretch out the design from the morning meetings, with Morgan and Sammy Jo closing it out, since that is the couple which Danielle will be officially wedding.

Erin: How much should we pack for the five days?

Marc: Pack for the conditions. A lot of interchangeable pieces along with things you can possibly wear multiple times if weather or schedule necessitate it. For most of it, you can get away with outfits not much different that what you wear normally. You might want something a little nicer for the Monday night soiree, the Wednesday tour of ULS, and of course whatever you're choosing to wear on the day itself. Comfort and warmth should take priority. I'm probably going to consider a couple of changes to my normal attire for Thursday if the extended forecast ends up being close to correct (low 30s and a better-than-average chance for flurries). If the weather ends up being too bad, Plan B is to hold the ceremony in the hotel with a replica of the statue brought in. Kristie, I, and hotel management will talk that over on-site if necessary.

Danielle and Erin got up and went to the kitchen to start preparations for the Super Bowl LIII party that would be starting at 2pm. This year's game has the Minnesota Vikings making their first appearance in the Big Game since Super Bowl XI in 1977. Their opponent, the surprising Buffalo Bills, who took advantage of Tom Brady's collar bone injury in Week 7 to win the AFC East and then defeat them in the divisional playoff before sending the Pittsburgh Steelers to the sidelines in the AFC Championship Game. The Bills are in the Super Bowl for the first time since their four straight appearances from XXV through XXVIII (1991-1994). The most important aspect of today's game is that one of these teams will FINALLY end their 0-for-life runs on this stage (both have lost four Super Bowls, with the Vikings doing it in numbers IV, VII, IX, and XI and the Bills in XXV, XXVI, XXVII, and XXVIII). Early projections had the attendees skewing toward support of the Vikings (partially for pity's sake, partially to be anti-Buffalo because New England isn't there, and partially because Lindsey and Emily have riled up their floor the past two weeks in anticipation for this battle). Marc was one who would be rooting for the Bills (pro-Packer = anti-Viking plus his affinity for the city he called home for a brief time in 2008), along with Steph Lafleur (Kitchener is 90 miles from Buffalo). Erin, being raised a Lions fan, was slightly partial against the Vikings, but not nearly to the extent she was against the Bears.

Just before 2, the first group of party goers showed up, those being Sam, Kristie, Lindsey, and Emily, all decked out in purple-and-gold.

Marc (to Sam): What is this?!?! Chicagoans backing the Vikes? Did you hit your head moving Dani
and Michelle yesterday so that you're not thinking straight?

Sam: Bears, Schmears. This support is for the sake of our beloved Patriots being knocked out by the Bills. Our parents grew up near Boston and went to college there before moving to Chicago for my dad's first job.

Marc: I see....and of course the two Minnesotans are regaling us with their support of the ZERO-TIME World Champions.

Emily: Two of the greatest quarterbacks of all-time, in their prime, and you manage to make it to only three Super Bowls in 25 years.

Marc: Scoreboard! Two more Vinces in the trophy case. I think they'll need to fumigate yours when you finally have a chance to store the George Halas one since it hasn't been opened in 42 years.

The good-natured ribbing was elevated when Christen, Julie, Sofia, Lauren, and Kelley arrived. A mixture of Packers, Cardinals, and Colts attire was seen on the five of them, with the Vikings supporters and Bills supporters sending out a resounding set of boos at them. Danielle and Erin brought out the first set of food offerings, a deli tray and buns. Buffalo wings (based on the recipe from the official home of the delicacy, the Anchor Bar in Buffalo) were marinating in the spicy sauce while a small pot of lutefisk was being cooked as homage to the Vikings. A couple of crock pots were going with meatballs in barbecue sauce and little wieneros in a grape jelly/chili sauce mixture. Some lefse that Danielle got from her sister over the holidays were on the tray, along with cinnamon sugar and butter.

Most of the three hours prior to game time was spent laughing at the commercials, eating, and trying to keep from splitting a stitch when Emily, Erin, and Marc started going at each other with the cut-downs and jokes. Right at 5:00, Danielle dialed up Marc's sister Laurie and her family in Blaine, MN to have them join in on the festivities.

Marc: Sis, ready for the Vikings to succumb in the first battle between teams that have each lost four past Super Bowls?

Laurie: Put a cork in it! No way the Bills beat us.

Marc: Care to put something on it?

Laurie called back to her son Matt and daughter Sam to see what they might want out of a bet against their uncle Marc. Once she got their responses, she relayed them to Marc.

Laurie: Matt says that if the Vikings win, you have to set him up with your goddaughter when he gets to Trinity in the fall. Sam says you need to come to her Sweet 16 in April if the Vikings win.

Marc: On the second one, which day is it, since her birthday is on Palm Sunday?

Laurie: We're doing it the night before, starting probably at 9 or 10pm so it will stretch into the 14th.

Marc: As for the first, I think the object of his affection might want to speak up about it.

Marc asked Erin to come over to the laptop and put in her ten cents as to Matt's request.

Erin: Matty Boy, you might be cute, but I don't swing that way. Sorry.

Laurie's stepson Michael and Matt's best friend Andrew overheard Erin's turn down and gave him a bunch of grief. Danielle took control of the computer and she and Laurie chatted back and forth
while watching the game from their respective houses.

The Vikings took the opening kickoff and methodically moved the ball deep into Buffalo territory before stalling out and settling for a field goal from Kai Forbath. On the Bills' first possession, quarterback A.J. McCarron hit rookie Austin Proehl on a deep fade route that was taken 62 yards for a touchdown. Stephen Hauschka's extra point made the score 7-3.

With the score 13-10 in favor of Buffalo at halftime, Erin brought out the bane of every Minnesotan's existence.

Erin: Team, this is a tradition of the Vikings from as far back as the ninth century in Norway and Iceland. It's called lutefisk and is cod, so normal fish, pretty much.

Lindsey held her tongue as she knew what her clever friend was trying to sucker the others into trying. Several of the players took a small bit on their plates, trying it unseasoned and dry first.

Sam: Ick! Erin, this is fish?!!

Erin: Yes, it's fish.

Sam: It tastes like fish-flavored Jell-o!

Kristie: It's not THAT bad, Stretch! Add a little butter to it and it tastes different.

Julie: Tastes like fish, but the texture seems to be much like Vaseline.

Erin: Lindsey, do you want to tell our lovely Thunder teammates the truth about this dish?

Lindsey: Gladly. Erin is correct in that lutefisk is cod. What she didn't tell you is what they do to it after catching it. First, it's soaked in cold water for a week, then soaked in lye for two days. After that, it's dried and then reconstituted by soaking it in water again for a few days. It can be baked or boiled. Adam Richman from "Man vs. Food" came up to Minneapolis and was suckered by Andrew Zimmern of "Bizarre Foods" into trying it. It was described as "having the consistency of frozen Vaseline, but it's warm."

Danielle gave Lindsey a round of applause for the accurate description, then offered her some to take back to the dorm.

Lindsey: Ummm.....NO THANK YOU!

Danielle: Smart woman.

The second half was very much back-and-forth between the two teams, with Minnesota holding a 25-22 lead at the two-minute warning. Facing a fourth down on the two-yard line with 18 seconds remaining, McCarron handed the ball to LeSean McCoy who was stopped just shy of the goal line. The Vikings' celebration of the stop was short-lived as a yellow flag was on the turf of Atlanta's Mercedes-Benz Stadium. An encroachment foul against the Vikings' Everson Griffen gave the Bills one last chance, with the ball now at the one and just 13 seconds left in regulation. Again, Buffalo head coach Sean McDermott gambled and went for the win. On the snap, McCarron faked a hand-off to McCoy then gave the ball to wide receiver Kelvin Benjamin on an end-around. With the defense sent in the wrong direction, Benjamin sauntered into the end zone with six seconds on the clock. Hauschka's extra point made it 29-25 for the Bills. Minnesota tried to advance the ball on the ensuing kickoff through laterals and flea-flicker movement, but an ill-advised fling landed in the hands of former Packer Micah Hyde who raced the ball to the end zone and, following a final extra point by Hauschka, ended the game with the Bills winning, 36-25.
After the game, Erin, Danielle, and Christen went into the kitchen to take care of dishes and packaging leftovers for the others to take back to school. By 10:00, the house was vacant of the college students, much to the relief of Danielle, who was beat from all the interaction. Marc wound down by working a crossword puzzle and then headed to bed, hoping a good night's sleep would lead to a good start to the upcoming week.
The new week at Trinity began with Marc answering Lauren Green's questionnaire for the wedding section of the Philadelphia Hearts website and catching up on other communications he missed over the weekend. After calling Lauren Fowler about her school's plans for the seminar portion of the Practical Ministry certificate and hearing that they were looking to work with the School of Nursing to offer joint seminars for their students, he jotted a few notes on the computer screen prior to Morgan Andringa's appearance at 9:30.

Marc: Have a seat, Morgan. What is it that you've come in to discuss?

Morgan: First, I need a little more information for your profile piece in the Trinity Times. The claims which Boot The Brute made as to your infidelity, and which you seemingly acknowledged as being in part correct, was there more than just crossed wires on those occasions?

Marc: There was no physical infidelity between myself and another individual, but there was a fair amount of emotional cheating, where I would seek out a sympathetic ear or a time-occupier when Danielle either wasn't open to listening to me or wasn't available.

Morgan: One final question. If the proposal by Dr. Oliphant for the creation of an Urban Coaching Institute at Trinity passes both Faculty Senate and the Board of Trustees, will you step away from your role as chaplain to direct it, and if not who do you have in mind to oversee it?

Marc: Should the Urban Coaching Institute be founded, it will hopefully be housed within the confines of the City of Milwaukee. I have no plans to oversee the day-to-day operations of the institute, but would retain my place within it as its founder and executive director. I haven't yet thought too far ahead of that, as what the position would be responsible for in terms of advising and networking opportunities will depend on what we're looking to accomplish in the short-term. With my desire to build out through expanded knowledge of the profession and cross-cultural exchanges in the field, how we would fashion a course for submission to Faculty Senate is still in the planning stages. My goal is to have it in the course catalog for the 2020-2021 Academic Year.

Morgan: Thanks for your answers. Now, onto what I REALLY came to discuss.

Morgan handed Marc a list of quotes and statements that she had heard Lauren use over the previous week with regard to players on the team and her desires for the program. Marc looked them over and saw some serious missteps by the lacrosse team's head coach, which he went over with the first-year midfielder.

Marc: You heard Coach Heberlein make these references with your own ears, correct?

Morgan: Yes. The first couple came during training on Wednesday afternoon, but the rest are from a conversation I overheard her having with Coach Manning from women's soccer at lunch on Thursday.

Marc: Can you corroborate the ones from Thursday, as I presume other members of the team heard the ones on Wednesday?

Morgan: I'm not sure if Maggie Downing or Savannah Johnson heard the first comment or two before they left for class, but as for the rest it was only me at the table hearing it.

Marc: With you being on the Times, you're probably held to a higher standard for getting information and being able to use it. Would you be able to publish anything you heard yesterday?
Morgan: I could if I was muckraking or looking to smear her. The fact is that I overheard what they said out-of-sight.

Marc: Which means they had some expectation of privacy or being "off-the-record", as it were. I have to hold that same standard, especially with the lack of corroboration. That doesn't mean I won't be looking to act on it. I just need something more openly said by her to move ahead. Do you understand?

Morgan: Yes. Is there anything in what I've brought that you can use or that puts her in a bit of hot water?

Marc scanned the document again and starting putting down notes next to certain items, then told Morgan what he could do.

Marc: The first quote from Wednesday is useful, as it can be construed as sexual harassment. What she said about this "alumni relations" group might dovetail with a potential investigation I'm looking at dealing with a couple of players on the women's soccer team and their extracurricular activities. I can move slightly based on the Wednesday stuff once I have confirmation from another set of ears, and you know how I'm going to do that, right?

Morgan: Ask Erin?

Marc: Doesn't have to be her. I have three players on the team in my Peer Ministry leadership group, so any of them can confirm your statement and open the door to starting to dig for more. We meet for lunch on Mondays to talk shop and deal with the week's schedule of activities and ministry opportunities. Hence, I'll ask Erin, Steph, and Julie about this then.

Morgan: And the rest?

Marc: I will file your list of quotes for future use, because there are a BUNCH of lines crossed in those statements. Title IX, ADA, the ELCA Social Statements, things in the Employee Handbook I'm sure, and the Code of Student Conduct's allowances. That one conversation had enough ammunition in it that she could be easily bounced for it, and the only reason I can't push for that now is because the comments were not in the open like the ones at practice and only learned of by you through the equivalent of a wire tap. If more comes out, let me know. Bring corroboration. I'm willing to file this on your team's behalf once I get more dirt.

Morgan: Thanks, Deacon.

Marc: I know you're being polite and formal and it's your job, but you're Erin's teammate, so you can drop the formality with me.

Morgan: OK, Marc.

Marc: Any idea when my piece will be in the paper?

Morgan: I can't tell you, because then you'll know where you ranked ahead of time.

Marc: Guess that's fair.

Morgan got up and left Marc's office, assured that he would act when he had enough to do so.

**********

Practice for the Thunder this afternoon was a bit different than previous days. After three weeks of
pre-season, Lauren was finally ready to see how her 24 players would do within the confines of an actual scrimmage and to move closer to a set playing rotation and first XII for the match against Ripon on March 6th. It would be the current first-string vs. the reserves with Sarah filling in on the reserves team and the three goalkeepers each getting 40 minutes each (Nicole with the starters, Jane with the reserves, and Steph splitting time between the two teams).

First XII: Nicole; Ali-Sam-Julie-Erin; Morgan B.-Jess-Megan; Sofia-Lindsey-Steph M.-Christen (listed right-to-left)

Reserves: Steph L.; Andi-Emily-Shelley-Sarah; Maggie-Becca-Morgan A.; Kelley-Lauren-Savannah-Kristie

Steph McNamara and Lauren Chandler battled on the opening face-off with the ball popping up and caught by the freshman. She passed it out to Kristie, who dumped the ball back to Becca. Her pass to Kelley was picked off by Megan, who ran the ball quickly down the field then pulled up so her teammates could get into the attacking zone. Megan's pass to Morgan Brooks was chucked onto Sofia, who challenged Sarah and spun inside her before flinging a shot at net that went wide. Andi went back to restart the ball for the reserves, passing it to Steph, who passed it to Morgan Andringa. Her deft feet got her through the middle between Morgan Brooks and Jess, from where she passed the ball onto Lauren for a low-driven shot that got past Nicole. Slightly embarrassed at conceding first, the starters mixed up their attack a bit and pushed Sam out of the back, drew Sofia off the front line, and pressed Morgan Brooks up behind Steph McNamara in a 3-5-3 layout. The addition of Sam to the midfield helped their team take control of the remainder 25 minutes of the half, as they amassed 11 goals on Steph and Jane over that time. Not to be outdone, the reserves were able to put up 4 scores of their own, most coming by way of the counterattack down the left side where Kristie was able to eat up Sofia on the touchline and pull Ali out of her spot in the back three. Lauren picked up two of the goals, Kristie one, and Savannah one. First XII 11, Reserves 5.

As the second half commenced, Steph watched how the starters tended to play in this 3-5-3 set-up and realized the best way of advancing the ball out of her net would be to dump it straight to Sam as her height made her an easy target to hit on the break-out. When she was inserted in the starters’ net, the score was 13-6 in favor of the First XII. Starting off with the ball, she tried the dump-out to Sam, but overshot her and a quickly advancing Becca Curtin scooped up the ball and tore directly for goal, burying her shot underneath Steph's armpit. Jane got pummeled by shots from Christen, Megan, Morgan Brooks, and Steph McNamara. In the end, the starters won, 27-12. Walking off the field, the players discussed their good and bad moments with one another, hoping that a well-earned dinner at Siebert would hit the spot and give a number of them a chance to talk through the scrimmage in greater detail.
Lunch Bunch on Wednesday was heavily-attended as there was much on campus that the various parts of the community wanted to discuss with each other.

Marc (to Liz Edwards): What's on the docket today at the SGA meeting?

Liz: We're planning to pass the expansion of the Student Code of Conduct that has been under consideration since we and the Board of Trustees passed the new one last semester.

Marc: What parts are being expanded?

Liz: The ones that will repeal the so-called Wang Rule.

Julie: Wang Rule?

Marc: That is what the progressive people on campus call the current ban on multi-partner relationships involving male students, that any relationship involving a wang is required to be one-on-one, be it same-sex or opposite-sex.

Alyssa: So I can be with both Kristie and Sam and there's no problem, but replace one of us with a guy and it's no-go?

Marc: Yes. We left that off the table in attempting to get the new code passed by SGA and the Board of Trustees so that Paul wouldn't have me enforce the Social Statements by fiat. The idea was to eventually revisit it when there was a better chance of it passing with no fanfare. I still don't know if this is going to fly. I understand the issue with the double standard and the possible Title IX violation, but can any of you honestly say that there won't be some upheaval if the expansion passes?

Liz: I know the votes are there and that the support for it is spread out. Not much we who might oppose it can do other than block it from coming to the floor.

Marc: Not a bad strategy. Send it back to committee, propose additional legislation that you can combine into an omnibus bill that can be passed by the whole in two or four weeks.

Liz: The proponents want to have this done in time for Valentine's Day, which won't happen if we delay the vote.

Marc: As much as I appreciate their desire, it's just not a good idea to go there now when there is a lot of lower-hanging fruit that can more readily pass your body as well as others if need be.

Sarah: What do you consider lower-hanging fruit?

Marc: Well, for starters the rules that make fraternization forbidden. The main purpose of the policy is to prevent conflicts of interest and relationships with unequal power dynamics, but they're always too broadly written. Relationships between students and staff in the university have been going on since the beginning of time and they'll always happen no matter how much anyone tries to outlaw them. What is needed is a consistent definition of what is permissible and what isn't, since most of the ones currently out-of-bounds shouldn't be.

Liz: You're going to have to explain your line of thinking since I don't seem to see any positives with allowing those types of pairings to be out in the open.
Marc: An example would be if Steph and Dani wanted to get together. On paper, it's a student-athlete and a coach, but they are in separate sports. Same for Alyssa and Sarah or Morgan Brooks and the assistant baseball coach. There should be no rule stopping those from happening if the parties desire to be together. Ben and Megan had to do a very careful dance when they met, but it shouldn't have been an issue since he teaches higher education and supervisory courses while she was a student in early childhood education.

Erin: How far would something like that be able to go?

Marc: There is a limit, like wanting to date the dean of your college or your department chair or the athletic director, but a graduate assistant in your department shouldn't be off-limits if your paths aren't scheduled to cross in the completion of your degree.

Liz: Most of us at SGA know that you're a bit of a wizard with threading holes and pitching policy that can get passed. How would you lay out a means to do this? I really am not in favor of us making that huge jump into the unknown not having a good feel for what the reaction will be.

Marc: It should be relatively simple. When the motion is made to advance the file, you object at the appropriate time, then state your reason, which in this case probably would be something to the extent of desiring to pass a larger bill in the near future instead of piece-meal changes. The chair will allot a certain amount of time for debate, split between yourself and someone in favor of advancing the file. You should have a couple of people already lined up with arguments to back your desire to not take up the file today. Then, it comes down to the vote afterwards. If you make a good argument, you should be able to get the fence-straddlers to go with you. You also will want to introduce the second piece of legislation, which only needs to be a description for the clerk to read, and have it referred to the relevant committee, which should be done by the chair without objection.

Liz: Can I meet with you tomorrow to fill in the blanks on the potential legislation?

Marc: Sure. Faculty Senate meets tomorrow afternoon and if you end up tackling the fraternization piece, it will eventually have to pass them to go on the books. If you have a sponsor or two of the idea, bring them along as well. 10:00 work for you?

Liz: That will be fine. Are you going to be at SGA today?

Marc: No. I have orientation this afternoon off-campus with my new hire for the Urban Coaching Project. I'll read through what happened when I get home afterwards.

Once Lunch Bunch broke up, Steph, Erin, Julie, and Sarah went to Buuck to get ready for practice, Alyssa went out to the Ozaukee Ice Center for hockey practice, Liz went to class, while Marc and Dani left campus for her place in Brown Deer to work on Urban Coaching Project activities and have dinner together.

**********

After a short time of the couple reconnecting with one another, Marc and Dani tackled the backlog of Urban Coaching Project work. Dani went through the emails and responded with the appropriate information as Marc made notes on his downloaded copies of the requests for future reference. The pair then discussed some budgetary items that would need to be handled once actual agreements were signed and materials sent to the licensees, with Marc walking her through the requisite steps to order, distribute, package, and send out the modules. Once the pending information requests were handled, the two of them talked about happenings at the school and in their own lives.

Marc: I heard from Ben that Dawson asked Michelle out on Saturday.
Dani: Yeah. He texted her while she, I, Sarah, and Cali were here having a girls' night in. She's joining him for roller derby on Saturday night because Ben is out of town at a conference.

Marc: I can see her cringe at the sight of all the heavy hits, but that might not be a bad thing if it draws out Dawson's sensitive underside, like when you curl up with someone while watching a scary movie.

Dani: How are things with you and the missus?

Marc: They are what they are. I still don't think she's really interested in next week's proceedings in Philly, but she's being a good trooper about going and doing her part. My biggest worry is how she'll react if we have to do any media requests during our time there. Erin, I, and Alyssa should be no sweat, the other two can shore up Steph if she ends up being nervous, but Danielle is more likely than her to curl up and try to avoid it. Also, I am preparing for a bit of sniping like I've seen and heard from her over the past couple of months.

Dani: Worried at all about something happening back here while you're gone, like previous trips?

Marc: A bit. I almost want to place you in bubble wrap since you've gotten hit with something every time I've been gone, from Erin's attack on you to Lexi accusing you of harassing her to the accusations of me using my office's funds for your benefit. Hopefully that will be a calm week, where Stefan, Julie, and Corey don't have to do TOO much firefighting and I can return to campus the 18th with nothing in the "S.O.S." file. Are you planning to go to the Sock Hop on the 16th?

Dani: Haven't decided. On one hand, it'd be fun for Sarah and I to attend and see our players in a social atmosphere, plus have them see us together as a couple. On the other, it would seem a bit of a fake since I'd want to be there with you and she with Wil. You're the special guest DJ for the night, right?

Marc: Yes, which means I need to work on a song list of 50s and early 60s hits that are suitable. "Grease" will be one place I get some, plus stuff I already have in my Spotify library. I'm planning to talk to my base of older guys about performing something together as well.

Dani: Sarah told me that you met with one of her players on Monday about some scuttlebutt she heard from Sara and Lauren last week. Anything you can share?

Marc: The big thing is some kind of a student-athlete group that fetes alumni in the hopes of securing donations to the athletic department and developing a larger public profile for Trinity.

Dani: Like football and basketball "boosters", which we know is shorthand for coeds that "do whatever it takes" to get recruits to sign with their school?

Marc: That's my thinking. Sara seems to want to over-recruit so she can balance out the 5 or 6 that are part of this group with more "all day every day" athletes. Lauren is looking to redshirt some players to up the cute factor on her team and get them to join up with the soccer women and their endeavors.

Dani: Are you acting on it?

Marc: I filed Morgan's quoting of the two, but without something more substantial, I don't have much to go forth with.

Michelle came home from Maple Dale to Dani and Marc chatting while pulling together a semi-permanent schedule for the former to follow in working for UCP. After dinner, Marc left to head home, giving Dani a peck on the lips and Michelle a hug on his way out.
Results from the SGA meeting: The bill to expand the Student Code of Conduct failed to advance to the floor by a vote of 19-16. Bill 1819-35, a series of amendments to the Student Code of Conduct dealing with fraternization between students and university employees, was forwarded to the Legislation and Rules Committee, which will meet on February 11th to take up the measure.
A Flurry Of Activity

The rest of the week was quite packed with things that needed to be accomplished before Marc and his team would leave on Monday morning for the City of Brotherly Love.

* Marc met with Elizabeth Edwards and a pair of her SGA colleagues (Lee Nugent and Beverly Gordon) on Thursday morning to craft a series of amendments to the anti-fraternization rules in the Student Code of Conduct that would create new standards for what would be considered acceptable forms of partnerships. Examples were laid out from students and instructors at the school that currently would be unable to partner but whose relationship wouldn't necessarily cause a conflict (athletes/coaches in different sports, graduate assistants/students in different departments or whose courses don't intersect, students who got together prior to graduation which was followed by one moving into a hired position at the school), along with a strategy for getting it to pass in committee. Marc implored them to not let this bill get folded into an omnibus offering with the "Wang Rule" repeal, lest it go down to defeat. He said he would try to meet with them on the 18th with some tips for handling the debate on the 20th so it would get the 18 votes to pass and move onto the Faculty Senate for passage at their March 7th meeting.

* The proposals for the addition of a certificate in Practical Ministry along with its course components, the addition of a two-semester coaching seminar within the Physical Education department, and the founding of a Coaching Education Institute at Trinity were made by Tom, Ben, and Marc to the Faculty Senate on Thursday afternoon, with them referred to the relevant committees (Undergraduate Education for the first two, Academic Planning for the last one).

* On Friday morning, Marc met with Wittenberg Hall Director Heather Mitchell and Activities Chair Nikki Steiner to work out some of the logistics for next Saturday night's Sock Hop. He brought to their attention the live song he had planned with Drs. Oliphant, Sinclair, and Moncrief, while Nikki mentioned that a couple of her dorm mates were thinking of doing live songs of their own (one a Buddy Holly hit, the other Chuck Barry).

* Alyssa backstopped the women's hockey team to a pair of wins in Michigan against Adrian College (4-2 and 3-0). While she was away, Kristie and Sam made a road trip to Oshkosh on Saturday to see Amanda and plan a Valentine's weekend surprise for Alyssa following her game on Friday against Trine.

* Erin and Steph had dinner on Friday night with Dani and Cali at Jose's Blue Sombrero. The four of them had a lovely time and Cali saw face-to-face how important the other two had become to her cousin, while Erin got a glimpse of the type of relationship she could hope to have with Dani if she and Marc ever paired up for real.

* National Girls and Women in Sports Day at Trinity attracted close to 300 female athletes from local elementary, middle, and high schools. Following a morning of educational sessions on nutrition, physical conditioning, and careers in sports, the attendees cheered on TLU’s Acro and Tumbling team to an upset win over UW-Whitewater.

* Michelle and Dawson's date at the Brew City Bruisers doubleheader at UWM Panther Arena went reasonably well, with both enjoying themselves and able to maintain a decent conversation with one another despite their nerves and introversion. When Dawson dropped Michelle off at home, she kissed him on the cheek and asked him if he'd be interested in coming over next Saturday night for dinner since Dani would be at the Sock Hop at Trinity with Sarah. Dawson accepted, knowing that his dad and stepmother would be at Trinity that night as well.
A brisk but sunny Monday morning greeted Erin, Steph, and Alyssa on the Trinity campus. The three of them were in the Augsburg lobby at 8am waiting for Marc and Danielle to pick them up en route to Mitchell International Airport for their flight to Philadelphia. Kristie and Sam along with Cali came to see the three of them off, putting in gift requests if the girls felt inclined to bring them back something. The Schmidts arrived close to 8:15 and loaded the three peer ministers' luggage into the trunk of Danielle's car. There was a slight bit of a backup at both the Marquette and Airport interchanges, but they were able to get parked and to ticketing by 9am. While waiting for their flight to be called, Marc gave a pep talk to the students about what was to come.

Marc: I know this is much bigger than the weddings you did with me already. Accept that fact but realize, at its base, this isn't going to be a whole lot different than the one at College Cup or the one at Convention. The crowd will be slightly bigger, the venue a bit more expansive, but the participants aren't going to be any more "stubborn" or "diva-like" than the couples from the first two weddings. Erin and Steph, you've met all of the brides already aside from Sam and Abby, which Alyssa did in Chicago. You know your roles and you've been in environments with the level of scrutiny that will come this week. Alyssa, your hockey experience is going to make this seem like a breeze because you're used to all eyes on you and with high stakes on the table. I know the three of you will want to operate on an equal basis, but I will be relying on Alyssa to sort of keep the calm when and if snafus or unexpected bad things happen.

Danielle: Are we sure that it is going to be six couples on the 14th or might that change?

Marc: Nothing will be for sure until we meet tonight for dinner. There is a three-day waiting period between applying for the license and being able to wed, so whoever is in will have to have gotten it by the end of business Friday if they don't want to be running to the courthouse to get it on the day.

Danielle mulled over this, having a feeling that she MIGHT be able to back out if the combination of Marc and the on-call seminary students were able to manage the ceremony without her.

Erin: Will we have time to hit the city a bit on the days before the wedding?

Marc: It's a tight schedule, but I'm thinking there might be some time today if we don't have any problems with the flight or getting checked-in, along with tomorrow after our meetings with the couples. Wednesday and Thursday are packed and we fly back out on Friday. I really wish I'd be able to get one more day on this trip, but duties back here didn't allow for that to happen. Any places you specifically want to go?

Erin: I'd like to see some of the major attractions, like the Liberty Bell, Independence Hall, Museum of Art.

Marc: We'll see what we can do. No promises, though.

At 10:00, American Airlines flight 4883 for Philadelphia was called. Marc hung back so the other four could get in line in front of him. Boarding was smooth and they found their seats, with Marc and Danielle seated together and Erin, Steph, and Alyssa a row behind them. Once take-off occurred and the plane leveled off, everyone settled in for the 2 hour trip. Marc did some preliminary scripting of the ceremony, along with where he wanted to interject his humor. Danielle knitted to pass the time, while Alyssa worked on crossword puzzles and Erin and Steph napped a bit together. The time flew by and before long the plane was on its descent to Philadelphia International Airport. The group was met at baggage claim by Ali Krieger and Steph Labbe, who told Marc that they had decided to do
their nuptials on New Year's Eve in Vancouver and that the former was sort of managing everything on the brides' end for Thursday's wedding. Marc, Danielle, and Alyssa went to pick up their rental car while Erin and Steph rode with Ali and Steph to Le Meridien, where everyone would meet up and check in.

**********

Upon the suggestion of the Hearts' captain and her fiancee, Marc and the others did a bus sightseeing tour of Philadelphia before meeting with the wedding participants at Maggiano's Little Italy for dinner. After returning to Le Meridien and changing, they walked the handful of blocks to the restaurant, where Morgan Andrews, Sammy Jo Prudhomme, Rhian Wilkinson, and Diana Matheson were already waiting. Kristie and Sam Mewis, plus their fiancees Steph McCaffrey and Abby Dahlkemper, arrived a few minutes later. The 13 of them were quickly seated and the get-to-know-you dinner commenced.

Marc: I know a fair bit about each of your relationships, so I have a good base from which to do my homily. I'm still working a bit on the funnies, so if any of you have good stories that might help me interject something into the ceremony, let us hear them.

Kristie: Steph, Sammy, Abby, and I lived together in the Boston area for a couple of off-seasons. On a couple of occasions, things got a little dicey when it came to one of us walking in on the other couple in dare I say a compromising position. Once was when Steph and Sam came home after a night out and my darling bride ended up in bed with Abby. Another time was when Steph walked in on Sam and Abby having an early morning more-than-cuddle because she wanted to rouse the two of them for our planned brunch outing.

Marc: I think I can do something with one or both of those. Not sure what the punchline might be, but there is enough in those stories to come up with one.

Rhian: As you know, Marc, Diana likes to make fun of my being overly serious, how I can't dance, can't sing, can't have fun. We were at training camp in Vancouver during the run-up to the Rio Games and Karina Leblanc decided to pick up a number of us for training, mainly so she could play Carpool Karaoke. Tanc and KK are all-in while I'm just humming along per normal. When P!nk's "Just Give Me A Reason" came on, D decided to sing the lyrics to both me and Sinc, looking for a response. She got more or less nothing from Christine, but I had to laugh and smile at her because it was one of those things that made me realize how much I was pining over her. Still took me over a year and the reality of her being picked up by the Hearts to actually tell her that, but it was what started the process that has us here now, three days away from getting married.

Marc: I have a lot of material on the two of you, because I've been a huge fan of Diana's for most if not all of her Canadian National Team career and have watched the way you and her interact on and off the field. I do have a little jab for her, but it will be quite funny.

Steph L.: I'm not as much of a straightperson as Rhian, and Erin isn't as funny as you, Diana, but I hope we're still in that "can't live without you" stage when we get to your ages.

Diana: As much as you might want to force it, you can't. What's grown between Rhi and myself came from trials and troubles and believing the worst about yourself only to be lifted up by someone who believes the best about you. Like everything, you have to stretch yourself and get uncomfortable to find out whether you have that kind of staying power.

Dinner wrapped up and the group split up, as Marc and his entourage went back to Le Meridien with Rhian and Diana. After a fair bit of ribbing, the two Canadians went to their room while Marc went to his in order to line up the schedule for tomorrow with the interested parties and scan over what the
other members of his squad sent to Lauren Green at the Hearts.
Ever the early-riser, Erin had left the hotel to grab a spot of breakfast at McDonald's down the block. While eating and checking up on life back at Trinity, she was spotted by Lauren Green, the Philadelphia Hearts' communications director. Lauren sat down and joined Erin at her booth.

Lauren: Interesting that you're out of the hotel on your own.

Erin: The only other person in our group who is a morning person is Marc, and with Danielle here, his propensity to get-up-and-go sort of gets killed.

Lauren: I wanted to follow up with you on a couple of your answers to my questionnaire. First, you said that you're along pretty much to keep Marc and Danielle from killing each other by the end of the week. Explain what you mean.

Erin: You could not find two more opposite individuals to officiate Thursday's Marriagepalooza. Both are well-respected for their one-on-one skills, but beyond that it's night and day. As you know, Marc is a bit of a ham. He's also quite sure of himself, almost to the point of arrogant but not quite. He loves what his past lives have allowed him to do, and enjoys the opportunities to be "bigger" than the chaplaincy at times allows for him. Danielle is quiet and thoughtful, doesn't seek out the spotlight, isn't a fan of the big to-do, and I'm sure is hoping to lie low this week and do her part when the time comes. How I have to balance them is to remind Marc that Danielle isn't the 100-miles-an-hour go-go-go type who can feed off others' energy to push her out of her introversion, while letting Danielle know that Marc needs bodies around him to do his best thinking and his best work.

Lauren: This will be the second wedding that you and Steph have done together, and the first one either of you will have done with Alyssa or Danielle. Any worries about stepping on one another's feet in your various roles, either today in the individual meetings, tomorrow in the run-through, or on the day itself?

Erin: Marc spent a fair amount of time with us last Sunday spelling out what each person would be handling and to which couple they would be the primary liaison. Steph, Alyssa, and I already have some experience working together in a ministry setting and I believe can effectively manage the spaces where we might overlap or cross over with one another. The three of us also have had to unexpectedly step up at the weddings we've done to make sure they went as designed.

Lauren: I think that covers what I wanted to know. I'll let you finish up your breakfast while I move over to Le Meridien to get some tidbits from the four couples and Ali. Marc is meeting with Wendy and myself at Molly Malloy's at Noon, where I'll inquire more about his plan for Thursday and we'll lay out what we're planning for Wednesday night in lieu of a traditional rehearsal dinner.

Lauren left and Erin went back to her news perusal while finishing off her orange juice and breakfast burritos.

**********

The first couple to meet with Marc and his team was Kristie and Steph. As the main orchestrator for the Valentine's Day festivities, it made sense for Kristie and her bride to be the ones to lay down the first few elements of the ceremony, upon which her sister and future sister-in-law would embellish. The pair decided not to go with witnesses as their most likely choices were Sam and Abby, who would also be marrying on the day. When asked where in the procession or the order of declarations they wished to be, Steph said that her preference was to be third of the four, as their decision to
marry on the 14th was made after Morgan and Sammy Jo and Rhian and Diana and thus they deserved the earlier posts. Ali and Kristie gave Marc and the others a rundown of plans for the reception as well as their preliminary design for a processional that would be tried tomorrow during the rehearsal.

Up next were Sam and Abby. They both said they had asked individuals to stand alongside them (Lindsey Horan for Sam and Caprice Dydasco for Abby) and were comfortable with the service they had seen in their short meeting with Marc in Chicago. He informed them that they would be up fourth of the four since Kristie and Steph had set the order during their meeting earlier in the morning, which seemed amenable to the pair.

Upon completion of their second meeting of the day, Marc informed the rest of the team that he was meeting with Wendy Gebauer Palladino and Lauren Green from the Hearts at Reading Terminal Market for lunch and a follow-up interview with them for the website. The others chose to wander over to Chinatown for their lunch time feasting.

**********

Lauren: Marc, Thursday will be the fourth wedding you've performed involving current NWSL players in the span of four months. How have you become the go-to person for marrying female athletes?

Marc: It started by Elysa Friedman, head of the NWSL Players Union, posting my information on the locker room wall at FC Kansas City. Two came that way, while word-of-mouth from her to Wendy's husband Bill, one of her former coaches at North Carolina, led to being asked to do Becca and EJ's in North Carolina and the multiple couple one here on Thursday. My reputation for being an ally, my experience in the women's soccer world, and the transient life of the professional athlete sort of combined to put me in this position.

Lauren: This will be the third wedding of yours that I'm attending, and it seems as though you have a mini-entourage with you at them. Can you clarify about that since it seems a little odd that you would need additional bodies for a single-couple wedding?

Marc: The first wedding I did was solo. When I submitted my itinerary for the second one, the bishop of my synod noticed that I was planning to do that one solo as well. He became concerned that outsiders might argue that I was deliberately choosing to do these gigs alone so I could engage in inappropriate conduct. Therefore, I am required to have at least one person associated either with Trinity or the synod with me on these trips. Am I happy about it? Not in the least. For me, weddings are work and not the fun-and-games others might wish to believe. I take my role as officiant seriously and, as such, do not wish to be entertaining or checking up on others during that time frame.

Wendy: What I saw at Becca and EJ's wedding was you making the best of the hand you were dealt, bringing along a group of individuals that not only could perform the tasks but were able to watch your back if something negative came about. I'm presuming you have a similar group with you for this week.

Marc: Yes. Steph and Erin are with me, along with my top peer minister from Trinity and my wife who is a synodical deacon in the ELCA and will be performing Morgan and Sammy Jo's portion of the ceremony.

Lauren: What can people expect to see on Thursday in LOVE Park?

Marc: I hope they will see four couples whose members are deeply in love with one another taking that next step in their relationships by becoming wife and wife. I hope that the love exhibited by and
for each other will radiate from the eight women that will stand in front of me and Danielle. Lastly, I hope that they will see the normalcy of the occasion, that the advances we have made as a society make the sight of two women exchanging vows amidst all the traditional trappings of a wedding a fact of life and not something that should start the social activists staking out their talking points on the matter. You can also expect to laugh at least once or twice and for me to use some pop culture references in my message.

Lauren: Last question. I know that a couple of our team's duos have pushed off doing their nuptials until later in 2019. Have either one of them asked you to officiate?

Marc: Neither one has, but I would gladly accept if either does.

Wendy: With the schedule for this event somewhat different from that of most weddings, and it involving four couples, two of which are members of the Hearts along with half of a third, I thought that the club could host something akin to a rehearsal dinner, but more laid-back and open to a broader segment of the attendees than the traditional guest list. My idea is that we will spotlight Philly cuisine through the menu chosen for the evening.

Marc: Philly cuisine, as in Cheesesteak, Water Ice, TastyKakes, the pork sandwich with broccoli rabe?

Wendy: There's more to it than just those, but I'm impressed you know about ones aside from Cheesesteak.

Marc: The Philly "Man vs. Food" episode was a wonderful primer on eating in this city. Before I head back to the hotel, I need to try Bassett's and see if the extra milk fat makes it as good as claimed.

Lauren: I take it you're a bit enthused by this idea?

Marc: Definitely. I'd been wondering how with the tight schedule we have I'd be able to hit Pat's, Geno's, and the Franklin Fountain before going back on Friday. After the run-through tomorrow, we have a tour of United Lutheran Seminary planned since two of our students are pre-candidacy and should become familiar with where they might consider doing their future theological studies. What time are you planning for this, and where?

Wendy: 6:00, and at Le Meridien since everyone is already there.

Marc: I'm wondering if I should keep this as a surprise or tell the women about it.

Wendy: You might want to let them know something is scheduled so they don't end up making alternate plans for dinner tomorrow.

Marc: True.

Marc shook hands with the two women from the Hearts, then stopped by Bassett's Ice Cream for a two-scoop dish of Butterscotch Vanilla ice cream before returning to the hotel.

**********

The two afternoon meetings went smoothly, with each couple deciding on single attendants (Rhian and Diana's sisters, Becca Proctor for Morgan, EJ Proctor for Sammy Jo) and coughing up some interesting tidbits about their future wives. Things wrapped up by 4:30, allowing Erin, Steph, and Alyssa to use the rest of the evening to catch up with their teammates and loved ones back in Milwaukee while Marc worked on his message for Thursday and Danielle played games on her laptop.
Marc woke up on Wednesday morning to a handful of forwarded messages from Erin, Steph, and Alyssa along with one from Sarah Hawthorne and one from Julie Jacobsen.

StephLafleur: FWD LaurenNC12: Coach went off again during practice today. Ended up throwing Steph Mac out of practice after the two got into a shouting match over an insult about her concentrating more on getting into Kristie and Sam's pants instead of training.

EDMatheson17: FWD CurtinsUp: Lauren got to bashing Savs again about not being more vocal. Also sent Sofia into a small attack after practice by telling her that "college players won't take it easy on you just because your head is all jumbled."

AlyssaNorman: FWD SammyMueller: Things are out of control with our coach. Attacked Steph Mac, then threw her out of practice when she responded. Mouthed off about Erin and Steph missing a whole week of training because "the precious little chaplain needed them to stroke his ego and go to Philly with him."

CoachHawthorne: Where do I file a complaint against a fellow employee? Lauren has been verbally abusive toward several of the players recently and has voiced certain attitudes that don't fall in line with the new codes.

Julie8Jacobsen: Nothing too frantic here at home other than the impending meltdown of our lacrosse coach. The players are close to a revolt and we'd like a bit of guidance on how to proceed.

After reading them, he drafted a group response.

DeaconMarc: Let's meet on Monday morning in my office, probably a rolling meeting 10am-12pm, stop in when you can. Pass the word to everyone you think would like a voice in this. Based on other conversations I've had recently, going through the campus chain might not be effective in resolving this. Sarah, maybe take this up with Paul at lunch since he's presiding at Worship today in my absence.

Hearing him typing fast and furious on his phone, Danielle woke up and asked him what was up.

Marc: The women's lacrosse coach has been going over the line with her players in terms of insults and verbal abuse. Erin, Steph, and Alyssa sent me messages they received from players, plus I got ones from the assistant coach and Julie. Wrote them a response saying that we'll meet on Monday to see what can be done, and asked Sarah to take it up with Paul since the actions violate the Social Statements. Don't want to be dealing with this when there is SO much on the agenda for today, but I guess I'm glad it came overnight so I could respond before any of today's action started.

**********

LOVE Park was mostly vacant when everyone associated with the wedding arrived at 11am. Ali got the brides and their attendants in line on the path into the park from 15th and Arch, with Marc pacing out what he would consider an appropriate length of time to get from A to B. The processional run-through went smooth, with the four couples now in front of Marc at the LOVE statue. He went through the ceremony in parts, with the humor inserted at the chosen spots. After Marc's announcement of the declaration of intent, the couples turned to face one another, with Danielle reciting the vows for Morgan and Sammy Jo, followed by Marc doing it for Rhian and Diana, Kristie and Steph, and Sam and Abby. From there, Rhian and Diana said additional vows with Danielle.
translating Rhian's from French, then Kristie and Steph did their personal ones. Marc brought the rehearsal to a conclusion, ending it with a recessional that would exit the park and enter Le Meridien following the ceremony. The group walked back into the park and went through the day-of schedule, with Marc asking Kristie about getting some level of traffic direction for the 20 minutes before and after the ceremony. She told him that Wendy had contracted with the Philadelphia Police Department to have members of the 9th District manage the corners of 15th and JFK Boulevard and 16th and JFK Boulevard, with Arch closed between 14th and 17th, from 10:30am to 12:30pm. Pleased with that, and with how things went, Marc wrapped up rehearsal and said he'd see everyone again at 6 at the hotel.

While walking out of the park, Marc was intercepted by Katy Zoble from WCAU 10, Philadelphia's NBC station. She told him that the anchors of the 11am news telecast had seen some activity in Love Park and wondered if it was related to the Hearts' wedding gala tomorrow morning. He confirmed that it was, which led to being asked if he would be willing to do an interview for tomorrow morning's early morning news. He initially declined due to the team's schedule for the rest of the day, but relented when she said that it could be done at the hotel after everything was completed for the day. After a little bit of haggling, he agreed to an 8pm sit-down with someone from WCAU, which she said she would confirm via text after returning to the station.

**********

Despite it being really too early in the process for Alyssa, Steph, or Erin to begin looking at seminaries, they went through with the tour at United Lutheran Seminary while Marc and Danielle met with tomorrow's two on-call seminarians (Ben Krebs and Jacqui Neuhaus). The four of them went over the service and how things would proceed prior to the ceremony. Comfortable with their roles and Marc's expectations for the two of them, Ben and Jacqui confirmed their participation and were told by him which vestments to bring to Le Meridien tomorrow morning.

While on the tour, the three students quizzed their guide, Director of Graduate Studies Allison Dettloff, about seminary and the various pathways to the roster they might take.

Steph: I have been talking with our chaplain about finding a seminary where I'd be able to get the theological education I would need to be consecrated as a Churchwide Diaconal Minister as well as take courses toward an MA in sport administration for future employment at one of the ELCA's colleges or universities in athletics or chaplaincy. Do any of the universities near ULS offer that degree or its equivalent?

Allison: Temple and Drexel both have Master's programs in Sport Management, and there are countless universities where you can do the degree online.

Steph: I'm actually looking for one super-sized degree that would cover both ends, the theological base and a concentration in administration for vocational use.

Allison: We'd probably have to sit down and line up the two programs you'd be pursuing to put something like that together.

Erin: I'm not sure if seminary is in my future. I am a business major currently and don't really see how theological education would make me more marketable or provide a platform for career advancement.

Allison: Our Master of Arts in Public Leadership is designed for people who might enter faith-based non-profit agencies or organizations. Sounds like that would be a possible fit for you.

Alyssa: As the only one of us who is targeting the pastorate, what would make ULS a better choice
for me than, say LTSC or another seminary?

Allison: I'm not sure I can answer that. Every seminary has its advantages and disadvantages. Here, your coursework would emphasize urban ministry and the underserved in the church. At Gettysburg, it would be the rural parish. Chicago tends to send out traditional parish pastors and those who will seek additional academic work for entrance to the professoriate.

When the three women and their guide returned to the Brossman Center, they were greeted by Marc and Danielle, waiting on their charges so they could return to Center City and change for tonight's dinner party at the hotel. Marc used the time on the road to check his texts and emails. Sarah filled him in on her conversation with Paul Emerson concerning Lauren's behavior and whether there was any course of action that could be taken at the synod level. Katy Zoble confirmed that Rosemary Cotterill would be handling the interview this evening with him and his team. He informed the rest of the group about the interview, which got a mixed reaction.

**********

Wendy Gebauer Palladino clinked her glass to get the attention of those gathered in the Trumbauer Ballroom at Le Merdien.

Wendy: I'd like to welcome everyone to tonight's pre-wedding get-together. With today's schedule and the number of participants in tomorrow's event, it made more sense to me to have the club host something big but less-stuffy than the traditional rehearsal dinner. In keeping with the overall theme that the brides have laid out, tonight's menu is a smorgasbord of traditional Philadelphia favorites. Before I set all of you loose to attack the food, I would like to make a toast. To the eight of you getting married tomorrow, may your love pull you through the difficult times and may you never forget why you have chosen your soon-to-be wives.

With that, the serving stations were ready to dispense their culinary delights. Marc went first of his group and got two mini-cheesesteaks (one from Pat's, one from Geno's), a slice of Tomato Pie, a slice of stromboli, and a portion of a soft pretzel. Steph copied Marc, while Alyssa bypassed the cheesesteaks for an Italian roast pork sandwich. Danielle got one as well and asked for extra broccoli rabe. Being a little cautious, Erin got a Geno's cheesesteak and a slice of stromboli.

When they got back to their table, they noticed that the other five seats had been taken. After a couple of minutes, the remainder of their dining partners showed up (Hearts Morgan Reid and Emily Sonnett, former Heart Jen Hoy, her girlfriend Danielle Colaprico, and Morgan's boyfriend Michael Bridges).

Marc: Michael, how is your semester at Jefferson going thus far?

Michael: Toughest of the four yet, but I'm up to the challenge.

Erin: You and Morgan have been together about a year now, right?

Morgan: It will be ten months tomorrow, counting from our first official date.

Steph: That's always a tough thing to determine, when you officially start seeing each other. Erin and I more or less got together our first day on campus almost six months ago, but I don't think either of us count that as the starting date.

Emily: That sounds similar to Lindsey and I. No real start date since things just evolved from us meeting for the first time just before preseason training in 2016 to where we were "together".

Jen: Danny and I can definitely pinpoint when we started as a pair. December 16, 2017 after we
went to dinner at her favorite restaurant in Jersey. We'd played together for three seasons with the Red Stars, plus one winter in Australia, before she was traded to Sky Blue and I went to the Hearts in the expansion draft. We started talking about spending more time together since we'd be so close geographically, but not until then was there any romantic about it.

Alyssa: Tomorrow I think is Kristie and I's five-month anniversary.

Erin: Counting from the Bayshore night where she asked if you could begin seeing each other?

Alyssa: Yes. At least, I THINK I have the date right.

Erin went back up to get a slice of the Tomato Pie and then onward to get a serving of Raspberry water ice. When she returned, Marc left to investigate the desserts, settling on a scoop of chocolate ice cream from the Franklin Fountain and a package of TastyKakes Swirly Cups. Steph, Alyssa, and Danielle left the table to indulge their sweet tooths with some ice cream, water ice, and TastyKakes. Around 7:45, Marc got a text from Rosemary Cotterill at WCAU 10 saying that she was on her way to the hotel and asked where they wanted to hold the interview. Marc replied and told her that the Abele Library on the third floor (same floor as Trumbauer Ballroom) would work and that they'd be waiting for her and her photojournalist there.
A Celebration of Love

Valentine's Day has arrived and Marc, ever the early bird, was awake and watching the WCAU 10 morning news prior to The Today Show starting at 7am. Following the weather and traffic reports, the interview from last night aired. While watching it, Marc noticed something off with Danielle, that she was oddly fatigued and was having trouble keeping her eyes focused on the current speaker. He decided he'd ask her about it when she awoke. After the interview aired, the anchors sent the broadcast to a live shot in Love Park, where reporter Katy Zoble was giving viewers a run-through of how the ceremony would proceed, walking along the path from 15th and Arch into the large plaza space and down to the fountain, with the LOVE statue in front of it. She then gave a quick synopsis of the who, what, and where, then sent it back to the studio, where it was mentioned that they hoped to air a couple of minutes of the ceremony during the 11am news. Marc took in all this information and began to feel a bit heavy-chested. Hearing the uneven breathing from her husband, Danielle woke up and looked at him.

Danielle: What's up, Marc?

Marc: I was watching the news on the NBC station here and they had one of their reporters on the plaza already plus mentioned the possibility of airing a portion of the ceremony during their 11am news broadcast. Just getting a bit nervous, that's all.

Danielle: This is what you wanted, right? To be front-and-center conducting this larger-than-life event. NOW you see why I don't like the publicity? Once you open yourself up to a little bit of it, the monster can't be quenched. OWWWW......

Marc: You OK?

Danielle: Got a bit of a headache this morning. Probably due to eye strain from driving in the rain and dark yesterday and the longer-than-expected night due to the interview. I'm not sure I will be able to do my part today. One of the seminarians can step in and handle the brief portion necessary to legalize Morgan and Sammy Jo's marriage. Hopefully, this will go away soon and I will be in good enough condition to attend the reception.

Marc: I noticed something while watching the interview, that you were more fatigued than normal and that you had trouble focusing on others when they were speaking.

Danielle: Yeah, and both are probably because of the combination of the long day and the eyes being a bit buggy. I seriously need to get in to see my ophthalmologist and find out if I need a new prescription or if my diabetes is starting to affect my eyesight.

Marc: Maybe call and get an appointment for next week while it's on your mind.

Danielle: Good idea. I'll do that while you're gone at Love Park.

Marc gave his wife a peck on the forehead and got up to change in preparation for an 8am meeting between the team and the couples and their entourages.

**********

Marc: Seeing that everyone is here that should be, I will get started. This will be the last time we'll see one another until you're standing before me on JFK Plaza. Remember that this is supposed to be fun, even though it is a serious event. Don't over stress about what you'll say or whether you remember everything in the right order. If you hit a wrong note, improvise. We will have to do a little
bit of that today. Danielle is laid-up with a headache brought on by eye strain and fatigue from yesterday. I have two seminarians on-call for today, so one of them will step in for her. As for translating Rhian's vows into English, does anyone know French well enough to do it?

Steph Lafleur: My father was born in Montreal and grew up bilingual. He didn't pass along everything he knew to me, but I can read it well enough and can speak it to the point where I'm not embarrassed when trying to make conversation with some of our relatives from Quebec. As for translating, I'm not sure I can think and speak fast enough to do it without the words in front of me.

Rhian: I can get you a copy of my vows, in both English and French, so you'll have the translation in front of you.

Steph: Thanks. I'll follow you back to your room following this and get it from you.

Marc: With that out of the way, one small warning. WCAU is planning to show some portion of the ceremony live during its 11 am newscast. My hope is that it will be done unobtrusively, to where none of us know when it's happening. On that note, enjoy these next couple of hours as you prepare for having your lives changed a bit and the pomp and circumstance of the moment. I, Alyssa, and our substitute officiant plan to be on the plaza around 10am, with Erin and Steph here at the hotel waiting to escort you over when everyone is ready. They will stand front and back of you until the time for the processional to start, then they will flank the final pair.

As the group broke up, Ali asked Marc for a minute of his time.

Marc: Sure, Ali. What's on your mind?

Ali: Steph and I were wondering if you'd be willing to do our New Year's Eve wedding in Vancouver.

Marc: You must have read Lauren's follow-up interview with me, where I said that neither of the other engaged couples had asked me yet, but that I'd be honored to do it if they did.

Ali: Yes. Having seen how Becca and EJ's wedding went, and now seeing up close how this one has come together, I know that I'd like you handling ours.

Marc: I feel like I know Steph pretty well since we both struggle with anxiety and depression, and seeing how you have been the perfect partner for her as she lives with it. I also have seen your transformation from the reticent woman who wanted to keep that part of her identity hidden to a very out-front advocate for your relationship and those of others. This WILL be during semester break, so I don't know who will be available to come with me for it.

Ali: So is that a yes?

Marc: Yes, that's a yes.

Marc left to return to his room to get his garment bag with the alb, dalmatic, and appropriate sashes and cinctures to take over to Alyssa's room, where the staff would meet, robe up, and go through final instructions and order of service. Danielle had sat up and was trying her best to follow the discussion happening on The Today Show. She told Marc that the local news anchors were pushing hard about having live coverage of the ceremony at 11, which made him just a little more nervous. He took a few deep breaths, then went to shower and get dressed before going to Alyssa's room and meeting with the rest of his staff.
Ben and Jacqui texted Marc when they arrived at Le Meridien and were directed by him to come up to Alyssa's room with their vestments. A couple of minutes later, they showed up and were led in by Steph. Marc did introductions among the seminarians and his students, then got down to business while everyone was vesting up.

Marc (to Ben and Jacqui): As I told the other three, Danielle is out for today with some head and eye trouble. We're hoping that laying low this morning will allow her to be able to attend the reception in the afternoon. With that said, I would like Jacqui to replace her in handling Morgan and Sammy Jo's vows and signing the license. Ben, given your connections to ULS and the Lutheran community of Philadelphia, I'll seriously recommend you take the next Hearts wedding that pops up.

Ben: That is quite kind of you. How do you know about my ties to the area?

Marc: We crossed paths many moons ago through Lutheran Student Movement. Your uncle used to be President of LTSP, right? (Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, which merged with LTS at Gettysburg to form United Lutheran Seminary)

Ben: Yes. LSM would have been, what, 15 years ago maybe?

Marc: Something like that.

Another knock came at the door, which Erin answered. Seeing that it was Lauren Green, Marc waved her in.

Lauren: I've gotten some details from the brides getting ready, so I thought it'd be cool to size up the opposition if you will.

Marc: Well, all you're gonna see is us robing up. All of us will have albs and cinctures, with me wearing a diagonal stole across the alb from left shoulder to right hip, a dalmatic over it, and my Flavor Flav-like crucifix in between. It was a gift from a friend of mine based on Erin's suggestion.

Lauren: It certainly fits you, Marc. Are the rest of you ready?

Jacqui Neuhaus: Being that I found out maybe 10 minutes ago that I would be filling in for Deacon Schmidt's wife, I guess I'm as ready as I can be.

Alyssa: Marc has gone over all the details with us and the brides, so now it's going out and performing.

Marc: Very similar to a game. All the training is done, the tactics are decided, so you go out and give your best on the field.

Lauren: I'll let you get back to "zoning in" on the task at hand. One warning: I saw Katy Zoble from WCAU wandering the halls.

Marc took one deep breath, then another, and another, but things in his mind started to spin and he couldn't stop the thoughts from taking over. He sat down, put his head into his hands, and shook. Noticing this, his three students came over, with Erin behind him, Steph on his right, and Alyssa on his left. Erin rubbed his shoulders and neck, while Steph talked him through some reframing of what is stressing him and Alyssa gave him a bit of pastoral care through encouragement.

Marc: Thanks, girls. Everything was great until I started hearing more and more about how this is going to be SO public. It's not going to be just those in attendance, or maybe a video shared with far-off family and friends, but possibly large swaths of the city and beyond will see this. I'm worried that I'll make some serious flub and then it's there for all posterity and ends up on YouTube or Instagram
and I won't be able to live down the mistake.

Erin: Papi, you've got this! Remember that you did what was probably the biggest athlete wedding in the past handful of years less than a month ago. Alyssa was there with you for it, and she's here now for this one. Steph and I supported you in an even tougher spot with getting you and Dani together after the reception in North Carolina. The two of us will have everything pre-game set up to run to order. All you have to do is be the you we all love and respect.

Marc leaned his head back and kissed his goddaughter on the chin. "Thanks, Er-bear!"

Steph: I thought I was the only one who called her that!

Marc: Not exactly. Jim and I do it on occasion. I guess it will probably help my nerves to get into the arena and take it in. Alyssa, Jacqui, let's roll. I'll get you set up once we're there and we can run through the exchanges from one of us to another. Erin, Steph, you're in charge of the rest of this until the four couples are front-and-center.

Marc, Alyssa, and Jacqui finished vesting up and then left for JFK Plaza.

**********

Marc: Dearly beloved, we are gathered here on this most romantic of all days to join these eight women in the bonds of holy matrimony. Taking this step in such a public manner, before all those here in person and watching on WCAU’s Internet stream, is quite remarkable. Speaking of steps, I think one of you needs a bit of one.

Marc placed down the step stool that Steph Labbe brought him in front of Diana for her to get a slight boost in getting closer in height to Rhian.

Marc: I should remind all of you that marriage is a wonderful institution...

Brides: And those who practice it belong in one!

Marc: Hey! NO stealing the punchline! Anyways, if it is your intent to bind yourselves to your partners in wedlock, please turn, face one another, and repeat after us.

Jacqui (to Morgan): I, Morgan, take you Samantha, to be my lawfully wedded wife. For richer or poorer, for better or worse, in sickness and in health, forsaking all others as long as we two shall live.

Sammy Jo repeated Jacqui's words, then Marc had Rhian and Diana exchange vows, followed by Kristie and Steph and Sam and Abby. Before moving onto personalized vows and the remainder of the ceremony, Marc gave a short message on how the path to the altar isn't a straight line on a smooth road, but very much a uphill climb over rocky terrain, where at times one has to stop and rest before going onward, giving examples from the relationships of the women in front of him to emphasize his points.

Marc: If any of you have personal vows you wish to make, please do so at the current time, starting from my far right.

Rhian: Ma chère Diana, combien de temps j'ai attendu ce jour pour arriver. Quand nous nous sommes rencontrés en tant qu'adolescents, je ne savais pas que je viendrais à vous aimer de tout mon cœur et de tout mon être. Il nous a fallu longtemps pour que nous soyons tous les deux au point où nous nous rendions compte à quel point nous étions parfaits l'un pour l'autre et à quel point nous ne devions pas agir plus tôt. Je promets, pour le reste de mes jours, de ne jamais cesser de te faire savoir à quel point tu me fais plaisir, combien je t'aime, et que je ne trouverai jamais quelqu'un d'autre qui
me complète comme toi, même si tu n'es pas aussi drôle que vous le pensez.

Steph Lafleur: My dearest Diana, how long I have waited for this day to arrive. When we met as teenagers, little did I know that I would come to love you with all of my heart and every ounce of my being. It took a long time for us to both be at the point where we realized how perfect we were for each other and how dumb we were not to act upon it sooner. I promise, for the rest of my days, to never cease in letting you know how happy you make me, how much I love you, and that I will never find someone else who completes me like you do, even if you're not as funny as you think you are.

Diana wiped a few tears from her eyes, then expressed her feelings and promises to Rhian. "Rhi, we've been through a lot together, as teammates, as friends, and now as partners. We've spent almost half of our lives in some form of relationship with each other, and now are creating the most intimate one two people can have. My heart has always loved you, though it didn't realize how much until the possibility of being half a continent away from you again stared me in the face. I adore you, I support you, and I love you with everything I am and have. Thank you for waiting for me."

Rings were exchanged by the couples, then Marc made the proclamation and gave them license to seal the pacts. After a few hoots and hollers, he sent them forth into married life and followed out the wedding party with his assistants in tow.
After everyone returned to Le Meridien, some went to change into clothes better suited to the indoors. The reception put on by the four couples was lovely, with all the traditional trappings (first dance, speeches, tossing of the bouquets). At a lull in the proceedings, Marc and Michael spoke for a few minutes.

Marc: Michael, how much have you studied thus far about conditions and their outward effects on individuals?

Michael: Some, as we get a bit of that in most of our courses at Jefferson. What are you looking for?

Marc: Danielle has had a major change in personality over the past three months or so, where when I am with our inner circle, be it at home or elsewhere, it's as though she has no filter and will let whatever she's thinking come out, especially as it relates to my faults. Around others, it doesn't seem to happen, just when we're with family or like-family, such as Erin, Steph, and their parents.

Michael: I noticed something last night while we were talking, that she seemed disturbed if you will about the attention you receive and how others act in proximity to you.

Marc: I saw something in the interview we did last night where she wasn't able to maintain focus on who was speaking and was unusually fatigued. She claimed it was eye strain from yesterday's driving to and from ULS in the rain and dark, combined with the long day of meetings and events, but I'm not really sure since the behavioral stuff has been there a lot longer than this.

Michael: Let me talk to her for a few minutes, just regular conversation, and see if I notice anything similar to last night or what you just described. I'll also pull up the interview on my phone and confirm what you mentioned.

Marc: Thanks.

Michael left the ballroom temporarily to watch the aforementioned clip from WCAU's website, focusing on Danielle and her reactions/responses. He returned after a few minutes and saw her speaking with Morgan, Erin, and Steph. He joined the conversation and asked Danielle a couple of questions about her combination of lab work and chaplaincy at the VA, giving her a chance to share about her work. Erin and Steph moved on to talk with Ali, who told them that Marc had agreed to do her and Steph's wedding and that she hoped the two of them would be along as his assistants. Marc came over after a short interchange with Bob Mewis, Keith Wilkinson, and Bill Palladino and caught up on the conversation between Morgan, Michael, and Danielle. EJ and Becca yanked Morgan off to the ladies' room for a bit of gab, leaving the other three.

Michael: Danielle, are you seeing OK as I'm noticing a bit of squinting even though you have glasses?

Danielle: I've been delaying getting to see an eye doctor, so it could be the onset of diabetic retinopathy or just a need for a stronger prescription.

Michael: Any blurriness?

Danielle: Not really. They just seem heavy, especially my right one. I've been compensating with the left, but that is now starting to be a problem since it's creating a bit of distortion when I look straight ahead with both.
Michael: Any other problems. Marc said you had a bit of a headache this morning.

Danielle: True. Chalking that up to the eye issues. I called and got an appointment for next Thursday, so hopefully this will be resolved shortly.

Erin and Steph came back to Danielle and Marc, then told her that they needed to talk to her briefly. After the three of them were out of earshot, Michael gave Marc his opinion. "The eye stuff could be what she mentioned, but it doesn't jibe with the personality change you've described. My feeling is that upon seeing the ophthalmologist, he or she will refer her for a CT or MRI since the combination of things won't add up. I'm telling you that as just a hunch, but it's something you might want to keep in the back of your mind."

Marc: Thanks, Michael.

When the three women returned, they told Marc that they were planning to grab Alyssa and head out of the hotel for dinner somewhere nearby. Marc said farewell to Michael, then did a quick breeze-by of the newly-married couples before leaving with his wife and two pseudo-daughters.

**********

Over dinner at Tir na nOg, the group did a debriefing of their four-day adventure in Philadelphia and turned the page toward the reality of returning to Milwaukee tomorrow.

Alyssa: If I may go first, I think this week was just too jammed with stuff. I know that we had a limited amount of time to work with, but if this event had been closer geographically, it's possible that we'd have been able to chip away at some of the planning from our side over the three months or so since the four of us were brought on board, Marc. Maybe a couple of random trips to meet with one or two couples.

Erin: Compared to Becca and EJ's, this wedding just seemed too big to do well. Fortunately, the media aspect of it didn't overshadow the ceremony, but like Alyssa said, there was too much to resolve in too little time once we got here.

Danielle: As much as I'd like to say "I told you so", Marc, the truth is that you got yourself into a bit of a mess here by 1) refusing to say no when first offered, then 2) not limiting the size of it when you had a chance, and 3) letting your ego get away with you when people added more things to your plate after we arrived.

Marc let Danielle's comment go in one ear and out the other, as her lack of filter had come out again.

Steph: I guess I'm the only one of the four of us that thinks it went well. It was fast-paced, but that also meant we wouldn't be dealing with the on-and-on trail of work. Marc planned from his side as best as possible given the circumstances and tried to keep everyone on point and their spirits up when the stress and weight of the occasion began to rear its head. My only suggestion for how this could have been done better, and it's something to remember in the future, is to have contacted the local synod right after getting the offer and tried to coordinate additional bodies from here to deal with a lot of the nuts-and-bolts so that, when we arrived, our focus was entirely on the individual touches and modifications.

Danielle: I had told Marc a couple of months ago to reach out and get someone from the synod office to be a liaison between him and the couples. He turned that down straight-away because it would have meant him losing control of the day. That's why he asked me to co-officiate and then lined up seminarians to be on-call if needed. It wasn't enough for him to have been asked by the couples to officiate and to have the honor of being involved in this wedding, he had to preside over it, which
wouldn't have happened if he was not the highest-ranked of the officiants.

Marc chose not to debate this point and add fuel to the fire of her mini-rant. "With this now done and dusted, it's back to real life at Trinity. Alyssa, how much leeway do we have between landing and you needing to be at the Ice Arena?

Alyssa: Game time is at 3, which means on-ice warm-ups around 2:15. Figure a half hour to get suited-up. It'll be tight, but if there are no delays I should be able to make it in time if I can get up there straight from the airport.

Erin: We'll take you up to the arena after we leave the airport, then go back to campus. Can you get a lift back to Trinity, since us, Kristie, and Sam will be at practice?

Alyssa: There shouldn't be an issue with that.

Marc: One thing resolved. Are any of you going to the Sock Hop Saturday night?

Steph: It looks like a bit of fun, and I KNOW you will bring the entertainment, DJ Marcy Marc!

Danielle: I STILL don't know why you agreed to do this?!

Marc: If you remember back to October, *I* was the one who sort of pushed the dorms into doing all-campus programming, and it would have been pretty disingenuous for me to turn Heather and her residents down after they asked me to do it.

Danielle: Again, you don't know how to say no where your ego getting a boost is concerned.

Marc: I have had about enough of your sniping. Be grateful that you might ACTUALLY have a problem causing it, or I'd be considering filing a grievance with Paul and the chaplain at the VA over your conduct this week.

Danielle bit her tongue, knowing that it was not a good idea to test Marc's scorched-earth approach to dealing with conflict. Following that, the rest of dinner was eaten in near-silence, as no one was really in the mood to talk lest they set off another tete-a-tete.
The Trinity crew made it back to Milwaukee with little trouble. Alyssa stopped 26 of 27 shots against Trine, but her opposite number from the Thunder (yes, both teams are the Thunder) did just as well, and the two schools settled for a 1-1 tie in the opener of their two-game series. On Saturday afternoon, Marc was on campus getting things settled with Heather Mitchell and Nikki Steiner at Wittenberg Hall ahead of the Sock Hop that evening. He plugged in his laptop and brought up the Spotify list he created for the event, then ran through the first handful of songs to get a feel for when to transition from one song to the next. Feeling that everything was as set as could be, he left campus and went down to Bayshore to meet Danielle for dinner at BD’s Mongolian BBQ. Out at the ice arena, the Trinity Lutheran Thunder finished off the 2018-2019 regular season on a high note with a 3-0 win over Trine, with Alyssa backstopping the side and collecting her sixth shutout of the season.

**********

As 8:00 drew near, the first-floor lounge of Wittenberg Hall began to fill up. A fair number of attendees dressed the part, with poodle skirts and saddle shoes or sneakers for the ladies and leather jackets and t-shirts for the guys (and some gals as well). The lights were dimmed a bit and the introductory music for the evening started. [Blues Brothers - Everybody Needs Somebody]

Nikki Steiner (Wittenberg Hall Activities Director): Welcome, one and all, to Wittenberg Hall and the 2019 Second Chance Sock Hop. In case you didn't land your Valentine on Thursday, tonight you have another opportunity to weave your way into someone's heart. And now, the man who will be rockin' and rollin', struttin' and strollin', spinning the MP3s for your pleasure, our very own chaplain, DJ Marcy-Marc Schmidt!

Marc strolled up to the rostrum. "Evening, guys and dolls! Who's ready to go into the WAY BACK machine?! We lead off with a classic from 1959, perfect to open a Sock Hop. At The Hop!"

The next handful of songs, leading up to the first of three LIVE performances, were: "Great Balls of Fire", "Shake, Rattle, and Roll"; "Do You Wanna Dance"; "Build Me Up Buttercup"; "Rock And Roll Is Here To Stay"; "Born To Hand Jive"; and "Rockin' Robin".

Marc changed out of his gold lame jacket, put on a grey cardigan, and stepped down to the floor as "Rockin' Robin" concluded.

Marc: When I was asked to MC tonight's dance and was told that it would be an all-campus event, including faculty and staff, I knew I had to get these three guys together with me to do this peppy ballad from 1965. Will Drs. Tom Sinclair, Ben Oliphant, and Albert Moncrief come up and join me? The three men came forward and Marc finished off the introduction. "We dedicate this song to the women in our lives, Allison, Megan, Erin, and Danielle." [The Vogues - You're The One]

As the song went on, Dani got a huge grin on her face watching Marc belt out the lead with Ben hitting the high notes behind him. Sarah smiled at her and held her hand, keeping up appearances while Megan and Allison were talking with Danielle, who was starting to get tired after working at the lab this morning. When the quartet wrapped up their song, they went over to their wives and shared some affection with them. Marc went back up to the rostrum and put on some intermission music while he got a bit of water. Danielle told him that she was tired and was going to head home, but thanked him again for recognizing her in the song and said she'd see him when he got home.

**********
As the second part of the evening went along, Erin and Steph, Lauren and Kelley, Matt and Cali, and Lindsey and Emily danced a couple of numbers, then sat out one or two before going back to the floor. During one of her rest periods, Erin went up and asked Marc about the song list, curious if there was one upcoming that she and some of the others could use to slightly embarrass their dates. She saw that the live performance of "Johnny B. Goode" would be followed by "If You Wanna Be Happy", an ode to the average woman. She went back to the table, then pulled Matt, Lauren, and Emily out to the foyer to go over her scheme, which would be the four of them lip-syncing the song to the other four women. Everyone was game, knowing that it was all in fun and not meant as a put-down. Emily said she was planning to ham it up a little for Lindsey. Just as "Johnny B. Goode" was concluding, the four of them returned to their table and faced the others. Erin then signaled to Marc to queue up the fun.

After they finished laughing at their partners, Lindsey and Steph started plotting their revenge against the two comics. Kelley asked Lauren how she was dragged into this, to which she said that she guessed Erin thought she was the better-looking of the two of them. With Matt basically following the lead of the others, Cali didn't give him a whole lot of grief for participating, but said she'd come up with something to get him back.

During the second intermission, Marc went over to Dani and Sarah, then asked the former to step outside with him.

Marc: I've missed you, sweetheart. The sniping this past week was horrible, but there might be an answer to it. A second-year med student who's dating one of the Hearts noticed some oddities with Danielle's sight and energy which, when combined with the behavioral changes, might indicate a serious problem that is causing all of it. I don't know how to feel about it, but I know that I'll need to show my support while we're going through getting to the bottom of this.

Dani: So, Marcy-Marc?

Marc: Yeah. I needed a clever handle so I ripped off the Boston rapper and actor's one but spelled it in line with my own name.

Dani: You look like you're having a really good time tonight. How was the wedding and everything?

Marc: It didn't go as well as the previous three I had done. It was too big for us to handle from a distance with no in-town support, and that became obvious once we got there on Monday with the media requests and packed schedule. I'm glad to have done it, but I'm also glad to be back. I also got an offer to do one on New Year's Eve in Vancouver, Ali and Steph's.

Marc and Dani walked around to the side of Wittenberg, then he wrapped his hands behind her neck, looked her over in her classic 50s outfit, and placed a soft kiss on her lips, which she returned with fervor. She then curled her head up into his chest and sighed.

Marc: I guess I better get back in there. Two things before I go: 1) the Danielle I mentioned in the dedication was you, and 2) hopefully I can get onto the dance floor for a spin with you before the night is over.

Dani: I love you, Marc, and even if I have to drag you off the stage, you WILL dance with me at some point.

Marc smiled at her and went back into the residence hall to take up his position at the digital jukebox.

**********
Kelley, Steph, and Lindsey got their chance to razz their women a few songs into the third quarter of the night with their recitation of this Dusty Springfield hit. [Only Wanna Be With You]

As the song played, others got into the act, with Kristie mouthing it to Alyssa, Corey to Ali, and Christen to Julie. Cali was waiting for another slow song to come up so she could drag Matt onto the floor and dance with him. Unfortunately, one wouldn't show up until near the end of the playlist. Not deterred, she got some support from Erin, Ali, Christen, and Lindsey to all get their loves out there when it came up. A photographer from the Trinity Times was getting candids of students and staff on the dance floor, presumably for publication in Monday's edition of the paper.

Marc: All of you have been putting in a really good workout tonight and look to be having a great time doing it. However, this is a Valentine's Day themed dance and it wouldn't be right if I didn't get a couple of slow, romantic songs in. We have two now back-to-back, so get your partner, get on the floor, and let the magic take over. [The Five Satins - In The Still Of The Night; Paul Anka - Put Your Head On My Shoulder]

Following those two songs was "The Twist", then Marc made an appeal to a specific section of the crowd.

Marc: I know I have a few Nicolet grads in the house! As most of you know, Nicolet was the basis for Jefferson High School in "Happy Days". This next song is the original theme song of the show. So Knights, come on out and shake a tail feather to Bill Haley and His Comets' "Rock Around The Clock"!

Dani, Sarah, and Kelley were immediately out on the floor, but not before they collectively dragged Marc off the stage and got him doing some of his less-than-stellar white guy moves and mimics of Bill Haley and Elvis Presley. He stayed out on the floor for the next song, "Pretty Little Angel Eyes", which he mouthed in Dani's general direction. She blushed and followed Sarah off the floor when Marc went back up to his perch. After a few more songs, including "Unchained Melody", Marc put on the final song of the night. Sha Na Na - Goodnight Sweetheart

Marc: For those driving, please do so safely. For those on campus, safe travels back to your residence halls. Remember, in just under two weeks Regents Hall will be hosting Open Mic Night with a CASH prize and trophy going to the winner. Now get outta here! Some of us old people need our beauty sleep.

Once his laptop was packed away, Marc headed for the front door of the hall, followed by Erin, Steph, Dani, Sarah, Cali, and Matt. The students all walked to Augsburg while the coaches and chaplain went to the parking garage to leave campus. Before driving off, Marc and Dani talked for a few minutes, working out her schedule for UCP for the upcoming week as well as when they would see each other next. Dani kissed Marc on the cheek and held him close for several moments before walking to her car and leaving, with Sarah close behind.

Marc got home near 1am and chose to sleep on the couch rather than disturb Danielle since she had to be up in three-and-a-half hours for work. As he drifted off to sleep, his mind played over the events of the past week and he wondered just how the juggling act he was doing would resolve itself without blowing up in his face.
Chapter Summary

Where the players drop a dime on one person and put in their two cents on several others.

A large number of Trinity's women's lacrosse players made their way to Deacon Schmidt's office on Monday morning, giving their impressions of the atmosphere in training and the locker room. The first to visit was Steph McNamara.

Marc: Have a seat. Not sure we've been formally introduced yet.

Steph: I'm Stephanie McNamara. You know my roommate, Sam Mueller, and her sister Kristie, I believe.

Marc: That I do. What can you tell me about your experience the first month or so of pre-season?

Steph: For the most part, it has been alright. Sarah has taught me some things about ball control and fending off excessive contact from defenders, while Lauren seems committed to me being in the starting lineup on opening day against Ripon.

Marc: I heard that you had been dismissed from practice once last week after getting into it verbally with Lauren. What caused the confrontation?

Steph: She accused me of having my mind on things other than lacrosse, which she believes is causing me to not perform as well as she expects. What got under my skin was her claiming that I was lusting after the Mueller sisters and it was affecting my ability to play.

Marc: Any truth to the statement?

Steph: Some. Sam and I were together when we returned to campus at the end of August, and Kristie and I had a bit of a thing as well. Currently, there is a bit of a frost on my relationship with Sam and Kristie has found someone else to be with here. As much as all of that angers me, the truth is that it's between the three of us and NOT for others to chip in their two cents. That's why I went after her, because she had no right to create additional antagonism between me and the two of them. They are still my closest friends here and allowing her to insult them without saying something would have been wrong.

Marc: Has she used any of the magic words to indicate her opinion on homosexuality or players of that ilk?

Steph: Nothing blatant. A lot of it is jawing, I think. Wants to get the players against her so they bond together.

Marc: Without something more definitive, I can't recommend to HR a formal hearing on her statements or positions. I'm hoping more of your teammates stop by so that enough smoke will rise to move ahead with a grievance.

Steph: Thanks, Deacon. Not much for religion, mind you, but I know from your interactions with
Kristie and Sam that you go to the mat for people who are wronged.

Marc: Take care.

Steph left and in came Lauren, Kelley, Morgan Andringa, and Savannah.

Lauren: First, let me say that we are SO glad you're back from Philly. I'm sure you had a blast doing the wedding and rubbing elbows with the A-list of the women's soccer world, but the week away left us unable to go to you when Lauren started getting pissy and creating a mess within the team.

Marc: I'm glad to be back. So spill on what's happened and I'll see if I can move ahead on it.

Lauren, Morgan, and Savannah gave Marc their interpretations and testimony of what transpired in training on Tuesday as well as past acts by Coach Heberlein that crossed the line in their opinions. Marc mulled over the acts mentioned and found a potential path to getting the magic words for an external investigation by OCR or the NCAA.

Marc: Between Morgan's overheard comments and what has been said in training, there is enough to move forward with a complaint. Problem right now is that the complaint would be going either to Human Resources, which has been embarrassed by me twice in the past two months, or to Gavin, who has a vested interest in sweeping this under the rug and keeping Paul or myself from getting any additional influence over his domain. To get the NCAA or the Office of Civil Rights involved, or lay open the threat of their involvement, we need to get some set of magic words out of her, then place our own into the complaint.

Morgan: Magic words?

Marc: She will need to actually use a homophobic slur or say something that can be construed as "denying an individual equal educational opportunity on the basis of ________". The statement about Sofia which referred to her mental illness would be one, as would the statement overheard by Morgan concerning her preference for players dating male athletes. With respect to Sarah and what she has heard, she can claim that Lauren has "created a hostile work environment" with her comments about teammate relationships and the perceived bias against lesbian pairings. Both of those will get the attention of OCR, which is what you will need to get action taken against her, as I don't see Gavin or Cheryl Baines following through on complaints made to their offices.

Savannah: What about the put-downs about my introversion?

Marc: As hard as this will be to hear, there is no standard for whether those rise to being actionable. You'll need her to come after something else that is "protected" or get a designation that your introversion is caused by social anxiety, which would then allow ADA protection to come into play, like it will for Sofia if she wishes to move forward on a grievance.

Confident that Marc was in their corner and willing to take on their coach if the evidence warranted it, the four of them exited his office. Around 11:30, Erin, Steph, and Sarah came to see him.

Marc: My favorite people in the lacrosse program.

Erin: You're just saying that so I won't tell your wife about you seeing my coach's girlfriend on the side.

Marc: Well, maybe. So what dirt do you have that I don't already know about Lauren?

Sarah: I've mentioned wanting to file a formal complaint against her. How do I do that?
Marc: Your best bet at action is to state that her comments and general demeanor have "created a hostile work environment". Those five words should put the fear of God into Dr. Baines as they indicate the possibility of the Office for Civil Rights or the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission coming in and doing a full investigation of the campus's policies on discrimination against employees in protected classes as well as sexual harassment. Be honest and forthright about your orientation and how her positions have caused you to be reticent about sharing that information with her or your team. How did your conversation with Paul go on Wednesday?

Sarah: He told me that the only thing his office could do is issue a reminder to campus offices about the Social Statements and their primacy in the implementation of policy. He also said that the synod could place a note of censure in her file if her violation of them resulted in an adverse employment action at Trinity.

Marc: That's good. You have the best case right now against her until and unless she lets loose with an epithet against one of the players or a protected class to which they belong. Write up something and send it to me. I'll help you get it tailored to get the action you want out of it.

Sarah: I don't necessarily want to get Lauren fired. Just called on the carpet for her behind-the-times thinking and forced to loosen up on the fear factor hanging over the team and myself. I'll get you something in the next couple of days.

Steph: Marc, we've got to get to Siebert for Peers meeting.

Marc: Thanks for the reminder, Steph.

Everyone exited the chaplain's office, with Marc, Erin, and Steph going to Siebert and Sarah walking over to Albrecht to have lunch with Rachel Bucholz from Student Health.

**********

The full contingent of peer ministers were at lunch with Marc, with one major thing on the agenda for their weekly meeting.

Marc: While I was flying back from Philadelphia on Friday, I went over the list of students who took the training a couple of weeks ago, paring down who I thought would make good additions to the five returning students in Fall and thus who I'd like to see shadow our present peers for the remainder of Spring. You know the students a LOT better than I do, so I want to get your recommendations before moving ahead. I would like each of you to tell me one person who you think should be part of next year's bigger peer ministry team and how you'd see them fitting in among the three branches of the alliance.

Steph: Some of us got to talk with Abby Davidson over lunch that day and got a bit of background on her. She's roommates with Dr. Oliphant's daughter and is a social work major. I think she'd make a good peer minister in the dorms with the combination of her education and the open spirit she possesses.

Marc: She was on my list with those pieces being the reasons. Consider her invited.

Julie: I know this one didn't take the training because she had Acro practice that morning, but I think Vanessa should be considered. Her relationship with Sofia is a good example of serving one's fellow human through difficulty as her anxiety can make even a normal day into a roller coaster of highs and lows.

Marc: Her assistance to me at the All-Sports Mixer was a great comfort, especially since no one at
Trinity aside from Erin knew that I had mental health issues and she was able to spot the onset of my anxiety attack and help me release the emotions of it. I'll call her in and see what she thinks about being part of this.

Erin: I'm torn between recommending Cali or Matt. I think either one of them would be a good choice, Cali because she has a little bit of experience already with seeing the dark side of campus and might be able to make inroads with bringing the light to them, and Matt because he's a he and we don't have that many of those, plus being in the arts where he's even more of a rarity.

Marc: I get your points, Erin, and can see what you're attempting to say. Let me reserve judgment on those two for a few minutes while the others offer up their suggestions.

Stefan: With me on the way out, I'd like to see us add someone who can match Alyssa's heart and passion for the pulpit. I really like Karina Lester's ability to light that fire under someone and how it would balance Alyssa's quieter and more studious approach.

Marc: This is a very good suggestion, Stefan. We have a lot of great one-on-one people and those comfortable sharing in the midst of day-to-day living, but we don't have one who thrives on being in the square, who can get the more ecumenical members of the student body energized. I'll talk to her and offer her the chance to join us.

Corey: I'll echo Erin's recommendation of Matt as a possible choice, but I cast my vote for Liz Edwards. She's already used to the spotlight due to being on Student Government and her more cautious approach to the changes being advocated on-campus would help draw in students who might be questioning what they believe.

Marc: I have Cali, Matt, and Liz on my list of possibles, so the suggestions of them from the two of you move them into the invitation category.

Alyssa: I'll wrap up by recommending Christen Prince. Every ministry needs people who just throw themselves into whatever comes up, who are interested in learning and doing, and who bring a open heart to those around them. Her friendship with Sofia as well as her support of her and Vanessa's relationship shows some of that, and her own relationship with Julie is SO CUTE AND TOUCHING and balanced, that each of them can be the support or the out-front person depending on the situation. "Glue" is something that is crucial in holding everything together, and where we have Erin as the glue that binds the six of us together, I feel like Christen can do that with the new people to attach them to Julie and Erin, and therefore the inner circle.

Marc: My experience with Christen over this year tells me that she is exactly what Alyssa describes and where Julie was at the beginning of the year, sort of the mentee of the big three who learned and got comfortable around them while gaining deeper understanding of her own faith and ability to act upon it. I have a couple more on my list to ask into our circle, but all of your suggestions are solid and will have an opportunity to join us. After Spring Break, I will pair up the newcomers with one of the six current peers and you'll mentor and equip them for what they will be doing come Fall. Everyone feel good about the direction we're headed?

The six peer ministers all nodded in agreement to Marc's question, after which he ended the meeting and the students took their trays up to the conveyor belt before leaving the dining hall.
The Eye Of The Beholder

Chapter Summary

Beauty is subjective, as one player comes to find out.

In the locker room prior to Monday's practice, a number of Thunder players were razzing Morgan about a picture of her from the Sock Hop being in that day's Trinity Times. She got a copy of the paper and looked at the byline to see who had gotten the shot and whether she knew him. Not recognizing the name, she did a bit of research that evening to find out more information about him since she wanted to get a blown-up copy of the picture as it captured her goofy side perfectly.

Between classes on Tuesday, she stopped by the Trinity Times office to see if she could catch up with the photographer or learn more about him from others. The paper's editor-in-chief, Heather Osiecki, told her that Kevin Nemeth was scheduled to cover that night's Trinity/Concordia-Chicago NACC women's basketball tournament game and should be stopping into the office at some point in the afternoon. Morgan thanked Heather for the information and asked how her dad was doing (their fathers played together at Wisconsin), then shared the latest update on Rob's cancer recovery. Heather said she'd pass the info onto to him and asked about the profile piece on Deacon Schmidt, which Morgan said was nearly complete but because of his high ranking in the influence list, she wanted to wait until as close to publication date as possible to submit it.

**********

Tom, Ben, Paul, and Marc were gathered in the Lake Shore Room in Stuenkel for today's meeting of the Faculty Senate Undergraduate Education Committee. They were there to offer testimony on the Practical Ministry certificate and the new course offerings in Religion and Physical Education championed by the two faculty members. Marc had had a conversation with Lauren Fowler on Monday asking her to have the coaching seminar request tabled until March's meeting as getting the Coaching Education Institute founded was a higher priority for him. At 3:00, committee chairman Oscar Pandolfo called the meeting to order.

Oscar Pandolfo: The first item on our docket today is a proposal by Dr. Tom Sinclair for the creation of a certificate in Practical Ministry, to be offered by the Department of Religion and Theological Studies in conjunction with the Greater Milwaukee Synod of the ELCA. Dr. Sinclair, will you kindly speak on your proposal and why it should be passed?

Tom Sinclair: Chairman Pandolfo and members of the committee, I was approached by Deacon Marc Schmidt a couple of months ago about using the vast resources of Trinity Lutheran's academic offerings to create a certificate that would mirror the synod's two-year Diakonia program and allow students to leave the school upon graduation with a tangible credential that would be useful both in the church and in the workplace. Our side of this collaboration is to offer the courses and confer the academic certificate upon those who complete its requirements. Deacon Schmidt will act on behalf of the synod to link the certificate to the consecration of graduates as synodical deacons. You should have in front of you descriptions of the four courses which would make up the certificate and how they parallel the twelve, five-week courses the synod offers in the Diakonia program. The certificate is aimed specifically at non-religion majors and those not in the Pre-Seminary program, as course requirements for those two cohorts go over and above these four survey offerings. With that, I would
like to have Deacon Schmidt speak on how he and Bishop Emerson plan to admit these students to the synod's diaconate.

Marc: Dr. Sinclair gave a very good synopsis of the certificate from both the academic and the ministry side. At a time when there are far fewer people willing or able to attend seminary than in the past, and as the gap widens between supply and demand of religiously-trained leaders, the use of our ELCA colleges and universities as conduits for interested and skilled individuals to gain theological education that is specific to their chosen vocations and offers them a place in the larger pool of rostered leaders in the synod and the ELCA as a whole should be considered an efficient use of the denomination's resources. Our synod's Diakonia program has provided a boost in compensating against the tide of pastoral retirements in recent years, but it can't solve the problem on its own, and most of its graduates seek consecration in order to serve at a higher level in their own congregations. Offering this program within the curriculum of Trinity Lutheran University would allow for greater flexibility in its graduates' service opportunities upon consecration and better align the church's needs with its available human resources.

Oscar Pandolfo: Would the Bishop like to make any comments before we begin debating the proposal?

Paul Emerson: I have been withholding my approval of this proposal from the start because I wanted to make sure that it had on-campus support as well as gave synod leadership a hand in determining the fitness of certificate holders for service. Having been given assurances on both parts, I am in favor of this moving forward and giving a new generation of Lutherans a pathway to living out their faith in the world.

Oscar Pandolfo: Thank you, Bishop Emerson. I open the floor for discussion of the matter.

Lauren Fowler: As the School of Health Professions' representative in the creation of this proposal, I speak strongly in favor of it and ask that it be passed by our committee.

Chuck Bottinger: The School of Business doesn't take a position either way on this proposal as it will have little or no effect on the academic pursuits of our students.

Marc: If I may respond to that statement, Chairman. There are a number of business students at Trinity who, since the start of this semester, have taken steps to become more active in the campus's religious community, including one that went on a formal seminary visit last week in Philadelphia, where she was told that the combination of a BBA and their MA in Public Leadership could well lead to a position in charge of a non-profit agency and consecration as a Churchwide Diaconal Minister. Therefore, to dismiss this certificate as irrelevant to your students' academic pursuits is at the least short-sighted and at the most disingenuous. Once approved, we could see a way to include your school's Business Ethics course in the program for your school's majors.

Chuck Bottinger: Thank you for your response, Deacon Schmidt. I have been corrected slightly in my thinking and recommend we pass it out of committee to give it a full hearing at the March 7th Faculty Senate meeting.

Oscar Pandolfo: If there is no further discussion, I call for the yeas and nays.

By a showing of hands, the bill passed the committee 12-1.

Oscar Pandolfo: The chair recognizes Senator Fowler.

Lauren Fowler: It has been requested that the next bill before the committee be tabled until our March meeting due to competing legislation in another committee. I move we table Dr. Oliphant's
proposal until that matter is resolved.

Oscar Pandolfo: Without objection, it is so ordered.

The committee took up several other proposals dealing with the expansion of minors at the two predecessor institutions into majors at Trinity and certifying certain cross-department course substitutions. The committee also developed a proposal for the Committee on Committees that would create a sub-committee to focus on the historical use of individualized and self-designed majors and whether there was enough critical mass to create formalized ones.

**********

Following the Trinity women's basketball team's 61-49 victory over Concordia-Chicago, Morgan sought out Kevin Nemeth, the photographer at Saturday night's Sock Hop.

Morgan: Kevin, is it?

Kevin (being coy): Yes. I recognize you, but can't say we've met.

Morgan: My name is Morgan Andringa. You took a picture of me at Saturday night's Sock Hop that ended up in yesterday's Trinity Times. I was wondering if you still had the original because I'd like to get a large-size one, say 20x30, that I can hang on my dorm room wall.

Kevin: I keep all of my published shots as part of my portfolio. I have to say that it took me a while to get that one because you were so active on the floor. By the time I got you into focus and in the position I wanted to convey, you'd have shifted before I could snap it.

Morgan: Well, you did a fantastic job on the one you got. I don't think I've seen a better picture of myself or one that brought out that side of me on film.

Kevin: If you'll follow me back to the office, I can get you the original from my SD card if you have a means of saving it.

Morgan and Kevin walked back from Buuck Field House to the Trinity Times office in Albrecht, with them comparing their beats on campus (Morgan with the Board of Trustees and long-form pieces, Kevin photographing campus life activities and athletics). Once at the office, Kevin took his SD card adapter and plugged it into a USB port on the desktop, then uploaded the picture. Following that, he removed his adapter and placed Morgan's memory stick into the port before downloading it.

Kevin: Glad I was able to put a smile on your face with my creation. The reason I put so much effort into it is because I thought you were cute and, after asking around, knew that if I got assigned a women's lacrosse game this spring, the picture I'd get of you from that would be a LOT different with the visor over your eyes and your mouth guard in.

Morgan blushed at Kevin's comment, then invited him to join her for Lunch Bunch tomorrow if he was game. He said he'd think about it and contacted campus security so Morgan could get an escort back to Augsburg as he had work to do for tomorrow's edition of the Times.
Amendments to the Student Code are on the table, resulting in a tense session of the Student Government Association.

Wednesday's sermon from Marc focused on mistaking the changes made to the Code of Student Conduct related to relationships as license to act as one wishes in the light of day.

Marc: The advancement and ultimate codification of the Social Statements into policy at Trinity had at its heart shifting the focus from the acts in question to the motivation behind those acts. I haven't heard a valid argument from anyone as to why expansion of the current parameters is desirable. I would say that those seeking this have confused the concept of developing meaningful relationships with others with the freedom to hook up with whoever one wishes in whatever combination desired. I have been a strong advocate for getting the stuffed shirts out of policing the interpersonal relationships of students, faculty, and staff at Trinity, and I have offered my assistance to students who have wanted to make incremental changes to what passed in November, particularly on the subject of what is considered allowable when dealing with partnerships on-campus, because these grey areas still lie within the framework of allowing for commitments to be made between two or more individuals. What has been proposed by a segment of the student body, to strip the current code of any restrictions regarding type and number of persons in a recognized relationship, moves the goalposts much farther and in effect eliminates any standards for conduct in the university. Care for creation that is the cornerstone of the Social Statement on Human Sexuality is not consistent with what is being proposed, and I hope that Student Government will take a hard look at what should be granted provision and what shouldn't when they meet this afternoon. Amen.

**********

Lunch Bunch again brought face-to-face conversation to the thoughts expressed in Marc's homily. Morgan Andringa, who had written a long-form piece for the Trinity Times in the fall describing the process of getting the new Code of Student Conduct enacted, asked Marc how the position he seemed to state earlier today meshed with his previous statements that resulted in the new code being passed.

Marc: I don't think you would find that my statements today contradict anything I have said previously, although I will admit that the rationale for them has, to some extent. When we were working to pass a new Student Code in the fall, the need to get something that had broad support and could make it past both Student Government and the Board of Trustees on the first attempt meant that we limited which "non-traditional relationships" would be deemed acceptable, with the proviso that the SGA could expand upon it at their pleasure once the basics were on the books. I still hold that it is their right to do so, but I also have come to a different conclusion as to which ones are in line with those already approved and the ethic of responsible sexuality and which ones would seem to upend the code.

Liz Edwards received texts from several Student Government representatives asking to meet with her before today's meeting so they could determine if they have the votes to both pass the anti-fraternization amendments and stop the "no restrictions" bill that another portion of SGA wants
enacted. Liz asked Marc if he was available after lunch to meet with her and the others to give them a little pep talk and strategy options. He looked at Dani, knowing that she and he were planning to spend some extended time together this afternoon, and she told him that Michelle would be out of the house tonight, meeting with Dawson for dinner at Marquette before his night class and visiting the Humane Society to look into adopting a pet. Marc told Liz that he was free to help them and could attend the meeting as well. She sent confirmation texts to her people and left Siebert to go back to Katharine to get her SGA folders before meeting everyone at Marc's office at 2.

**********

Six members of the Student Government Association (Liz Edwards, Becky Sanderson, Lee Nugent, Beverly Gordon, Haley Kendall, and Tommy McNeil) sat down with Deacon Schmidt to go over their plan for today's SGA meeting and to elicit advice on managing their role in the debating of their bill and the "no restrictions" bill.

Becky: We all have a decent grasp of the legislation that Liz will be presenting, as well as the nuts-and-bolts of moving it to passage following the debate on it. What I think we want to know is how we can keep it from being side-tracked by those against it as well as those pushing the other bill that will be before SGA today.

Marc: I don't know every tactic available to you on the floor, but one that should be at your disposal is the ability to object to a motion to take up your two bills concurrently. An objection and a sufficient second would move the motion to an up-or-down vote, with majority prevailing. That protects your bill from being co-opted and used as a means to ram through the other bill without proper debate on either one.

Lee: We'll be in charge of managing the debate on the first bill. Any suggestions on dos and don'ts?

Marc: Well, lead strong since you'll open the debate. Try to get a couple of fence-sitters leaning toward you from that 2-3 minute monologue. Line up strong advocates of it. Use the unanimous consent request to make your support and testimony look stronger than it might actually be. Biggest is making sure you have the votes to pass it by the end, cobbled together between the ones who speak on behalf of it and the ones you already know support it.

Haley: How do we stop the other bill from passing?

Marc: Having the votes to defeat it, of course. I know, not much of an answer, but that's what you'll need if you're unable to force them to pull the bill.

Becky: I see your thinking, that it'd be better to not have it come to a vote, with the pro side pulling it because they don't believe that it can pass. Now, how to give them that impression?

Marc: They'll open and will probably turn up the rhetoric as to why their amendment to the Student Code must be adopted. You need to pick a solid argument that will rally significant support in opposition.

Liz: Like the ethic of responsible sexuality that you laid out at the start of the year, or the care for creation being the overarching theme in the Social Statement?

Marc: Yes. Either of those would be a significant reason to oppose it. Now, managing your side of the debate. Go with the best argument you have for not passing the legislation. If I were in your shoes, I would argue that your anti-fraternization amendments which passed are not compatible with this bill, that the lack of restrictions would blow the doors off the current code, and that at the base of it their legislation is VERY harmful to female students. Their whole argument for wanting to pass
this is to level the field as they believe the new code favors women in the relationship arena. What would happen if this passes after yours does is the potential would exist for a male staff member to prey upon female students, or the BMOC to develop his own harem and strut them around with no fear of reprisal.

Tommy: Deacon, I know that a couple of the reps supporting this are hoping that no one notices the "no restriction" language and accept it as a male equivalent to what the women were given in the new code. We need to hit that HARD with whoever speaks first against that.

Marc: Right. The other two tactics you'll need to employ, which go hand-in-hand, are making them use their time at a quicker rate than you use yours and a parade of 15-30 second "soundbites" from your side that will eventually make it look like you have the numbers to defeat them if they take it to a vote. Hopefully, that will cause them to pull the bill, after which one of you can use a unanimous consent request to send it to Legislation and Rules for revision. After the session, offer them an olive branch to work out something that they CAN get passed, which will give them some of what they want and spell out what WON'T be allowable.

Liz: Becky, think we're ready?

Becky: I'd say so. It might be two very tight votes, but if both go our way, it will another good day for Trinity.

The SGA representatives left Marc's office for Stuenkel, after which Marc packed up his bag and made the trip to Stuenkel as well.

**********

Stuenkel 103 was packed for today's Student Government Association meeting. The 35 representatives were convening at the front of the room, talking over the agenda and doing a little bit of whipping on the two major pieces of legislation before them. Marc sat near the back, preparing to watch a bit of political theater unfold before him. Dani ducked in briefly and told Marc that she was going to head home and asked him to pick up Jimmy John's for the two of them because "After I get done with you, neither one of us will have the energy to cook." Marc smirked and sent an air kiss to her.

Chad Markham (SGA President): The February 20th, 2019 meeting of the Student Government Association is called to order. The chair recognizes Representative Edwards.

Liz Edwards: I have a bill at the table and ask for its immediate consideration.

Chad: Clerk will read the title of the bill.


Chad: 30 minutes will be allotted for debate, equally divided and controlled by Representative Edwards and a member in opposition.

Richard Kilbourn: I rise in opposition to the bill and ask that I be granted control of the time for our side.

Chad: Without objection.

Liz gave an impassioned 3-minute monologue on the quandary that the broadness of the current policy places upon students, faculty, and staff and how spelling out in narrower terms what forms of "fraternization" were acceptable and unacceptable would help build a stronger campus community.
Following her remarks, she reserved the balance of her time.

Richard: Mr. President, the bill before us is a veiled attempt by a certain faction of the SGA and persons in leadership positions at Trinity to take the focus off the biased Code of Student Conduct by attempting to patch a hole in it that does not exist. There is no reason for us to be taking up a measure that will not affect more than a handful of individuals in any given year while neglecting to deal with the elephant in the room known as misandry. I move that we take up these two bills in tandem since they both address changes to be made to the Code of Student Conduct and, to my knowledge, have enough support to pass this body in unison.

Liz: I object.

Chad: Hearing an objection, I ask if there is a sufficient second. Seeing a sufficient second, the yeas and nays are ordered. Clerk will call the roll.

Each of the 35 representatives were called upon and voted on whether or not to take up both measures concurrently.

Chad: On this vote, the yeas are 16, the nays 18, with one abstention. The motion is not agreed to. The chair recognizes Representative Edwards.

Liz: I yield two minutes to Representative Nugent, who helped craft this legislation.

Lee stepped to the podium and provided an explanation of what would happen if the bill did pass, using anecdotal evidence of couples in the university which existed presently under the radar due to the current policy but who would be free to be public under the new one. He also asked unanimous consent to submit the transcripts of his interviews with those campus community members.

The two sides went back-and-forth with speakers, then Liz closed the debate with a request that all members be given five legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and provide extraneous material for the record.

Chad: All time having expired, the question is before us. Those in favor will vote I, those opposed no. Clerk will call the roll.

Following the roll call, Chad announced the results. "On this vote, the I's are 24, the no's 11. The bill passes. The chair recognizes Representative Kilbourn."

Richard: I ask that my legislation at the desk be given immediate consideration and considered having been read.

Chad: Without objection. There will 30 minutes for debate, split evenly between Representative Kilbourn and a member in opposition.

Becky Sanderson: I rise to request that I be granted control of the opposition's time.

Chad: Without objection.

Richard spent 5 1/2 of his side's 15 minutes laying out his case for amending the Student Code of Conduct to allow both men and women equal opportunity to engage in multi-partner relationships, bringing up the possible Title IX violation that existed if a male student wished to register a complaint as well as the inherent unfairness of the one-at-a-time restriction men were under. Becky used two minutes of her side's time to refute a number of Richard's assertions, especially the Title IX argument because religious institutions are allowed to seek waivers to not abide by it, such as the ban of women in the Pre-Seminary program at Concordia. Richard yielded three minutes to Michael.
Parsons, who spoke on behalf of his LGBTQ brethren in pushing for passage of the bill. Liz gave two minutes to Beverly Gordon.

Beverly: Mr. President, the proponents of this legislation argue that they are seeking a level field for men and women on this campus. I believe that, should this bill pass, it would be VERY detrimental to women, especially in light of the anti-fraternization rules being amended a short while ago. There is no justifiable reason for men to have multiple heterosexual partnerships, and were we to pass this, it would give license for men to develop on-campus harems with no fear of reprisal. This legislation also flies in the face of the school's ethic of responsible sexuality that was the foundation of creating the new Code of Student Conduct and the care for creation language that is at the heart of the Social Statement on Human Sexuality. PLEASE join us in defeating this bill. I yield back the balance of my time.

Marc's jaw dropped as he heard Bev's plea and her usage of the arguments he threw out earlier in the day. Richard reserved the balance of his time, wishing to save it for a closing statement. Becky then started her side's parade of speakers, with a total of 13 members speaking out against the bill. Seeing the potential for his bill to be defeated with no real hope to craft something different in time to pass it before the semester ended, Richard asked that the bill be withdrawn. Chad assented to the request, with Becky immediately asking that it be referred to the Legislation and Rules Committee, which was ordered. Chad then adjourned the meeting, after which Becky and Liz crossed the aisle to talk with Michael and Richard about working together on a bill that was capable of passing the full body and didn't leave the door open for unintended consequences.
Roller Coaster Ride

When Marc arrived at Dani and Michelle's house, he saw a note on the door telling him that it was unlocked and to come in. He opened the door and his nose immediately caught a whiff of Dani's perfume (j'adore by Christian Dior). He deposited their dinner in the refrigerator before wandering through the house in search of the scent's location, which was Dani's room. Lying on the bed, Dani was clothed in a burgundy chemise and black sandal heels with ankle straps.

Marc: Again, you take my breath away, princess.

Dani: Good! Now come over here and unleash your inner tiger on me.

Marc walked over to the bed and crawled toward Dani until his lips captured hers. She wasted little time in getting his mock turtleneck untucked and then over his head and off his body. She then kissed her way over his chest and licked his nipples lightly, followed by unbuckling his belt and unbuttoning his slacks. Marc ran his fingers through her hair and slid the right strap of her chemise off her shoulder, where he kissed her tenderly before moving his mouth up to her neck and then over her throat. She slid his pants and briefs down his hips, then took his member in her hands and stroked it lovingly yet firmly.

Marc: Not interested in foreplay today, eh?

Dani: Not when you make me so horny with your confidence and your attentiveness.

Dani tipped Marc backwards and climbed on top of him, guiding his shaft inside her before pressing down upon it. Marc didn't wait for her to sink down completely onto it before thrusting upward into her, catching her by surprise.

Dani: I see someone is a bit eager to make me scream with delirium. Fuck me like a mad man, Marcy-Marc.

Marc rolled his lover onto her back and pressed his entire length into her, then pulled it nearly out before pushing it in again. Their rhythm, usually in sync, was on point today and it didn't take long for either one of them to achieve orgasm. He pulled out of her and dove between her legs to suck on her vaginal lips and clit. She wrapped her legs behind his neck and over his shoulders, then laid back and let his oral skills shake her to the core, resulting in a series of mini-orgasms before a full-out climax.

Once his head was released from Dani's grip around it, Marc slid up and attacked Dani's lips with passion as she directed his cock to her opening, wanting him inside her again. Once he was inside, she wrapped her legs around his waist and rolled him onto his back, then pounded down on his length again and again and again, wanton with the desire of having him shoot another load into her, which happened after several minutes of her riding him. She laid her head on his chest and the two of them cuddled while his erection subsided and he fell out of her love canal.

Marc: Is it just me, or have you gotten more ravenous since our first time?

Dani: I have. I also try to bring something a little different to the table every time, because I like finding out what turns you on and how I can do it even better. The confidence you give me to be naughty, for lack of a better term, makes me love you even more and makes me want to express that to you in new and creative ways.

Marc: So my confidence really makes you horny?
Dani: Yes. I know it's a fine line you walk between confident and arrogant, but I have seen you from
an outsider's perspective and can tell which is which. Arrogance is when you act superior to others,
while confidence is you knowing that you're right about whatever you feel or think, like what you
probably did this afternoon with the students in the SGA.

Marc: I don't think a lot of people at Trinity know my full background, so they seem a bit surprised at
the effectiveness of my suggestions and tactics. They've heard about my experience in student affairs,
campus ministry, and intercollegiate athletics, but they most likely don't know about my BA and MA
in political science.

Dani: No wonder you know so much about how to develop passable legislation and get the right
combination of supporters for it.

Marc: Also doesn't hurt that my focus in undergrad was on parliamentary systems of government and
how you have to cobble together coalitions to achieve anything. The three governing bodies at
Trinity are the ultimate in parliamentary government as every member is their own party, by and
large. You learn very quickly that there are no permanent friends and no permanent enemies in that
environment. After forcing the no restrictions bill to be withdrawn, the "winning side" reached out to
their counterparts and started discussions on how to fix their proposal so it would pass the next time
around.

Dani: Your intelligence is another thing I find sexy about you.

Marc: Well, Ms. Darling Danielle, I love the way you own your body. You let the world know that
this is who and what I am, and damn it, I am not going to hide that because it might not conform to
someone else's view of perfection. It makes me weak in the knees because my ugly mug doesn't
believe it deserves to have someone as sexy and adorable and beautiful as you.

Dani: Again, I want you to lust after me a bit. I like the fact that I have shown you my soft side and
my slutty side and that you want to ravage me in either circumstance, that you make me feel so
desirable whichever way I want to present myself to you. Tonight was a cross between the
consummation of our relationship that I wanted to have happen in Cary and the dirty, illicit, mind-
blowing sex from Chicago.

Marc: You're too perfect for me, Dani. Can we get up and eat, because what I want to tell you
deserves a more sober setting?

Marc took Dani's left hand and kissed the ring finger on it, which led to her leaning up and placing a
loving peck on his lips. After getting dressed, the two of them went out to the kitchen and retrieved
their subs from the refrigerator. Marc filled Dani in on tomorrow's appointment for Danielle and the
possibility of there being a serious problem. He opened up as to being torn about the whole situation
and wasn't exactly sure how he should feel. Dani knew that she couldn't really advise him on this,
but re-iterated her love for him and that she would still be there for him however things turned out.
Still having about a half-hour before he needed to leave for home, Marc and Dani curled up on the
couch and watched clips of his time in Philly from last week that she had downloaded to her tablet.
She remarked on his choice of attire and the stool joke on Diana, then made a comment as to how his
relationships with Erin, Steph, and Alyssa bring out the best in him from a mentoring or fathering
perspective. Marc told Dani that he saw in her relationships with Erin and Steph the kind of "older
sister/stepmom" role that has made their acceptance of the couple's relationship come somewhat
easily, which he was hoping would happen for Ben and Megan at some point in the near future. He
asked her if she'd have a desire to reach out to Megan and share her experience on being a younger
woman dating someone with kids (be they biological, adopted, or pseudo children). Dani told him
that she could do that and that it might be a good idea for her to have Erin join them, so that she
could hear both sides of the conversation she will eventually need to have with Lily. A few more minutes of snuggling happened before Marc got up and left to head home.

**********

Marc went with Danielle to her ophthalmology appointment at the Froedtert Eye Institute on Thursday morning. The headaches and blurry vision had started to become less bearable for her in the past week and her hope was that the problem would be solved by getting a stronger prescription for her glasses. She was called back to see Dr. Simmons while Marc waited in the lobby and scrolled through his work email to see if there was any large-scale fallout over last night's SGA votes. An all-campus letter written by Student-Athlete Advisory Committee Chairman Kevin Dupree and signed by Black Student Union President James Hanford and Inter-Fraternity Council President Tom Bridges assailed Richard Kilbourn's decision to withdraw his bill and also claimed there was racial bias in the management of the two bills on yesterday's agenda.

"We believe that the white women who advanced the Anti-Fraternization Revision Act as well as their water-carriers in Trinity's administration deliberately blocked Representative Kilbourn's bill from getting an adequate hearing before the full SGA because they fear the possibility of black men having their way with them if there were no limit to the number of sexual partners they could have. Fraternization leniency benefits the status quo and the current power structure where white, middle-aged professors sleep with and groom young, impressionable, white undergraduate women of high socioeconomic status. We DEMAND that Vice President for Student Affairs Albert Moncrief and Board of Trustees Chairman David Strasser look into this matter and fish out the true motives behind Representatives Edwards and Sanderson's use of political theater and low-ball tactics to maintain the double standard on this campus where women's choice of partners is celebrated but men need to keep it in their pants."

While crafting a response to this letter that he could share with both Albert and David defending his involvement in the matter, Dr. Simmons came out and asked Marc to come back with him to the examination room. He followed him back and sat down next to Danielle.

Dr. Ken Simmons (to Marc): As I told Danielle, her vision is a little weaker than it was when she was last seen, but that is normal as one ages. I have suggested she consider bifocals so that she's not straining her eyes when it comes to reading things within arm's length. That's the good news. Now comes the other side. (to Danielle) The issues with your headaches and blurry vision are not because of eye strain or your weaker-than-necessary prescription. They are more likely due to something pressing on the optic nerve and throwing your eyesight out of kilter. I am going to recommend that you have an MRI done on the right side of your head. I am also going to put in a request for a blood draw and panel to check for kidney function since the MRI will require a contrast be injected. You don't have diabetic retinopathy, which I know was a concern of yours. I wish you the best of luck with what comes next and I hope to see you back in a year.

Marc and Danielle left the Eye Institute and went to lunch at Noodles and Company in the Tosa Village.

Marc: Hate to say it, but Mike was right when he thought something more than eye strain was behind the problems of the last three months. The headaches, the mood swings, the fatigue, they all point to the possibility of a tumor in the frontal lobe, the portion of the brain which regulates emotion and judgment.

Danielle: As much as I know you're probably right, I don't want to hear that. I HAVE to believe that it is something else. The one positive of the blood draw is that it will hopefully rule out cancer, meaning that if there IS a tumor, it's benign and can hopefully be treated without surgery and
Marc: I've been by your side for going on 25 years. You've been my best friend through all of that time and I won't let you handle this on your own. Let's keep happy thoughts about the situation until we hear something otherwise. Did Dr. Simmons set up a date for the blood work and MRI?

Danielle: The blood work is at my leisure, so I'll have it done tomorrow while at work. Once I'm cleared to have the MRI, I'll contact Froedtert and schedule an appointment.

Marc reached across the table and squeezed Danielle's hand. Despite being torn and conflicted in his mind, he knows where he needs to be right now, and that is here with his wife, his best friend, the original other half of his heart.
The rest of the week was especially busy for those connected to the Trinity community.

* The women's basketball team defeated Dominican University 71-66 on Thursday night to earn a place in the NACC championship game against Wisconsin Lutheran. The Thunder went down to the Warriors, 83-54, on Saturday night to finish one game short of making the NCAA Division III tournament.

* The women's hockey team split its games against Aurora University in the NCHA semifinals, but lost the total-goals series 7-6 (5-2, 2-4). Amanda picked up Kristie and Sam on Saturday morning and they left for Chicago to see Alyssa play the first post-season games of her career, staying at the Muellers' place in Evanston on Saturday night.

* On Saturday morning, Marc, Dani, Steph, Erin, Sofia, and Vanessa attended a seminar at Aurora Psychiatric Hospital in Wauwatosa on the topic of grounding or anchoring a person during a mental health crisis. Vanessa has been Sofia's anchor person since her partner had her first noticeable attack in 6th grade, while Erin has become Marc's main source of relieving his attacks, such as the one in Philadelphia last week and the near-suicide attempt in December, with Steph stepping in at times. Wil had put together this seminar as one of his final internship projects before he would graduate with his MA in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from UWM in May. Through self-disclosure and role-playing, those in attendance learned how to recognize an episode, how to draw near to their person, and what best helps him or her to exit the crisis. They were joined by Pam Rodgers, one of Danielle's friends, and her husband Greg. The Trinity contingent had planned originally to have Steph and Erin pair up as well as Marc and Dani, but instead would end up keeping Erin with Marc and having Steph and Dani work together. Following the seminar, the six of them and Wil went to lunch at Leff's Lucky Town, where they were joined by Sarah, Christen, and Julie. The lacrosse players gave Marc some additional ammunition against their coach, which he asked to be sent via email so he'd have a hard copy for his files.

* Michelle and Dawson had dinner with Ben and Megan, the first formal interaction between the law student's parents and the person he had begun seeing. The two women hit it off extremely well and swapped stories of cute moments from their teaching careers to date. Dawson smiled at the connection Michelle and Megan had made, with Ben pleased that Dawson had come upon someone who seemed to complement his son in some necessary ways. Ben asked Michelle how Dani had handled Erin's role in Marc's life when they got re-acquainted. She shared a small snippet of her conversation with her best friend and housemate from their Sweetest Day dinner the day that Erin had confronted her about her relationship with Marc, then said that he had suggested to Dani the two of them get together with Megan to share their experience of moving from being adversarial to accepting one another to uniting around their love for him and becoming friends-of-sorts.

* With their men tied-up on Saturday night (Marc with his wife and Wil on overnight rotation at the psych hospital), Dani and Sarah spent the evening together and fell asleep with one another at the latter's place. The pair talked about their situations and how they wished to pursue them, both with one another and with their men.

* Erin and Steph were over at Marc and Danielle's on Sunday, with the two of them discussing with the girls plans for their goddaughter's birthday on the 17th. She had already spoken with Val about her and Jim coming to Milwaukee that weekend for the Trinity/Carroll match on Saturday the 16th and the two women decided that they'd hold a mini St. Patrick's Day/birthday party at the Schmidts that Sunday. Erin thought it'd be nice to share her special day with her girlfriend, parents, godparents,
and teammates. After the two students left for campus, Marc told Danielle about a special surprise he wanted to pull on Erin, which she thought could be coordinated when they learned the schedules of the traveling pipe bands.
With just two weeks left before Spring break, a number of departments and organizations were trying to get the final pieces of preparation done before the second half of the term began and the heavy administrative and legislative decision-making would occur. With that in mind, Marc met with Paul Emerson, Albert Moncrief, and Vice President of Finance Sean Forbes to gain information from the three parties as to the financial condition of the Chaplain's Office and what could be expected from the university and synod in the 2019/2020 budget based on the office's level of activity in 2018/2019 and the resources granted in past years by both entities. The bishop told Marc that the Greater Milwaukee Synod had planned to increase its earmark for the school's ministry activities by 15% and to commit an additional $10,000 to the office to match an expected $10,000 for the Peer Ministry Alliance from Student Affairs by way of the Student Government Association. Forbes divulged that roll-over funds from Concordia's departure of $43,718 needed to be spent by June 30th, placed into the 2019/2020 budget as a surplus that would decrease the university's contribution to the office for that year, or moved into a separate fund within the chaplain's office for a perpetual, agreed-upon purpose. Moncrief interjected that Student Affairs was interested in corroborating with Marc's office on the development of additional programming beyond weekly worship and Lunch Bunch. Marc told Albert that they could discuss that on Friday ahead of the Board of Trustees meeting.

The remainder of the morning had Marc responding to email and voicemail messages. He first read over the newest list of actions sent to him by the lacrosse program, which included additional derogatory statements against the mental and moral fitness of several players as well as a veiled threat by Lauren of "straightening out the program". Marc took the portions related to Sofia (and by inference Steph Lafleur) and penned a grievance that he would seek to have Disability Support Services file with Human Resources on their behalf. The remaining complaints were filed and he then went about dropping an email on Bishop Emerson asking for a layout of the Social Statement on Education and whether disability discrimination was addressed in it. Danielle sent Marc a text saying that the blood tests showed she had decent kidney function and that her MRI was scheduled for March 8th. Richard Kilbourn from SGA sent Marc a message asking for some advice on getting the "no restrictions" bill out of committee and back to the SGA for passage next Wednesday. He gave Richard a call and laid out some ideas.

Marc: The first thing you need to address is what EXACTLY you want to accomplish with this bill. Is it just to level the field with what the women were given in the original code? Is it license to run amok? Is it some other purpose?

Richard: When Michael Parsons and myself went about developing this amendment to the new code, it was meant to give us gay men the same freedom that gay women had. If we had been able to get it onto the November 7th agenda, it would have passed and that would be that. Instead, it got pushed over to the November 20th meeting, which didn't have a quorum present due to students leaving campus early for Thanksgiving break. The December 5th meeting dealt almost entirely with taking action to allow groups and organizations to start Spring semester on stable footing. By the point we got it on the agenda and ready to debate on February 6th, the bill had been amended to also allow for multi-partner relationships involving persons of both sexes, which is what I think got it derailed. Liz blocked the bill from getting to a debate, then brought her own legislation dealing with the fraternization policy and necessary amendments to it. Of course you saw what happened on Wednesday when both of our bills were taken up. How do we get this thing done? It is back in Legislation and Rules this afternoon and I want it to get out of committee with a good chance of getting the 18 to pass on the 6th.

Marc: Biggest thing here is you HAVE to narrow up the bill to create SOME restrictions. The
"Harem Act" that Representatives Dupree, Hanford, and Bridges seem to be advocating is NOT going to pass. The women on the committee and in SGA as a whole are NOT going to back anything that makes them into sex slaves for the men on this campus, which is what their idea would do. You will need to get very technical in your amendment to spell out somewhat which relationships will be allowable and which ones won't.

Richard: How specific or technical?

Marc: Spell out at the very beginning the three forms of partnerships that can be created between humans, those being male/male, male/female, and female/female. With that as your basis, you can then lay out the parameters for what is acceptable and what isn't within the bounds of the Social Statements and the ethic of responsible sexuality. First, I don't think you're advocating a commune of men swapping with each other, correct?

Richard: Yes. It's hard enough being in a relationship with one or perhaps two and making sure you trust each other to be honest about your pasts, but I can't imagine a string of partners that one would need to do that with.

Marc: So put into the bill a restriction of no more than three individuals in a "relationship". Then lay out how they can be formed. The women already are allowed to have triads, which means each one is with the other two, a closed triangle. The men should be able to have that as well. Take gender out of the description and list it as "up to three pairings described in subsection one or subsection three".

Richard: And that will mean....

Marc: That men can create triads where the three individuals all partner up with one another.

Richard: Looks simple, but could be confusing.

Marc: In committee, you're likely to have time to explain the parts of the amendment in a bit more detail than you will in front of the whole body. Lay out what is meant by those words.

Richard: Is that all I need to do?

Marc: No. As you will have brought in at the beginning the concept of male/female relationships, which is still the most prevalent type in society and in the campus community, you will probably need to reconcile how those are managed in light of giving gays and lesbians freedom to engage in multi-partner relationships. In short, what can straight people do and not do, and do bisexuals get any provision or freedom to satisfy their need for human interaction?

Richard: I see how giving that freedom just to gays and lesbians would be problematic with other segments of the LGBTQ community. I'm sure you probably have something in your bag of tricks to get around that dilemma.

Marc: I do, and it comes from the outside world. A former women's soccer player of mine is seeing a female co-worker. Both of them are bi. Therefore, each of them is also pursuing a relationship with a man, with both parties having full knowledge of it. Should this be considered illicit or not?

Richard: Is it the same guy?

Marc: No, it isn't, and that is why I'd advocate getting technical on that part of interpersonal relationships. You've already given a description of a triad, so now you'll need to describe the workings of the bisexual relationship, which under the code and the Social Statement would have to be "open". The "fulcrum" individual would be able to have a relationship with a person of each gender, but those two would not be allowed to close the triangle. In the language used at the top, it
would be defined as "one pairing from subsection one or subsection three and one pairing from subsection two".

Richard: Which means there cannot be three pairings in the relationship or two pairings from subsection two, right?

Marc: Right. It puts off-limits the idea that one guy can have two girls or one girl can have two guys without explicitly forbidding it. You sanction all the other types as amendments to what is in the code currently.

Richard: And this will pass?

Marc: You should get the 6 to pass it out of committee the way it is laid out. If that happens, you'll get my support because, even though I don't necessarily understand the value or necessity of multi-partner relationships on your side of the aisle, I do understand the rationale of inherent fairness and am willing to acquiesce to your desire to achieve that.

Richard: Gotcha. Today is really the last chance to get it out of committee because elections will take up a good portion of the next six weeks.

Marc: When do campaigns begin, and what is the structure of the SGA? I'm aware that there are some representatives from the various schools, some at-large, and some that represent certain segments of campus, like student-athletes and the Greek system.

Richard: The nomination process runs from tomorrow through next Tuesday, with students eligible to seek ballot access both through their school as well as the at-large pool. The Elections Committee will meet next Tuesday at 4pm, when they will determine the make-up of next year's SGA and therefore how the election will be run. Any student organization seeking a seat on SGA needs to have a member present at that meeting. There will be a maximum of 10 seats available for representatives of those organizations, but that only happens if at least 25 organizations seek positions, with a 40% "winner" standard determining how many seats will be allotted. At least five of the 25 voted-in positions must be at-large, and the schools' percentages of the body are based on the number of candidates they have.

Marc: Thanks for the information, and if you need a pep talk before next Wednesday's meeting, give me a holler.

Richard: Thanks, chaplain.

Marc wrapped up his communications work and walked over to Siebert for his weekly meeting with his six peer ministers.
Adding To The Core

Monday's meeting of Marc's Super Six focused on the preliminary planning of Trinity's Easter service (to be held the evening of Palm Sunday, April 14th), with the chaplain bringing the students up to speed on happenings around campus.

Marc: I had a lengthy conversation with Richard Kilbourn from SGA this morning and he told me that elections are coming up. The nomination and canvassing process runs from tomorrow through next Tuesday, where students can register to run for either a seat representing their school or college or an at-large one. Also, student organizations can vie for one of up to ten seats by appearing at the SGA Elections Committee meeting next Tuesday at 4pm. Since the Peer Ministry Alliance is registered and recognized, we should consider getting on the ballot. Alyssa and Stefan, you are the only two among us who were here last year, so I'll defer to your knowledge of how things run here.

Stefan: Last year's election was quite different because we had a large number of representatives either graduating or transferring plus student organizations that would be disbanding upon Concordia's merger. It's how the Black Student Union was able to secure a seat as well as the Inter-Fraternity Council. The 35 seats allocated were the fewest in my four years here and is partially responsible for the current state of devil-may-care decision-making from the body.

Marc: Who here thinks we should throw our hat in?

Steph, Julie, Corey, and Alyssa raised their hands, with the sophomore offering to attend the meeting on behalf of PMA.

Marc: That being resolved, let's move onto planning our second "Rite In Place", an Easter Sunday service to be held on Palm Sunday, since almost everyone will be gone on the day itself. Unlike Christmas Eve service, Easter is very straight-forward and pretty by-the-book. Specific hymns, the prescribed lectionary, certain liturgical elements. As always with me, there WILL be some additions that don't follow the script. This will be the major project that you and your mentees will focus upon during the afternoon portion of our Peer Ministry In-Service on March 22nd. If I bring in all nine that I'm interviewing this afternoon, we will have three possible homilists in addition to myself and I would like to have them give their best five-minute sermonette on the Resurrection. Steph, I am planning to have you as one of my liturgical assistants for the service, with Erin and Julie assisting with communion, and Corey in charge of set-up and take-down. Alyssa and Stefan, you will be two of the three I wish to have delivering the message. I will send all of you the liturgy once it is together in one piece. I also plan to reach out like we did for the Christmas Eve service and offer opportunities for the general student body to participate.

Julie: Our mentees will be joining us in our roles, I am guessing.

Marc: Yes. Speaking of that, are any of you free this afternoon to sit in on interviews?

Steph: Erin, Julie, and I have practice at 3, while I have class 1-2:15.

Julie: I can do 1-2, then need to be over to the field house to get ready for practice.

Corey: I'm available after 2.

Alyssa: Got class at 1, but with the season over, I'm free after that. 3-4 for me, then?

Marc: Corey, can you do 2-3?
Corey: Sounds good.

Marc: Each of you will be sitting in on my Q-and-A's with three candidates and will be asked to give me your opinion of them. Hopefully, there will be no instances where a conflict of interest will come up that forces me to postpone an interview to tomorrow.

Stefan: Are we still meeting at 4 to put together the file for my candidacy committee?

Marc: Yes. Have you decided which seminary you plan to attend?

Stefan: It's between Luther and Wartburg. Parents want me to go to Wartburg, but I'm more interested in the smallish big-city life of St. Paul.

Marc: St. Paul is a great place, in my opinion. Close enough to a lot of things, but the neighborhoods are all relatively secluded.

Erin: What's planned for the In-Service?

Marc: It will be a more intense version of the training day in January. There will be role-playing and group scenarios, and you'll be working closely with your trainee or trainees. As I mentioned earlier, the afternoon portion will be spent fleshing out the Easter service from the base elements of the liturgy.

Steph and Alyssa left first to get to their 1:00 classes, followed by Erin, Corey, and Stefan. Marc and Julie walked over to his office, where they were met by Cali Farmer, the first interviewee of the afternoon.

Marc: Come in, Cali, and have a seat. I am pretty sure you know Julie, one of our current peer ministers. She and a couple of others will be sitting in on today's interviews to give me additional feedback on the candidates.

All three were seated at the square table located against the far wall, just under the windows.

Marc: I have asked you to meet with me because you were recommended by one of our current peer ministers to be added to our roster for next year. Based on what she said and what I already knew about you, the decision to interview you was not hard. So tell us your faith story.

Cali explained to Marc and Julie how she and her brothers were nominally Catholic by way of their mom, but that she had little interaction with the church outside of the requisite hoop-jumping to get through Confirmation. Her parents had sent her to Greendale Martin Luther for high school (one of two LCMS schools in Milwaukee County), which made the choice to attend Trinity relatively easy given that she had some familiarity with Lutheranism and knew that TLU would be more liberal on the whole than GML or Concordia was.

Cali: In reality, my stepping forward into this is partially your doing, Marc. When Dani told me that she was considering participating in the Christmas Eve service, we ended up talking about religion and your view on it and the broader context of living out what one believes.

Marc: I'll guess that she told you how I view the concept of lifestyle evangelism, that one's faith and connection to God is meant to be the foundation upon which one goes through life and that it informs how they view the world and their place within it.

Cali: I don't recall it in those terms, but she did say something about how your concept for MUSC seemed to come from a belief in a greater purpose for the club than just competing and keeping your players in shape for their college seasons.
Marc: It did. My wife had gotten me a book called The Ragamuffin Gospel, which talked about Jesus' message being one of grace, for those who had been trampled by life. He was not seeking out those who were attempting to "earn" their place in the Kingdom, but rather those who knew they couldn't get there without help or luck. That's why I stress the concept of vulnerability and relationship-building in every arena I'm in. No person is an island, and as the Village People said once, "no man does it all by himself." I wouldn't be here without people giving me opportunities in the past or luck shining on me once in a while. You have a bit of experience with seeing the dark side of life here at Trinity. How do you or would you attempt to shine light into that darkness?

Cali: Having been wrongly accused of certain transgressions on campus, I know what it is like to be judged without a chance to prove otherwise. I feel like I'm able to build a bridge of trust with others that allows them to open up, that the concept of mutual sharing gives me a platform from which to provide empathy, sympathy, and honest caring for the individual.

Marc: I am interviewing nine candidates today, all of whom I am confident will make fine peer ministers. How many I will invite to join the roster is dependent on funds from the synod and university to cover stipends for them as well as extra-ministerial opportunities, along with the spread of talent we have across the three aspects of peer ministry. Decisions will be made by next Monday, with an official welcoming happening during worship on that Wednesday.

Cali: First, thank whoever suggested me for this opportunity, as I am honored to be considered. Second, I look forward to being part of what you're planning to do on this campus next year in whatever capacity I can.

Cali got up and left Marc's office, with Abby Davidson coming in for her interview. The three of them had a rousing fifteen-minute discussion on how social work and peer ministry are similar concepts in that sometimes you have to be vulnerable yourself in the line of work and "lead with your heart" to connect with a client. The third candidate on the docket was Karina Lester.

Marc: Stefan Fraser from the Pre-Seminary program recommended you for a student chaplain's post on next year's peer ministry leadership team. He said that you have the personality and fire for public witness that, frankly, most of our students don't. Can you give me a bit of your background as to where that "larger than life" personality was formed?

Karina: My mom took me to church from a very young age. I would see the spirit move in the building on Sunday mornings and it shaped how I viewed being in God's presence. As I grew older, religion became something that both helped me stay on track in school, but also made others avoid me because they thought I was too "goody two-shoes" for them. Running track at Park gave me a peer group that supported me when I felt disowned by some of my own people. I went to Carthage because it was close to home and because it allowed me to patch together a self-designed major in African-American Studies, with an eye to use that to go onto grad school and then into university teaching. The move up here and this being a campus with a bigger disconnect between the races than at Carthage has been an adjustment.

Marc: Have you thought about seminary?

Karina: I've looked into the programs at Howard University School of Divinity, but am not 100% committed to going that route.

Marc banked away her statement for a future conversation. After a couple more questions, Karina and Julie left, with Corey and Christen waiting outside for their time with Deacon Schmidt. Julie wished her partner good luck and squeezed her hand, which was followed by the two freshmen entering Marc's office. Marc got a good synopsis of Christen's life story growing up with parents of different races and religious backgrounds, then how her rooming with Julie led to their mutual
attraction and her desire to learn more about what mattered to her girlfriend. She told Marc she enjoyed being part of the Christmas Eve service and helping with the Chili Cook-Off and asked if there were more things coming up outside of worship in which she could participate. Marc made a brief mention of Easter service and told her to ask Julie for more details since it had been discussed at lunch earlier in the day.

**********

Before the last interview of the day, Marc and Alyssa talked about the previous two they had done and the overall feeling he had about the students he had met and questioned.

Alyssa: What do you think about Vanessa and Matt?

Marc: I was sold on them when they were recommended last week and their testimonies backed up what I felt coming in. In fact, I don't think I've had one yet that I can't see asking to join the roster. How many I'm able to ask depends on Bishop Emerson, Sean Forbes in Finance, and how we view the current and new students fitting between the public and private aspects of peer ministry.

Alyssa: How would you split the five you will have returning for next year?

Marc: For sure, I want you, Steph, and Erin associated with the office, given your experience and the gifts you possess. Julie is going to be a fine residence hall peer in my opinion, and Corey seems destined to fit into the general day-to-day happenings around campus.

Alyssa: I know we have one more to go, but what is your thinking on the previous eight?

Marc: Abby in the dorms, Karina as Stefan's replacement with the three of you, Cali, Vanessa, and Christen similar to Corey, Brad as my office mate/runner, and Liz technically on the office end but focused on campus as a whole if she's re-elected to student government.

Katie Aguinaga came at 3:40 and proceeded to enter the office for her meeting with Marc. Marc: Welcome, Katie. As you are the last of the nine that we had scheduled for today, I'm going to get right to the questions. Give me a bit of your background and how you've come to this point in your life.

Katie shared with Marc and Alyssa some details, such as being raised for the first few years of life by a single mother, who married when she was 5 and had two daughters and a son with her new husband. She was adopted by her stepfather at the age of 12 and was raised Catholic, attending Eau Claire Regis for high school before coming to Trinity for college. Marc asked Katie about her academic pursuits (Athletic Training major) and what she felt her best interpersonal skills were (the ability to identify with people of different races, backgrounds, and upbringings; good active listening skills; and magnetism, where others open up to you for no explicit reason).

Following Katie's interview, Stefan came by to go over his candidacy file with Marc. Finding everything to be in order, Marc signed off on it so he could officially submit it to the two seminaries' admission boards and his home synod in Iowa. With that last task completed, Marc packed up and headed home for the evening, but not before checking his email one last time and seeing a message from Dani.

Marc,

Three more requests today. Will have a stack of agreements for you to read and sign when I come to campus on Wednesday. Keep the faith as to Danielle's health. All will turn out as it should. Beyond what we share in the bedroom, we're friends, and I don't want that to change as a result of your
needing to focus on your wife at this time. I'm not going anywhere and will be holding you close to my heart.

Love, Dani
Thursday's lacrosse practice promised to be a rough one as the team was less than a week away from playing their first-ever match as Trinity Lutheran University. Lauren chose to use the first half-hour of the time having her outfield players pepper the three goalkeepers in a test of shooting accuracy and creativity for the first group and strength of will for the second. As expected, Nicole did very well during her first round of shots, with Steph a little shaky and Jane getting burnt through the gaps in her stance. Nicole was pulled for the second round as a pre-caution, with Steph doing better in being the brick wall she knew she was, channeling a bit of Alyssa's hockey goalkeeping style. Jane, again, found the drill difficult as her upper-body structure wasn't yet filled-out enough to withstand the velocity and weight of 21 shots in short succession.

Following that drill, Lauren and Sarah selected their teams for an inter-squad scrimmage. Given a roster of 24 with three goalkeepers, the teams would play 11 v 11 with one goalkeeper and one outfield player sitting out to start. Lauren selected Nicole first, with Sarah taking Steph Lafleur after her. The back-and-forth continued until both teams were filled out.

Blue: Nicole; Ali, Becca, Erin; Maggie, Jess, Julie, Morgan B.; Sofia, Steph M., Lauren.
Green: Steph L.; Andi, Sam, Emily; Kelley, Megan, Morgan A., Kristie; Lindsey, Christen, Savannah.

Christen and Steph McNamara faced-off in the center circle, with Steph winning possession of the ball. She passed the ball back to Jess, who swung it out to Morgan Brooks, with her pass to Erin moved onto Jess in short order. She took the ball and ran with it in the webbing of her stick, with her three attackers spreading out in front of her and the remaining midfielders following her and setting up around the 12-meter fan. Lauren and Sofia moved in and out of the area between the fan and the 8-meter arc, with Steph Mac standing on the arc in front of Steph Lafleur. Andi attempted to keep Lauren outside the fan, but was unable to and the pass from Jess to her was quickly flicked into the net for a 1-0 lead.

Shelley and Jane conversed a little bit on the sidelines as they had yet to be inserted into the match, with both sort of despondent on their current places in the pecking order. At the 20-minute mark, Jane was inserted for Steph and Shelley came on in place of Sam. Nicole moved over to the Green team while Jane took up her position in front of the Blue team's net. Shelley's hold-down play in the center of defense was not to the same quality as Sam's which gave Christen and her line mates more opportunities to breach their fan and arc, resulting in shots which Jane had little chance of stopping. Lauren moved a few players between the two teams to start the second half, giving the first-choice defense (Ali, Sam, and Erin) a chance to face off with the first-choice attack (Sofia, Lindsey, and Steph M.) and pairing up Megan and Jess in the center of Blue's midfield against Morgan Andringa and Becca. On 40 minutes, Steph Lafleur came in for Nicole and Jane moved over to the Green team. The final 20 minutes was a test of wills between a tightly-packed back eight for the Blue team and a threatening front seven from the Green side. Steph's chemistry with Ali, Sam, and Erin was noticeable as they kept her field of vision clear of screens while working to force their opposite numbers away from the arc. Shelley skulked a little on her side of the field, which ended up proving costly on a couple of occasions as the quick-counter combination of Erin-to-Megan-to-Savannah torched Andi on the right side of defense and left Christen as an open target once she was able to draw Shelley out to confront her. The scrimmage ended with a lot being learned by the two coaches and some tough decisions for Wednesday's opener to be made.
The team had not been in the locker room together more than 30 seconds before Shelley changed quickly back into her street clothes, packed her lacrosse bag, grabbed her backpack, and proceeded to push her way past the others to leave, with a sneer on her face and a bit of attitude in her demeanor. Megan chased after her hoping to get to the bottom of what had the freshman in such a snit. She was able to catch Shelley before she got to her car and invited her to have a cup of coffee with her in Luther's Landing. Once they got their beverages and sat down, Megan began the inquisition.

Megan: What is going on with you?!?! I know it sucks that you're not getting to show what you can do as much as some of the other defenders and that you've been getting drafted into the second-string back line in the scrimmages, but moping on the field and being harsh about it around the rest of the team is not going to help your cause.

Shelley: No one on the team likes me, with some being quite hostile about it. Steph McNamara has been the only member of the team that has even attempted to be friends with me, and I think that's only because she's on the outs with Sam and Kristie. Early in the school year, Kelley had invited me along to some of the team bonding activities she and the others in Augsburg would do, like going out to dinner. After Fall break, she pretty much stopped talking to me or reaching out to me.

Megan: Do you think the fact that she was assaulted while with you that weekend might have something to do with it?

Shelley: I'm sure it does, but I didn't mean for it to happen. It was supposed to be a few drops of GHB so she would open up about what was happening on the dating front inside the team, but it knocked her out instead.

Megan: And how did she get into the condition she was in?

Shelley: I may have done a couple of things to her, to get her aroused and silly-happy so she would tell me what I wanted to know.

Megan: Does she know it was you who had her drugged and then assaulted her?

Shelley: No, and I'd like to keep it that way.

Megan: Back to the team hatred thing. That incident I'm sure led to a good chunk of the team becoming quite protective of Kelley and seeing you as the enemy. So that's a huge strike against you. Was there anything before then that might have gotten you on their bad sides?

Shelley: Well, early in the year I was trying to attract the attention of one of our teammates, being perhaps too obvious about it. Some others got offended by that and declared me persona non grata.

Megan: Ahhhhhhhhh. That'd be it, then. A good portion of the squad knew you were chasing Steph Lafleur hard and weren't about to help you while hurting their friend and teammate in the process.

Shelley: ERIN SHOULD NOT HAVE HER!!!!

Megan: That's not for you to decide, Shelley. They're together, they've been together in some capacity since the start of orientation, and if Steph had wanted to accept your attention, she would have done so back then.

Shelley: Why is everyone clam jamming me from her and taking the goody two-shoes' side in this?!

Megan was having a hard time not going off on Shelley, but was having no real luck using reason to
get her to give up the chase.

Megan: This might be where your commuting really has hurt your chances. We've seen them with one another on an almost-daily basis for the past six months, and the sparks, the fire, the love, the bond, the camaraderie, it's all there. It's actually a beautiful model of how to grow a relationship from scratch that can last, in that you start from a common base and just add layers to it. Jess and I have known each other since our freshman year at Carthage, but only became a couple last summer, and I'd say we're not as close as the two of them. Why not accept that the S.S. Lafleur has left harbor and wait for the next boat?

Shelley: If I had lost the race to another 9 1/2 or 10, I'd be OK with that, but that's not the case here. She's with a freakin' SIX! How does that level of meh get to steal such a dime from the rest of the world?!?!

Megan: I'm through trying to talk sense to you. Listen up, girlie: stop trying to steal Steph from Erin or you're going to have a bigger problem on your hands than just a few teammates freezing you out.

Megan got up and went back to Buuck to shower, change, and go to dinner. She texted Jess along the way and gave her a short summary of the bug up Shelley's rump, then said that she'd address the subject with Steph and Erin as soon as she could.

**********

In Lauren and Kelley's room, more than half the lacrosse team (Megan, Morgan Brooks, Lauren, Kelley, Erin, Steph Lafleur, Christen, Julie, Lindsey, Emily, Morgan Andringa, Kristie, Sam, and Sofia) had been called together by Megan to address the Shelley situation and get a handle on the in-house drama that could rear its head on the Spring break trip starting next Friday.

Megan: You saw how Shelley bolted out of the locker room after practice earlier? Well, I chased her down before she was able to get off-campus and we chatted for a bit. Came to find out that she thinks the whole team minus Steph Mac hate her, and she's only sort-of OK with her because she's on the outs with the Mueller sisters.

Lindsey: She does know what she's done to get on the wrong side of most of us, correct?

Megan: Yes and no. She understands that her part in Kelley's traumatic experience over Fall break probably caused you to develop a negative opinion of her, but she also tried to downplay what actually happened, the information of which is better left unsaid.

Christen: Well, that was AFTER she had already made enemies of us by causing two of our faves unnecessary turmoil.

Megan: She's not buying that, and I couldn't get her to see the cold, hard truth about them. She feels like she was given no chance to make her play for Steph before she was "stolen" by Erin and that the rest of you have been supporting their "Dime and Six" relationship. Anyways, we have to keep her from turning our Spring Break trip into a freakin' circus, and with that I will hand over the floor to Moe.

Morgan B.: Remember I told you that Coach does NOT like drama, doesn't accept it, and will crack down on any that plays out in the light of day. So let's make sure none of this in-fighting gets out of control. It sounds like Shelley won't listen to reason, so we'll need to work around that. The seniors can probably manage her if we are able to get her roomed with one or two of us, but that's not a given.
Steph: Megan has said that she likes to keep roommates together as well as those with a common connection. Any idea how the singles will be distributed?

Morgan B.: It's very much a crap shoot at that point because most of the team will have been divided. At Carthage, we went four-to-a-room, so I presume it will be the same here with Gavin in charge of the purse strings.

Lauren: Any predictions? You know we have some pairings that are quite combustible.

Morgan B.: Looking over the roster and knowing who lives with who, you can count on Megan and Jess, Lindsey and Emily, Christen and Julie, Morgan and Savannah, Lauren and Kelley, Kristie and Ali, Jane and Andi, and Sam and Steph Mac being together. Beyond that, Sofia should be with Christen, Steph and Sam with Kristie and Ali, Andi and Jane with Morgan and Savannah, and Shelley with Kelley and Lauren. Ugh.

Megan: We can't let that happen. The two of us should bring Sarah up to speed on that situation so Lauren doesn't place the three of them together. I also think we should get on the table who is with who from a relationship perspective, so that we're able to have your backs in dealing with the coaches.

Erin: Sarah told a number of us a few weeks ago when we had next year's freshmen visiting campus that she would support players being what they are and with who they want, so giving her that information would be helpful if Lauren tries to take a crack at banning teammate relationships, which we know she can't legally do. She probably has an idea of some of them, and I think most of us know who are together, but let's get it out in the open so we ALL can stand up for one another.

Kristie: Well, we know Erin and Steph are together, as are Lindsey and Emily and Julie and Christen and Lauren and Kelley.

Megan: Jess and I have been together since this past summer, as I told Lauren back in September and Shelley just a little while ago.

Morgan A.: Savannah and Maggie are a bit of a thing, even if you can't get either one of them to admit it.

Megan jotted down the pairings so she would have them in front of her when the seniors talked with Sarah tomorrow.

Emily (to Steph): You were down there for College Cup and a wedding, right?

Steph: Yeah. Megan, can you ask Sarah where we're staying, because I'm curious if it's the same place Erin and I were on that trip?

Megan: Can do. You make any connections while in town?

Erin: A couple. One of the brides' mothers is considering coming to see us play against Meredith and said she would try to get some others to join her.

Morgan A.: Savannah said that Maggie's parents were planning to come up for a mini-vacation to see us play our two games and to meet their daughter's "special someone".

Steph: If we're at the Doubletree, there is a mall just across the parking lot from it that we could probably access if we get any downtime on the trip.

Morgan B.: Are we sort of settled on what we need to do to keep next week's trip from turning into a
Seeing a lot of nods from the others, she was ready to wrap up the meeting when Sam spoke up.

Sam: If you can, see if it's possible for Steph and I to be separated in the rooming assignments. Things aren't good there, as most of you are aware, and having her, Kristie, and I together in that confined space would be bad for us and I'm sure Ali wouldn't want to see the passive-aggressive sniping she'd do to my sister and I.

Megan noted Sam's request and said she'd make sure to bring it up tomorrow with Sarah. The two seniors wished their teammates a good evening and left, with most of the others drifting back to their rooms. Erin, Steph, Julie, and Christen followed Sofia to her room, where the five of them waited on Vanessa to return from Acro/Tumbling practice so they could go off-campus for a bit.
Outside Stuenkel 103 ahead of today's Board of Trustees, Marc and Albert Moncrief talked over how to expand religious programming on-campus in the new academic year. Marc told Albert that schools typically hold an activities fair at the start of Fall semester, and that that happens to be the best time for religious groups to make contact with students. As the two swapped ideas, Marc laid out how he was planning to expand opportunities beyond the new Peer Ministry Alliance and weekly worship through the founding of a Lutheran Student Movement chapter at Trinity, one which would be responsible for non-chaplain and non-worship programming as well as connecting the school to the region's other colleges and universities. He also advocated for a United Campus Ministries group to be founded as a counter to the ELCA ministries on campus. Albert asked Marc if they would be able to meet sometime during spring break to further discuss these plans, to which he was amenable. In response, Marc asked if he could invite some of his colleagues from the campus ministry world to sit in on their meeting and offer their perspectives on building UCM, LSM, and the potential for parachurch organizations to find space within the walls of Trinity.

**********

The Board of Trustees meeting began with Paul Ridgewell bringing to the table the administrative overhaul bill that he introduced four weeks earlier. Following a short question-and-answer period and some debate over compensation levels and "moral fitness" guidelines for the newly-classified positions, Chairman Strasser moved for the yeas and nays, with the bill passing 29-6. The next item on the agenda was the Practical Ministry certificate bill that was set to go before the Faculty Senate on the 7th. As the calendar did not have the Board of Trustees meeting again until April 5th, almost two weeks after Fall 2019 course registration would begin on March 25th, Ridgewell asked the body to "pre-pass" the bill so that it would be officially enacted upon clearance of the Faculty Senate and thus students would be able to begin taking courses toward the certificate this fall. Dr. Sinclair, Bishop Emerson, and Deacon Schmidt were all in attendance and available to take questions from the Board about its contents. Not willing to pass up an opportunity to score points with the conservative wing of the synod, Trustee James Garrick questioned the bishop harshly over this shift away from the professionally-trained and ordained to a wider spread of lower-level "quasi-leaders" that would be dubbed synodical deacons without the full moral testing that is placed upon those seeking ordination.

James Garrick: Bishop Emerson, is it not true that these "synodical deacons" could end up leading ministries in the church that have been previously been the domain of the clergy?

Paul Emerson: Yes, synodical deacons can possibly take over functions in the ELCA that clergy have previously handled.

James Garrick: So, in effect, you and your on-campus leadership are seeking to overthrow our understanding of the ordained as those "set apart" for public ministry to include those who might not have those gifts or the moral fitness for the position.

Paul Emerson: There is no intent by this proposal to devalue clergy or lessen their role within the greater church. At a time when the supply of seminary-trained leaders is falling well short of the demand for workers in the field, we need to open the doors of leadership to a wider segment of the church's membership as well as prioritize what clergy and ONLY clergy can do, allowing anything outside those boundaries to become a function of the laity, with them gaining theological education either through the synod's Diakonia program or by completing the coursework and experiential requirements for the Practical Ministry certificate from Trinity.
James Garrick: To me, this sounds like an attempt to reverse years of tradition in Lutheranism that came to us by way of the ALC, the LCA, the AELC, and their predecessor bodies that the ministry of Word and Sacrament be handled by professional-trained and morally-tested men and, since 1970, women.

Paul Emerson: You have referred more than once to the concept that those who are consecrated by the synod as deacons, be it synodical or churchwide, would not have to meet a moral standard similar to that of the ordained. Spell out what you mean.

James Garrick: The man to your right, Deacon Marc Schmidt, was proven by this body just four weeks ago of not being morally upright enough to have been able to gain ordination in the ELCA and thus came to his position at Trinity through the side door of the diaconate.

Marc, seeing that his good name and character were being slandered by Garrick, stood up and laid forth a response that only he was capable of giving.

Marc: Trustee Garrick, to claim that I would have been unable to progress to ordination due to my past indiscretions is at the least slanderous, and at the most character assassination. When my supporters testified on my behalf on February 1st, they presented a balanced approach to who I am and how they perceive me. Bishop Emerson was fully aware of my past when I interviewed with him near the end of Diakonia, and Trinity's call committee had full knowledge of my history. As much as I would like to stand up here and verbally tear you limb-from-limb, I will instead choose to present the "moral" standards that you are so worried won't be met by Practical Ministry certificate holders who end up consecrated as synodical deacons. EVERY student who completes the first three courses in the certificate program will be interviewed by myself along with a member of the synod's leadership team, most likely Rev. Matt Sherman. The moral requirements to gain consecration at the completion of the fourth course are as follows:

* The candidate must not have been found guilty of serious malfeasance against a member of the church or campus community;

* The candidate must accord himself or herself in line with the school's Code of Student Conduct and the ELCA Social Statements on which it stands;

* The candidate must be willing to uphold and abide by the Social Statements; and

* The candidate cannot have violated the university or synod's policy on acceptable personal relationships.

Any student that clears those hurdles will have met the SAME standard that the synod's candidacy committee requires of those seeking candidacy for ordination or consecration as a Churchwide Diaconal Minister. With that, I request that the yeas and nays be called for Legislatively Chair Ridgewell.

Ridgewell moved that the yeas and nays be called for, with Trustee Peter Wilkins seconding the motion. The result of the vote was 34 in favor, with only Trustee Garrick opposed to pre-passing the Practical Ministry bill, sending the measure onto the Faculty Senate to enact at their meeting on Thursday.

Other actions taken:

* Bishop Emerson, along with Deacon Schmidt, submitted the budget request for the Office of the Chaplain for FY 2020, to begin on July 1st. The budget laid out income which would come from the synod, student fees, and university appropriations along with planned expenses for the 2019/2020
academic year.

* Vice President of Human Resources Cheryl Baines submitted her retirement papers to the Board, effective June 30th.

* Athletic Director Gavin Winchester submitted his department's budget request for the next year, with large increases in projected income from and planned expenses for alumni relations.

Following the meeting, Marc asked Chairman Strasser if he could get a copy of Gavin's budget request sent to him by the clerk, as its contents might be of significance to an investigation he was conducting into the athletic department's off-campus activities.

**********

Prior to practice, the lacrosse team's four seniors met with Coach Hawthorne to discuss rooming arrangements for the spring break trip next week.

Megan: Sarah, we've got a bit of a problem stewing in the team that you should know about. Shelley has been chasing Steph Lafleur almost non-stop since the start of the year, with no success. You know her and Erin are together, right?

Sarah: Yes. My girlfriend knows the two of them pretty well, and they confirmed their relationship to me earlier this semester.

Morgan: Well, there is a bigger problem concerning her. Over fall break, she and Kelley went to a party off-campus and Kelley was assaulted. If Lauren does her roommate pairings like she has in the past, those two will end up together along with Kelley's roommate and partner, Lauren Chandler, and that will make for a VERY awkward situation.

Sarah: That would be a nightmare. I think she and I will be discussing the trip on Monday before practice, so I'll get that into the conversation.

Megan: Sam Mueller also asked that she not be paired with Steph McNamara. They're roommates, but on the outs and putting them together, especially with her sister Kristie, would be another combustible combination.

Sarah: I have a soft spot for Steph, because I think she can be a really good offensive cog on this team if she could keep her head into playing and off being a bad ass or getting distracted by what the Mueller sisters are doing. I'll add that to what we'll need to address. Anything else?

Jess: We probably should get you on board with the partnerships on the team. Megan and I are together. You know about Erin and Steph already. Then there's Lauren and Kelley, Julie and Christen, Lindsey and Emily, maybe Maggie and Savannah, and Jane and Andi.

Sarah: That's what, 14 out of 24 on the team?

Megan: Yes. Our favorite lovebirds told us that you in essence came out to them and said that you'd have the players' backs to be with who they want.

Sarah: That's true, and I will to the best of my ability.

Nicole: Thanks, coach. I think the four of us can handle the two malcontents provided we're allowed to do so. Keeping them from disrupting this first trip is our primary objective.

Sarah: Go ahead and get changed, then we can do some focused work before the rest of the team
arrives.

The players went into the main part of the locker room and got dressed for practice, satisfied that they were heard and that Sarah would do what she could with Lauren when the time came.

**********

Open Mic Night in Regents Hall brought out a smaller-than-desired crowd due primarily to a number of students heading home for the weekend before jetting out for spring break next Friday. Emily signed up to do some sit-down comedy and Matt planned to perform a couple of instrumentals on his mellophone. Lindsey, Erin, Steph, and Cali were in attendance to support their people and were joined by Abby Davidson. Following the performances, Matt walked Cali back to Augsburg. They chatted for a few minutes at the front door.

Cali: You're pretty good with that thing. Why did you choose that instead of, say, trumpet?

Matt: The mellophone is the marching band equivalent of French horn, which is what I play in concert band. I want to eventually put together a CD of instrumentals played on mellophone. What you heard tonight was just a couple of the tunes I'm planning to have on it.

Cali: When you finally release it, can I get a signed copy?

Matt: I think I can do better than that for you.

Cali blushed a little at Matt's comment to her. "How much better?"

Matt: Maybe a personal concert when I'm ready to lay down the tracks?

Cali: I'd like that. It's getting late and tomorrow promises to be a bit of a heavy day on the books for me with spring training starting on Tuesday. You going to be around in case I need a lunch break at some point? I'm sure you're aware that campus can at times be a bit vacant on the weekends and eating by one's self sucks, by and large.

Matt: Give me a ring when you want to go and I'll be there.

Cali took a step forward and gave Matt a kiss on the cheek, then went inside Augsburg while he returned to Wittenberg.
Megan took Nicole's advice and invited Shelley and Steph McNamara to join her and others from the team for Truth or Dare on Saturday night in Augsburg. Around 8:00, the players had gathered in Lindsey and Emily's room. The group for tonight, going clockwise: Megan; Shelley; Alyssa; Kristie; Sam; Steph M.; Lindsey; Emily; Erin; Steph L.; Cali; Julie; Sofia; Christen.

Megan: We will start with #1, which is Steph Lafleur. Truth or Dare?


Megan: If you weren't with your current girlfriend, who on the team would you consider chasing?

Steph L.: Not making this easy tonight, are you?! If I wasn't committed to Erin already, I'd be looking at Lauren. I think the sex would be good and she's also a very supportive person as I can tell from her relationship with Kelley. Lindsey, truth or dare?

Lindsey: Dare.

Steph L.: Go behind Emily, slide your hands up her shirt and rest them on her bare breasts.

Lindsey did as the dare required, tweaking Emily's nipples slightly and eliciting a moan from her partner.

Lindsey: Christen, truth or dare?

Christen: Truth.

Lindsey: Have you and Julie had sex yet?

Christen buried her head in her hands, not wanting to give her teammates this piece of information, but knew she really didn't have a choice. "We've fooled around some, but nothing that has involved penetration or lip-to-lip contact."

Christen called on Sofia, who chose the truth. "Where is the strangest place you and Vanessa have gotten busy?"

Sofia: The women's bathroom in the Muellner Building at Hart Park. It was when I had a panic attack during our state tournament play-in game. Coach had pulled me and I went to the restroom to get myself composed and under control. Ness followed me to make sure I was OK and, well, things happened since her touch is one of the things that can quickly calm me down. Erin, truth or dare?

Erin: Dare.

Sofia tried to come up with something slightly embarrassing yet risque and sure to put Shelley on her back heels again in dealing with the truth of her and Steph's relationship. "I dare you to tell Steph what you would like to do to her after tonight's game."

Erin (to Steph L.): I'd like to lick my way down your body, starting at the back of your neck and progressing over your torso and perfect-for-me chest to your honey pot, where I would camp out and bring you to climax a handful of times over the course of the night.

A handful of the players were stunned by Erin's admission, with Shelley giving her some side-eye and a mean stare. Erin called on Cali, who chose the truth. "Have you ever had a crush on someone..."
you shouldn't have?"

Cali: Yes, a few of them actually. First one was my middle school homeroom teacher, then a couple of other teachers and my uncle's stepson.

Julie was next and chose a dare from Cali.

Cali: Make out with Steph Lafleur.

Julie and Cali switched places and she nuzzled up against Steph's neck before laying a kiss upon it, then moved up to embrace her lips with her own. As Julie finished, Steph gave a slight response to her teammate, prompting both Christen and Erin to rag on them a little and Shelley to become a bit sullen.

Julie: Alyssa, truth or dare?

Alyssa: Truth.

Julie: What is the angriest you have ever gotten at someone?

Alyssa: When we played against Grafton my junior year, some of their fans started slinging verbal abuse at Amanda over her frame. Despite us being twins and looking almost the same, she is more on the soft side and I'm much like Steph in being muscular and hardened. At halftime, I walked over toward their student section and got into a bit of shouting match with them in defense of my sister and best friend.

Cali felt her phone buzz and checked it. She saw that Dani had sent her a message and read it.

DaniPDillon: Need you, sis. Freaking out. Michelle visiting her sister in Indiana this weekend, so home alone.

Cali texted her back saying she was on her way.

Cali: Steph, Erin, we need to go. Deuce is in trouble.

The three of them left the game and went to Erin's car to head over to Danielle and Michelle's house. Before leaving campus, Cali called Dani and asked if she wanted her to pick up anything on the way over. "KOPP'S! It's going to be one of those nights." Cali passed the word onto the other two and they made the round-about trip to Brown Deer by way of Glendale, getting a four-pack of custard from Kopp's (two pints swiss chocolate, one pint chocolate salted caramel, and one pint cookies and cream).

**********

Cali knocked on the door at Dani's house, which was answered almost immediately.

Cali: I brought custard, and I brought company!

Dani looked behind Cali and saw Erin and Steph. The three came in with Cali wrapping Dani in a tight hug after seeing the tear streaks on her cheeks. Erin took the custard to the kitchen so she could put it in the freezer until they decided to break it out. She returned to the living room and sat on the opposite side of Dani from Cali, with Steph on the floor in front of the three of them.

Cali: What happened?

Dani: Sarah and I had gone out for the evening, planning to stop in at Saloon on Calhoun to see a
local lounge act, the 5 Card Studs. After dinner at Bravo! and browsing around Brookfield Square, we were on our way to the bar when she started getting indecipherable texts from Wil.

Cali: Like drunk texts?

Dani: Sort of. When he starts texting Sarah heavy on a night, it usually means that he is both a little bit lit and somewhat lonely, which leads to bad decision-making and regrettable actions. Anyways, Sarah said that she had to get to his place ahead of him so that she could keep him from "doing something stupid", so she dropped me off on her way there.

Erin: Sounds like it makes some sense since she told us that she had a male best friend that she's sort of hung up on. So what caused you to crumble after getting back here?

Dani: I let my mind get the better of me. When Marc and I were in Chicago, we did a shortened version of 20 Questions. He asked me what my biggest relationship fear was, and I said it was that I would end up not getting either him or Sarah in the end, that she'd hook Wil and he'd stay put with Danielle. When Sarah went to Wil and knowing that Marc is sort of tied-up with Danielle due to the uncertainty of her health, that fear crept up on me and I started thinking of all the times when I wanted someone only to be rejected for one reason or another.

Steph stood up, then lifted Dani to her feet. From there, she, Erin, and Cali embraced her, allowing her to cry on their shoulders and feel loved by them. Once she was calm, Dani went to get the custard and the four of them sat around the table eating and kvetching about their love lives.

Steph: Things have started to get a bit messy again. One of our teammates is trying to get me interested in her, knowing full well that I'm with Erin, and she has begun to step up the heat. I'm worried about the possibility of us ending up as roommates on the spring break trip next week. She also was partially responsible for another teammate of ours being assaulted at a party over fall break.

Erin: Shelley can be a whole lot to handle. I'm glad that you and Marc have been such a strong support to us dealing with some of the same issues that the two of you combat so that the flare-ups and misunderstandings that happened at the start of Fall semester are things of the past.

Dani: I love the two of you like little sisters or perhaps stepdaughters. Weird, right?

Erin: Not really. Marc is like a second dad to me, and you're his partner, so it would make sense that you view your relationships with us through that lens. Cali, anything going on between you and Matt?

Cali: I don't know. I think I'd like there to be. He's sort of cute, fairly grounded but not dull like some people in the arts can be. When he walked me back to Augsburg last night after Open Mic, I was hoping he'd kiss me, but I think he's a bit tentative so I gave him one on the cheek before we went our separate ways. We got together for lunch today, since I needed a break from studying, and it was nice. I hope he takes the lead, because I would like to perhaps start seeing him.

Dani: Bring me up to speed on this Matt character.

Cali: He's a sophomore in the music education program. Plays mellophone in Trinity's marching band and French horn in the concert band. We met at the Peer Ministry training event a few weeks ago.

Erin: Speaking of that, how did your interview with Marc go?

Cali: I think it went well. He asked me about my faith story and how I would share my light with those around me. He also quoted YMCA when talking about how we must rely on one another to
get through life.

Dani: Another one of his pop-culture references to describe important life concepts.

Erin: We're meeting on Monday to go over the interviews and see how we'll plan to mentor those chosen. When he asked for recommendations, I told him that I was torn between you and Matt, because I saw positives that both of you could bring to the table.

Cali: So you were the one who recommended me, Erin?

Erin: Yes. I'll probably also be mentoring you if you're selected.

Cali went over to where Erin was seated and hugged her from behind. "Thank you."

With the pints having been consumed, the hour getting late, and fatigue taking over the four of them, Dani asked Erin and Steph if they would stay the night, to which they said yes. She suggested all of them share her queen-size bed so no one would have to sleep on the floor or the couch. Once they got comfortable and adjusted, the layout was Cali on the absolute inside, Dani behind her, followed by Erin, with Steph on the outside.

**********

Sarah was sitting on the stairs outside Wil's place, waiting for him to arrive home from his evening on the town. Thankfully, he chose to call an Uber instead of coming home by way of someone he had met at one of the bars or driving himself. As he walked up the stairs, Sarah stood and took him in her arms, partially holding him up and partially comforting him. Wil unlocked the door and the two went inside. Wil gave Sarah a run-down of what had happened and what he had meant in his jumbled texts. While cuddled up on the couch, Sarah ran her fingers through Wil's hair and whispered words of reassurance to him. He curled up into her a bit and began falling asleep. Noticing that, she recommended they go to the bedroom. Once in there, she asked him what he needed from her that night, to which he replied that some naked cuddling would be comforting. Having not done that with Wil in a couple of years, before her feelings for him changed, Sarah was eager to connect with him in such an intimate way. She carefully undressed Wil before disrobing herself and crawling into bed with him.

As Wil began drifting off to sleep, Sarah traced little circles over his chest and laid her head on his shoulder. Wil shifted to lie on his side, his arms wrapped around Sarah. She drew closer to him and moved her body so that her pubic region was pressed up against his. A bit of wiggling and adjusting allowed her to get the head of his penis resting against her vaginal lips, from where she pushed forward a little bit and got him to enter her. She slowly moved up and down on his member, which caused it to become harder. In his inebriated state, Wil lied there and allowed Sarah to do the work, not realizing until he was close to cumming that he wasn't wearing a condom. With no desire to pause what he and Sarah were sharing, he thrusted upward and brought himself to orgasm in short order. While he was still inside her, Sarah rubbed her clit to bring about her own climax. Once they were disconnected, Sarah returned her head to Wil's chest, listening to his heart. She heard him start to snore, then kissed his chest and whispered to his heart, "I love you, William, and I want to be yours, now and always," unaware that he was still slightly awake. A smile came across his face and he drifted into a well-earned slumber.
Spreading The News

Steph woke up first of the four women at Dani and Michelle's and went out to the living room to do some yoga and meditation by herself. While going through her breathing exercises, she contemplated what happened the previous evening and what it might mean going forward.

Steph (to herself): I REALLY REALLY hope Shelley got it through her head that Erin and I are together, that the team knows it and supports it, and that they will fight her if need be to keep her from meddling. I know we have to be "nice" to her to keep the drama from affecting our on-field performance, but sometimes it's hard when she keeps insisting that I give her the time of day on the relationship front. At least Erin and I are past the struggles from September that caused Alyssa to call me on the carpet for not acting to protect her heart and our developing bond. The support that Marc, some of our teammates, Jessie, and Alyssa provided us then helped us past that spot and allowed me to make the commitment to her over Fall break. What do I think about Dani and Cali and how Erin is starting to get closer to the two of them? It's probably good for all of us for that to happen. Cali's straight as far as we know, Dani's already said that she's starting to view Erin and I as family, and we all are holding onto the secret of her relationship with Marc. Cali is most likely going to be part of Peer Ministry next year, which means more time spent with Erin, I, and Marc. It felt good last night being able to curl up with Erin, but I'm also sure it did Dani a world of good to be enveloped by her and Cali.

Erin came wandering into the front room and saw Steph in contemplation. She sat down and waited for her to come back to visible consciousness before moving over and wrapping her arms around her. The two cuddled and talked about the day's plans (laundry and chill at Marc and Danielle's), wondering when they should head back to campus to get their stuff. Cali and Dani emerged from the bedroom and watched the other two curled up together for a few seconds, then Cali went to get her phone to snag a picture of them. The click on the snapshot startled Steph and she looked up to see the two of them standing with "awwww" expressions on their faces.

Steph: How long have the two of you been standing there?

Dani: Long enough to see how cute you and Erin can be when you're left undisturbed.

Cali: Seriously, you two make me jealous. I hope if Matt and I end up getting together and staying together, we can come to have the level of comfort and connectedness that you and Erin display.

Erin: Thanks. How did you sleep?

Dani: Like a rock, really. Having Cali and you on either side of me allowed the negative and fearful thoughts to subside. I also think the custard gave me a full-enough stomach to bring on sleep rather easily.

Cali: Dani and I would sleep like that when she'd stay over on weekends in our younger years, so being held by her felt normal. I also know it helps her to move the focus away from what she's getting to what she can give.

Erin: Any plans for the two of you today?

Dani: I think I'm going to go visit Angela, Brent, and the kids. Get out of the house and access some Auntie therapy before things pick up tomorrow in preparation for spring training starting on Tuesday.

Cali: Can I come with, Dani?
Steph: Actually, Cali, I had an idea. Erin and I are going over to Marc and Danielle's for the day, doing laundry, raiding their cabinets, getting off-the-record advice from Dad, and probably doing a bit more planning for Erin's birthday party in two weeks. It's almost a given that you'll be asked by him to join our crew in Peer Ministry, so I was wondering if you wanted to join us.

Cali: Isn't that sort of playing with fire considering.....

Erin: Being Dani's cousin is just ONE identifier of yours. Focus on how the three of us know one another (athletes, floor mates, friends, peer ministry) and there shouldn't be any flare-ups.

Dani: Go! Angela will probably want you to sit for Courtney and Dylan during your Spring break, so you'll see them a lot next week.

Cali: Are you going to be OK?

Dani: Yeah. Maybe I should tell her about everything. She was the first of my sisters to know that I went both ways and is the one I go to for sisterly-bordering-on-motherly advice.

Cali: That's a huge do. Know that I'm with you in spirit. Tell her to confirm if she wants me during Break and then tell me at practice on Tuesday.

Dani made breakfast for the four of them before the three freshmen went back to campus briefly ahead of going to the Schmids' for the rest of the day.

**********

Erin and the two others walked into Marc and Danielle's unannounced as she had been given a key by them. She took her and Steph's laundry downstairs to put it in the washer while Steph went into the kitchen to get bottles of water and some fruit from the refrigerator. Erin met them in the living room and proceeded to turn on the large-screen TV for today's She Believes Cup doubleheader, with the opener being the USA and France. Marc and Danielle returned home just before kickoff and were slightly surprised to see the three girls sitting on their couch.

Marc: Keep forgetting you have a key, Erin.

Erin: It comes in handy at times. We brought a third today because Steph felt she needed to become more familiar with you ahead of next year.

Marc: Hi, Cali. Steph, you that confident I'm going to ask her aboard?

Steph: I know you, Marc. She fits your vision of the in-the-muck church worker who brings God to those who won't come to Him on their own.

Marc introduced Cali to Danielle and told her a bit about her. Danielle shook her hand, then went into the kitchen to grab a glass of water with which to take another dose of Tylenol, as her headache from this morning hadn't subsided yet. When she came back into the living room, the five of them got to chatting.

Erin: Worried about Friday, Danielle?

Danielle: I'd be lying if I said no, but I'm sort of confident that it's not cancer and that whatever is happening up in my head can be resolved.

Cali: What's Friday?
Danielle: I am having an MRI done on the right side of my head. I have been having headaches for a couple of months now, not to mention fatigue and behavioral changes caused by something pressing on the nerve and area behind my right eye.

Steph: I wish Erin and I could join you and Marc for it, but Coach has us leaving at 6am on Friday for our Spring break trip.

Marc: Speaking of that, have either of you reached out to Kathy Proctor about getting some fan support to your games?

Erin: I did, and she said she'd try to get some of the local Duke players and their parents to attend the Saturday one against Meredith. Our teammate Maggie's parents are coming up from Florida for the games, which will be nice for her.

Marc: You're at Macalester after break, right?

Erin: Yes, on the 20th I believe. Lindsey and Emily are excited about playing in front of their families and friends. Do you think your sister and her family might want to come see us play?

Marc: I can ask her for you. I need to check in with her as to where Matt has decided to go next year.

Danielle: You KNOW he's going to choose Trinity, so you should just prepare yourself for that outcome.

Steph: Is that the nephew who tried to hit on Erin via Skype during the Super Bowl?

Marc: Yes, that would be him. Cali, you guys should be starting spring training this week, right?

Cali: Don't remind me. 7-9am on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I don't know why Coach couldn't have pushed off starting this until after break.

Marc: NCAA rules are sort of specific on the parameters of the spring season for Division III. Starts March 1st, has to end by April 30th. Have you thought about playing over the summer with one of the clubs here or the Torrent in WPSL?

Cali: No, I haven't. Not sure I want to do that since I'll be working full-time on top of watching my cousin's kids while their parents are at work.

Danielle: That would be pretty rough. Marc, you remember the juggling act that some of your players had to do just to get free for games.

Marc: That I do.

During halftime of the USA/France game, Marc asked the three girls if he could talk to them in his office.

Marc: Cali, I wasn't planning to do this until tomorrow, but since you're here....do you want to join our peer ministry leadership team for the 2019/2020 school year?

Steph: Told you.

Cali: Yes, Marc. Thank you.

Marc: With that done, any new problems with either of your teams?

Steph: Just that Shelley is getting a second wind about chasing me. This time, most of the team is
onto her and working to protect Erin and I. Some of us are worried about Coach rooming her with Kelley given their previous connection and the incident from Fall break.

Marc: That would NOT be good. I don't think Kelley knows who actually roughed her up and, since she hasn't chosen to press charges to find out, I can't release that information. For all anyone on campus knows, Shelley was an innocent bystander that night and not liable for the assault.

Steph and Erin read between the lines and knew that Marc just told them that Shelley was the assailant.

Erin: The seniors met with Sarah before Friday's practice to fill her in on what she missed at the start of the year concerning Shelley and Steph McNamara, as well as tell her who was with who on the team. Megan said that she is supposed to meet with Lauren tomorrow at some point to hash out the roommate assignments for Spring break, so hopefully she can use what she knows to block the potential fireworks that would come from Shelley rooming with either my Steph or Kelley, or putting Steph Mac with one of the Mueller sisters.

Cali: Nothing much different with the soccer team. Granted, I haven't been around most of them much this semester yet, but the bad ones seem to be staying to themselves. After the two training sessions this week, I'll probably have more I can tell you.

Marc: Anything else you think I should know?

Steph: As the "independent" one of us three, I should be the one to tell you this. We spent last night with Dani because she was having a depressive episode after Sarah ditched her because Wil was in the tank. She told us about what you and her discussed in Chicago and how last night sort of made it hit home.

Marc nodded his head, knowing to what Steph was referring. "I'm glad that you three were able to see her through it, and you might need to do it again if Sarah ends up turning Wil to her since I'm in a way stuck now with Danielle's medical situation. Sarah, Dani, and I need to talk about the current state of affairs, so that she can get the truth from both of us and decide for herself what she wants to do. We better get back out to the living room before Danielle begins wondering if we're plotting the overthrow of the free world."

**********

While visiting her sister, Dani asked Angela if they could talk in private for a bit. She told her husband, Brent, that they were going down to the rec room for some privacy, asking him to keep an eye on Courtney and Dylan so they wouldn't come down. Once seated, Dani placed her head against Angela's shoulder and started opening up to her.

Dani: Ang, last night I had a moment where I thought about doing a binge-and-purge to get the negative feelings out of me. Instead, I texted Cali and she came over to my place with some Kopp's and two of our mutual friends.

Angela: Sweetie, why would you have considered that? I thought that, once you came to terms with your physique and your bisexuality, you had stopped using that as a means of both healing and hurting yourself.

Dani: I'm sort of in a bit of a five-person love quadrangle, and I'm not the primary person for either one of my love interests.

Angela: Olivia told me that you were dating a former classmate of yours from Nicolet, but she didn't
mention anything about the rest of this.

Dani: She doesn't know about the other parts. I think only four people outside of the individuals involved know the extent of the situation, and they are Michelle and the three that were at our place last night. Let me explain and I hope you can keep it straight. Sarah Hawthorne, my classmate at Nicolet, who's the assistant lacrosse coach at Trinity, she and I are sort-of dating. It's more for appearances' sake since both of us are after guys that are sort of unavailable right now. She is trying to get her best friend to move their friendship beyond that, while I am in a relationship with someone I met a few years ago who now works at Trinity. The two besides Michelle and Cali that know about this are his goddaughter and her partner, who play for Sarah.

Angela: And the yet-to-be-mentioned fifth person?

Dani: His wife.

Angela was silent for a couple of minutes as she tried to diagram this cobweb in her mind. After believing that she understood who was with who and how they connected, she asked Dani some personal questions about her two relationships.

Angela: How do you feel about the two of them, and how long has this been going on?

Dani: Marc and I have been sort-of attached since early October, with Sarah and I deciding to get together around mid-November. As for how I feel about them, Marc completes me in so many ways. He's become my biggest cheerleader, encouraging me to take more control of my coaching future by getting out and making connections with others in the game, which is what I did at the College Cup just after Thanksgiving and the United Soccer Coaches convention in January. He's also offered me a chance to get some experience teaching the coaching module that I took last year through Shorewood and which he developed as well as helping his side gig, the Urban Coaching Project, get more school districts to become licensees of the module.

Angela: That's all nice, but that's professional. How do you feel about him on a personal level?

Dani: I'm in love with him. He is the right mix of passionate and tender in bed, which allows me to alternate between the romantic and the sultry. He makes me believe I can do no wrong in his eyes, which gives me confidence when we're together in the high-level world he occupies. At first, I was after him as a safe guy from whom I could get a piece, since I didn't really want to be tied-down to anyone. Over time, that changed, partially because he was already with someone and it didn't affect where I was sitting, and partially because we found in one another a person who had the right fix-it kit to patch up the other's broken places.

Angela: And Sarah?

Dani: It's fine as something to occupy both of our times while waiting on the guys to eventually get to the point where we can have them.

Angela: So this Marc is the one you ultimately want. You said that he had a goddaughter who plays at Trinity. I'm guessing he's a bit older than you. Is that true?

Dani: Yes. He'll be 47 at the end of April.

Angela: WOW! Still younger than Dad by about 10 years, but that is one huge age gap. You got a picture of him?

Dani pulled out her locket and opened it to show her sister the pictures inside it.
Angela: The two on the other side, are those the lacrosse players?

Dani: Yes. The taller one is Steph and the other is Erin, Marc's goddaughter.

Angela: Cute couple and they look so happy together. Now, about you and this guy.

Dani: Yeah?

Angela: I haven't seen you look THAT beautiful since MY wedding, or so happy in forever. Side braid?

Dani: Yeah. Erin suggested it because she knew that Marc had a thing for it.

Angela: So the two of them actually are in favor of you and Marc being together?

Dani: Yes.

Angela: Interesting. When was the picture taken?

Dani: In December when we attended a wedding that he was officiating in North Carolina the same weekend as College Cup.

Angela: Officiating? He's a pastor?!

Dani: No. He's a diaconal minister in the ELCA and the chaplain at Trinity.

Angela: You said you met him a few years ago. How?

Dani: He ran the summer league team I played for while going to Stritch.

Angela heard that and everything sort of fit together, such as how Dani would have known Marc before Trinity and how things were developing on the professional side for her due to his previous work in the women's soccer world.

Angela: You know Mom is going to flip when she finds out. She's just getting used to the idea of you being attracted to women.

Dani: If things get more serious between the two of us, I'll broach it with Mom and Dad. For now, I need to find a way to deal with him and Sarah not having me as their first priority.

Angela: Wish I could offer you some tips on handling that. For now, use the two girls, Cali, and Michelle to keep you occupied and up on what's happening with them and their others.

Dani: Thanks, Ang. That's probably the best advice for now. Speaking of Cali, she was wondering if you were thinking of having her watch Courtney and Dylan while she is on Spring break next week.

Angela: Can she?! I know the two of them would LOVE to have her around for a few days and I'm sure she could use the money.

Dani: I told her I'd talk to you about it and let her know at training on Tuesday.

Angela: Feeling better, sis?

Dani: Much. Thank you.

Dani and Angela went back upstairs and were attacked by the two kids. After playing with them for
a bit and having dinner, Dani left and drove back to her place.
Decisions, Decisions

The final week before Spring break at Trinity began with Marc in his office writing emails to the nine students he planned to invite to become Peer Ministers for the following school year. He was also working out a plan of which current peers he would pair with the new ones (some will have two, some one) and where he’d like to see them among the three sections of the Peer Ministry Alliance (all-campus, dorms, and chaplain’s office). The emails would be sent after his lunch meeting with the current team, where they would provide feedback on his suggestions for pairings and foci. Around 11:00, Sarah stopped in to pick Marc's brain before she was scheduled to meet with Lauren at 2 about the spring break trip.

Marc: Hi, Sarah. Getting excited about the season opener and the trip to North Carolina?

Sarah: Somewhat, but there is a LOT that needs to be done before we leave on Friday morning if the trip is to not end up a s***storm. I spent yesterday at home working out what I *think* Lauren is going to do with the roommate pairings, and there are some that just should not be allowed to happen.

Marc: Erin and Steph were over yesterday and I got a bit of the scoop from them on this past week’s flare-ups in practice. Can I see what you have? I don't know EVERY player on the team, but I know enough of them to be able to provide some feedback.

Sarah handed Marc her list, which had the following groups:


Marc looked it over and made some notes on his sketch pad.

Marc: With such a young team, I'm not sure I'd have all four seniors together and leave the rest to fend for themselves. On the other hand, that's an easy grouping to make. Group 3 could be explosive given who's in it and who could be added to it.

Sarah: I know about what happened on Fall break involving Shelley and Kelley, and about her desire to steal Steph from Erin. I am going to fight to get her out of that group and add Steph and Erin to it.

Marc: Smart. Group 2 could be a mess as well since Steph and the Muellers aren't really on the friendliest of terms presently.

Sarah: Point noted. Megan mentioned that she had heard from others on the team about their situation. I'm not completely against them rooming together, but they would need a stronger fourth in that room than Ali.

Marc: The rest looks pretty good and stable. Having Sofia with Christen is a very good move given their history, as is Group 6.

Sarah: I'm hoping to be able to have the couples together, which can happen with most of them since they're roommates here, so it's like hiding in plain sight. The seniors informed me who they knew were with each other and who they suspected were.

Marc: Keep the two nightmare situations from coming to pass and I think everything should be fine.
Can I ask you something not related to lacrosse?

Sarah was a little hesitant to say yes because of Marc’s reputation as a pit bull, but trusted her instincts enough to presume that he wasn't looking to unleash his Mad Dog side on her.

Sarah: I reckon so.

Marc: What happened on Saturday night between you and Dani? I heard that you in effect ditched her for Wil, which she took very hard because of some relationship fears she has.

Sarah: I didn't mean to "ditch" her. Wil was sending me the equivalent of drunk texts, which are a signal that he's a bit in the tank and prone to doing something ill-advised by the end of the night. I went to his place and sat on his doorstep until he got there to make sure he wasn't falling into one of his old traps, which is to pick up someone for a one-night stand that he hopes turns into more, then be shoved aside the next morning.

Marc: Cali, Erin, and Steph stayed with her on Saturday night so that she wouldn't be alone with her negative thoughts and the damage they can do to her self-esteem. I think the three of us should meet for lunch tomorrow and give her a chance to tell us what she needs relationship-wise from you and me.

Sarah: You're right. With me making more of a play for Wil and the health crisis surrounding your wife, Dani is getting the short end of things. We both know she loves you completely, and that you're doing the best you can at being available to her until you know more about what's going on with Danielle. I should have been more forthcoming on Saturday on the why and not just giving her the what.

Marc: I'll call her and see if she and I can talk after training tomorrow. Good luck with Lauren later, because challenging the head coach on what they want to do is always dicey.

Sarah rose and left Marc's office, with him leaving behind her to go to Siebert and meet his Super Six for lunch.

**********

Marc: After talking with Paul and Matt about our budget for next year, and submitting our request to the Board of Trustees on Friday, we can fully fund the nine candidates I interviewed last Monday. Therefore, I plan to invite all of them to join our team for the 2019/2020 academic year. The following is my suggestion for who should mentor them.


Erin: How did I land Cali and Brad?

Marc: You're the closest of the six current peers to Cali and you're also the most administratively-gifted of them, which is how I see Brad coming into the fold.

Corey: I get why you want to pair me with Matt, but why Katie as well?

Marc: You have some experiences in your past common to hers. With those as the baseline, you should be able to equip her to use her past to connect with other students here who come from similar backgrounds.
Alyssa was comfortable with her two charges, knowing how she planned to shape their thinking about the task ahead of them through their common bond with Sofia. Julie was excited for the opportunity to collaborate with Abby on bringing peer ministry into the residence halls. Steph and Stefan understood their roles with Karina and Elizabeth and were accepting of what Marc wanted them to focus upon with them.

After lunch, Marc went back to his office and sent off the emails he had written, then called Dani about meeting tomorrow morning after her team's first spring practice. He ended up getting her voicemail.

Marc: Dani, it's Marc. I heard about Saturday night from Erin, Steph, and Cali and I wanted you to know that I am sorry that you ended up in that dark place where your fears about not getting Sarah or me came to the surface. I'm glad that the three of them were able to give you a peaceful night of rest. Can you stop by after training tomorrow morning? I think you and I need to see each other. I love you, princess. Call or text me an answer when you have a chance.

**********

During Saturday night's Truth-or-Dare game, Shelley learned that the seniors had talked to Sarah on Friday about the spring break trip, hoping that she would be able to persuade Lauren against certain roommate pairings. Believing that she would be getting jammed again from pursuing Steph, she decided to stop in on Lauren ahead of her planned meeting with Sarah.

Lauren Heberlein: Shelley! Come in and have a seat. What can I do for you?

Shelley: I know that you've called me out a couple of times during training and that you've been fielding me with the second-string defense in most of our drills and scrimmages. Why?

Lauren: Because in the center defense position, you are currently fourth of the four we plan to utilize, behind Sam, Julie, and Emily. You don't play either wing defense position, so having you replace either Ali or Erin isn't really an option. You ARE ahead of Andi at the moment, so take solace in that. Just keep plugging. This year, it might be slim pickings for time, but next season either Sam or Julie is going to slide up into the midfield as the screen player in front of the back four, and if you can get past Emily in the pecking order, you'll have your chances to start. Fair?

Shelley: Sounds fair. I also have a bit of a personal request. Being the team's lone commuter, I haven't really been able to develop much camaraderie with the rest of the squad. Do you know who you are planning to room me with on the spring break trip?

Lauren: The plan is to put you with Kelley and Lauren. As for the fourth person, I haven't decided yet. Is there someone you'd like me to add to your threesome?

Shelley: Steph Lafleur if you can.

Lauren (looking over her list): She doesn't have a tied-in connection to anyone on the roster aside from possibly Julie and Erin as part of the chaplain's office. I think I can do that.

Shelley: Thank you, Coach!

Shelley bounded out of Lauren's office with a smile on her face and went down to the locker room to change and prepare for practice.

**********

Sarah and Lauren met and worked out the housing arrangements for the team's trip to North
Carolina. Despite numerous attempts to persuade her boss, Sarah was unable to change Lauren's mind on any of the "locked-in" pairings she had devised. She wasn't planning to announce them to the team until after the match on Wednesday, but she used them to create working groups for their final practice before the season opener against Ripon (tomorrow would be a walk-through of game strategy and tactics).


Group A had eight of the projected twelve starters for Wednesday's game along with all six players on the roster with college playing experience. Their tasks focused on tactical movement and speed of thought/speed of play from defense to midfield to attack and then around the fan. Group C, under Sarah's supervision, took a measured approach to their work, which was aimed at building up specific skills that would help them get playing time in certain game situations. Group B, with Lauren overseeing them, was the least-successful of the three as the cohesion that she had seen between Steph and the back line of Ali, Sam, and Erin near the end of Thursday's scrimmage wasn't there between Emily, Shelley, and Erin. The head coach rode both Lauren and Becca for not taking up solid positions to receive the ball from either Steph or Emily, while Shelley's distribution out of the back neglected moving the ball down the left side of the field, going through either Becca at the back of the attacking diamond or Emily on her right.

Training came to a close, with the players returning to Buuck to change and store their equipment. Shelley, having gotten her first real taste of playing with Steph behind her, was in a happy mood as she left the locker room and headed home. The other seven from that group went to dinner at Siebert and decompressed with one another over the frustrating session they just completed.

Becca: What were we supposed to get out of that?!

Lauren: Frankly, I don't know. The eight of us aren't really a balanced unit. Shelley, Erin, and Emily are all strictly defenders. Kelley, Lindsey, and I are mostly up top, and you, Becca, are a defensive-type midfielder. How were we supposed to develop ball movement and interplay with the key pieces so far apart from one another?

Steph L.: Our group made no sense. Getting the for-sure starters together, that worked. Having the end of the bench working with Jane was a good idea, as she needs work to develop her skills and they need to find their comfort zone on the field. Putting us eight together seemed like an afterthought.

Lindsey: Not if she has some other purpose behind choosing to put together who she put together. We've all been hearing from the seniors how she likes to keep on-campus roommates together on the road. Look over the groups again. In Group A, Steph Mac and Sam room together, as do Megan and Jess and Kristie and Ali. The other two seniors made up the rest of it.

Erin: I wouldn't jump too much to any conclusion based on that eight. All of them I'm sure will be starting on Wednesday and are the most experienced players on the team.

Lindsey: OK, then take Group C. Morgan and Savannah, Julie and Christen, and Jane and Andi are all roommates, Sofia went to high school with Christen, and Maggie gets thrown in to fill it out.

Steph: Better analysis there, Hoff. If the other two groups are potential roommate pairings, then our eight is probably another set of them.

Erin and Kelley looked at each other briefly, then back at their partners.
Becca: But how will she put it together?

Emily: Me and Lindsey, and Lauren and Kelley for sure. All four of us together, with the singles together as a foursome, or us four split and the singles sprinkled in to fill out the rooms?

Steph: I don't know. When are we supposed to find out for sure?

Erin: According to Sarah, after the game on Wednesday.

Steph: Then let's leave it lie until then. It will be what it will be, and there's no use getting one's panties in a twist over it.

**********

The landline at Marc and Danielle's place rang, with the latter picking it up after seeing Laurie's number on the Caller ID. Following a couple of minutes of chit-chat, she handed the phone over to Marc.

Marc: Hey sis. What has you calling me tonight?

Laurie: I thought you should know ahead of anyone else. Matt has decided to attend Trinity next year.

Marc remained quiet for a few seconds before responding. "Lovely."

Laurie: I know you're still not sold on the school being his best choice either academically or financially, but now that he's coming, the least you can do is offer to help him get adjusted when he arrives in August.

Marc: Moving him into the dorms when he gets here, that's no problem. Danielle would be the one to spend more time on that with him than I because I'll have duties on Move-In Day, such as the opening Chapel service for freshmen and student-athletes. When is he looking to do Pre-Orientaiton?

Laurie called back to Matt to find out if he had a preferred session.

Laurie: He says that he wants to do it July 8-10.

Marc looked over his summer calendar. "Looks like nothing on my plate that week."

Laurie: I'm sure you think he is going to want to ride your coattails for four years and not take his education seriously, but at the price tag he and I will be paying for it, I won't allow him to just burn that money without some kind of return.

Marc: Erin asked me last weekend if you and the family were interested in seeing Trinity play at Macalester on the 20th. There are two players from the Twin Cities on the team, one from Lakeville and the other from Minnetonka.

Laurie: I don't know if he'd want to go, especially since Erin shot him down, but I for sure would like to meet her, Steph, and the local girls at the minimum.

Marc: Well, I should be turning in. Need to keep on a regular sleep schedule so I don't have another situation like in December.

Laurie: OK. Tell Danielle that we should try to get together for Matt's graduation if not before.

Marc: Will do. Take care.
Marc hung up with Laurie and then headed to the bedroom to wind down before falling asleep.
The women's soccer team opened their spring season on Tuesday morning with some endurance training and situational possession activities (also known as rondos). Lexi and Cali both looked pretty solid in their ball movement, Emily Bowman was getting her first feel for being the presumptive starting goalkeeper for the 2019 season, and Cami Leonard showed the defending skills that Sara had been hoping to see last season. Carli went through the motions, by and large, her mind not exactly on the task at hand with Spring break on the horizon, where she'd have nine days of money-making opportunities as the fall athletes who were local would be relied upon to handle Gavin's alumni relations requests. Sara chose not to go the full two hours on the first day, ending practice at 8:30am. After showering and changing into her rest-of-the-day attire, Dani went to see Marc at his office in Luther Hall.

Marc: Cute. As. A. Button.

Dani blushed, then leaned across Marc's desk and placed a peck on his lips, which he returned.

Dani: I'll be glad when 2:00 or so rolls around. Practice, then this, then Erin and I are meeting with Megan Oliphant to parse out what's going on between her and Lily, then Sarah invited me to lunch at Maxfield's.

Marc: Interesting choice. She was supposed to text me that info, but I'm sure with all that she's needing to juggle to keep the lacrosse team from turning into an explosive mess, it slipped.

Dani: You're joining us? She didn't mention that.

Marc: She stopped by yesterday for some advice concerning the Spring break trip's roommate pairings and we ended up also talking about Saturday night. I suggested that the three of us get together and talk so you could lay out what you need from each of us given what else is happening.

Dani: You said we needed to see each other. What's on your mind, hubs?

Marc: Friday, Danielle is having an MRI done of her head and I'm pretty sure they will find something. I can't predict what it will be, or the prognosis, or much of anything. I need the friendship and work spouses part of our relationship to take precedence over the more romantic and sexual side of it for the time being. She has been my best friend for more than 20 years and, even though there is that 10-15% of our relationship that is missing, it is going to hurt me something fierce if she were to get sick or worse.

Dani: I think I can understand your perspective. I don't have any friends that I go back THAT far with, but I think if Olivia or Cali or Michelle were to be in that condition, I would probably be looking to shell up a bit just to deal with the potential grief that would hit me. If I haven't said it enough, Marc, I love you. I will stand by you whatever comes to pass, be it here on campus, as part of UCP, as your friend, and, should things end up in that direction, your partner.

Marc reached across the desk, grasped Dani's hand, then brought it across the desk to his lips. "That last part might be a little bit in coming, but we'll cross that bridge at the appropriate time."

Dani: I need to go meet Erin and Megan at Rincker. Do you want me to meet you back here and then leave together or just meet you at Maxfield's?

Marc: Probably better to meet there, so you have some time to yourself before facing Sarah and I.
As the two walked toward his office door, Marc and Dani held hands for a few seconds, then turned and looked at one another. The attraction and love between the two of them was palpable, leading to a couple of minutes of heartfelt and sensuous kissing between the pair.

**********

In the coffee shop at Rincker Library, Megan Oliphant, Dani, and Erin shared with one another their personal truths about May-December relationships and the struggles that can come with them.

Megan: Dani, I first want to thank you for reaching out to me and asking me to have coffee with you and Erin. It's hard around campus to find people who can understand what it's like to be stuck between two worlds, the one of your own making based on life up to this point and the one you enter as a result of your significant other or spouse.

Dani: Marc told me that he and Ben had had a couple of conversations about their side of the age-gap relationship and so suggested that we meet up and chat. He also recommended bringing Erin because she could best represent what Lily might be feeling.

Megan: I just don't know how to win with her. I WANT to have a relationship with her, not necessarily mother-daughter or sister-sister, but one where there is acceptance of each of our places in her father's life.

Erin: Even though Dani and I seem to get along like best friends, it wasn't always like this. It took me the first two months of her re-acquaintance with Marc to get past hating and distrusting her. I was hoping to use any crack in her facade to hurt her for what I felt she was doing to him and, by association, my godmother. After a bad confrontation with her while he was away from town performing a wedding, he read me the riot act and then got the three of us together to hash out what was what. I got the basic dimensions of their relationship and accepted that we both loved Marc and wanted the best for him. I started spending more time around Dani, both with my dorm mates and with Marc, and the wall I built sort of disintegrated. She took an interest in me as a person and in my relationships with Marc and my partner, Steph, with whom she had come to develop a friendship. I started to see the real her as a result of that, which led to my "approval" right before the four of us went to North Carolina in December for College Cup and a wedding Marc was officiating.

Megan: I feel like Lily's never given me a chance to show my interest in her and her life, as though my presence is an affront to her.

Dani: From her perspective, she probably feels like you stole her dad from her. From Marc's telling of the story, her mom died when she was very young, not yet 3. I don't know how much she might remember her, but she had had Ben to herself with no real female competition for the first 15 years of her life. I'm sure she had taken on some of the "womanly" aspects of day-to-day life in the family and your arrival might have made her feel as though she was no longer needed by Ben or Dawson.

Megan: That would explain why she's taken some of her anger for me out on the other two. How do I get behind that to start tearing down the wall she has built around herself, since it's pretty much her against all three of us at the moment?

Erin: You'll need another party to get her to start expressing her feelings, and I have a few suggestions. First, her roommate Abby. She is going to be part of our Peer Ministry leadership team next year and is most likely the person who has seen the most of her struggles with you, Ben, and Dawson. Another would be Abby's mentor on the current team, Julie Jacobsen. I'd be another option, since I have been in her position to some extent. Dawson's girlfriend, Michelle, could also be a potential ally.
Megan: I like Michelle. She has an odd way of balancing Dawson's introversion with her own. If they stay together, I can see their relationship resembling that of mine and Ben's, the two university professionals who love their time together and seek it out whenever possible, but also are able to go to their separate corners and not have their partner be offended by it.

Dani: I've known her for almost ten years now and we've been best friends for probably the last four or so. Despite being self-conscious and a bundle of anxiety when around people, she is a VERY good listener and quite perceptive about what goes on around her.

Megan: Either of you seeing any of them before Spring break?

Erin: I'll see Julie at practice later and Abby tomorrow at Chapel. By the way, Dani, Cali is also being added to the team for next year, so you'll want to be there to see her pre-installation during service.

Dani: Think I'll call Angela and see if she wants to come up for that and Lunch Bunch. It would give her a chance to talk to Cali about watching the kids over break and she can also meet and interrogate Marc. As for your question, Megan, I'll see Michelle at home later and can bring up the idea to her.

Megan: Thanks! I feel a bit better just getting out the frustration and hearing from the two of you how you worked your way through this.

The three women left Rincker and headed in different directions, with Megan returning to her office in Luther, Erin going to Albrecht for lunch with Steph, Becca, and Jessie, and Dani walking to the parking garage to leave campus for Maxfield's. During the short walk between Rincker and Albrecht, Erin and Dani talked about the latter's conversation with her sister from Sunday. When they separated, the two of them hugged and made plans to sit together at Chapel tomorrow, with hopes to have Steph, Cali, and Angela join them.

**********

Marc: Dani, I know that Sarah and I have been treating you at times like an afterthought, that we've been caught up in our own little worlds and you've been on the outside looking in. I apologize for my part in that. I love you so deeply, so completely, that I would never want to intentionally hurt you, and I hope you can forgive my neglectfulness.

Sarah: Marc pretty much wrapped up what I wanted to say. I care very much about you and am sorry for what you must have went through on Saturday night after I dropped you off. I should have explained more completely why I needed to get to Wil at that moment and not left you to fill in the pieces.

Dani: I know both of you have other relationships that you're struggling to either get off the ground or keep afloat. As I've said previously, I'm not looking at this moment for a serious relationship with someone, although that is starting to change a little as I am sort of committed to the two of you. What *I* need from you is to be kept abreast of what is happening in the other relationships, so that I'm not putting myself in a bad place emotionally relying on you for more than is reasonable. I also need your full-on attention when we're together and for you to be honest with me about how I fit into your world.

Marc: I gave you what I hope was a sufficient explanation of where I am when we met in my office earlier. If you need more info than that, I'll be happy to give it.

Dani: What did you mean when you said that we'd cross the bridge concerning the last part of my declaration to you at the appropriate time?
Marc: I meant that, should a time come when I would be free of my marital bonds, we would take up the possibility of you and I becoming partners.

Dani heard classic Marc in his statement, not promising 100% but also being honest about his true intentions.

Sarah: When I was with Wil on Saturday, he was in pretty bad shape but luckily did not bring someone home with him. I put him to bed and then we naked-cuddled for a while. I could see the pain on his face and the aching he had for companionship, so I shared my love with him. It was the best sex EVER, even though he was most of the way passed-out. There wasn't this physical yearning I had to get some, but it was an emotional one to connect with him, to show him that I could love him better than the guys he's been chasing.

Both Marc and Dani worked over Sarah's words in their minds, with the former knowing he'd need to check on Wil about his feelings and thoughts coming out of that night and the latter realizing that her role with Sarah would be to support her as she tried to win Wil's whole heart and to help her patch up the pieces if he broke hers.

**********

The lacrosse team's walk-through answered several questions for Lauren concerning the first XII for tomorrow's game against Ripon. She asked Sarah to put the team through some wind sprints for the last ten minutes of their abbreviated practice and went to the locker room to post the starting lineup on the bulletin board before departing for the night.

The players entered the locker room and went immediately to see what Lauren had posted.

Nicole
Ali-----Julie-----Sam-----Erin
Megan-Jess-Morgan B.
Sofia--Lindsey--Steph M.--Kristie

There were some happy players and some less-than-enthused ones. Lauren thought she had made enough of an impression to snag one of the wing attack spots, while Sofia was a bit surprised to be named as a starter. Before everyone left, Megan and Jess asked the players to take a seat and addressed their team.

Jess: Tomorrow will be the first college game for almost all of you. Those six who have been granted the opportunity to start alongside the veterans, appreciate how far you have come since the first day of training. You have earned the right to stand on that field when the opening whistle blows. For those not part of the first XII, know that your chance to influence the match will come, so be prepared to seize it when it does.

Megan: It was brought to my attention that some of you wondered what yesterday's training session was supposed to accomplish, as the groupings seem rather haphazard and not really based on the depth chart or what positions people played. Lauren does this mixing of players in the final pre-season practice to get a better view of how players do with certain other players. She takes that into account when deciding the starting lineup, her substitutions, and the living arrangements for road trips. You've seen the first part today. The second will come tomorrow during the match, and the third following the match when she posts the room list for the trip. Don't let any of this discourage you or scare you. Roll with it. It will save you a lot of grief, that's for sure. Thunder on three. One,
Two, Three.

ALL: THUNDER!
A VERY busy day at Trinity Lutheran University began with the release of the Trinity Times. Today's issue was highlighted by a profile on Cheryl Baines, VP of Human Resources, the 8th Most-Influential Person associated with TLU. Also in the paper was an op-ed piece by Marc in support of Richard Kilbourn's amendment to the Code of Student Conduct which was on the agenda for today's Student Government Association meeting.

**********

Bonhoeffer Chapel was slowly filling as members of the campus community were arriving from their 11:00 classes or the first half of their work days. Back in the sacristy, Marc and Alyssa were vesting up and going over the order of the service, which included the invitation and acceptance of candidates to peer ministry. Marc thanked Alyssa for attending yesterday's SGA Elections Committee meeting and getting the Peer Ministry Alliance onto the list of student organizations in contention for a seat in Student Government next year. At two minutes to twelve, the two of them walked out and took their places in front of the congregation.

The first half of the service ran to form (including the administration of ashes for Ash Wednesday at the conclusion of corporate confession), which Marc followed with a homily on reaching out to one's neighbor.

Marc: On this day, the message that I wish to present to our campus community can be summed up in the words of a 1920s spiritual. "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine." Friends, the grace we have witnessed on this campus over the past six months, the unity that is starting to come forth as we reach the three-quarters pole of this first academic year as Trinity Lutheran University, and the plans being made for next year all point toward a need for us to take that which we know, which we have received, and share it with those around us, inviting them to partake of it and involve themselves in the work happening here at Trinity. Today, I and the president of the Peer Ministry Alliance, Alyssa Norman, will ask nine students to join us in that endeavor. At this time, I would like to ask our current peer ministers to prepare the way for the newest members of our contingent.

Erin and Steph got up and exited their pew, leaving Cali, Dani, Angela, Sarah, and Wil remaining. They walked toward the back of the chapel and were joined by Julie, Stefan, and Corey.

Marc: Will the five of you please escort the candidates forward?

As they walked down the center aisle, the candidates exited their pews and walked forward in front of them toward the altar. Once at the front, the current peer ministers stood behind the candidates.

Alyssa (to the candidates): Do you affirm that you accept the responsibility which is being offered to you?

Candidates: I do, and I ask God to help me.

Alyssa: Do you affirm that you will utilize your role within the campus religious community to uplift those around you, to bring light to the dark places, and to share your gifts, your love, and your experiences to draw students, faculty, and staff here closer to God?

Candidates: I do, and I ask God to help me.

Alyssa: Do you affirm that, as part of the priesthood of all believers, those to whom you minister also have a calling and a right to minister to you in return?
Candidates: I do, and I ask God to grant me the grace to accept that blessing.

Marc anointed each of the candidates by drawing a cross on their forehead with oil of frankincense and myrrh, then did so to the returning peers and Alyssa. Following that, he presented the fourteen of them to the congregation as next year's class of Peer Ministers.

Service continued with the Prayers of the People, followed by Communion, and concluded with the Benediction. Marc invited all worshipers to join him in Siebert for Lunch Bunch, after which he and Alyssa retreated to the sacristy to disrobe.

**********

A larger-than-normal crowd showed up in Siebert for Lunch Bunch. After getting his food, Marc sat down and began listening to the conversation going on between others at his table.

Christen: Can't believe that I'll be playing in my first-ever college lacrosse game in just under three hours. Six-plus months waiting for this day and it's finally here.

Julie: I hope I don't leave Nicole or Sam hung out to dry too often today.

Erin: Jules, you'll do fine. The three midfielders in front of us hopefully will be able to control possession enough that we won't be doing a lot of one-on-one defending.

Marc: Any words of wisdom from the coaches at the table?

Dani: Control what you can control. The older players know that you won't be perfect in your positioning or might get dispossessed needlessly at some point. Let the skills you have shine as best as you can.

Sarah: Ripon is a first-year team, like us. Unlike us, they don't have the experience we do in net and across the midfield. I think Lauren is going to ask the starters to play more of a 4-5-2 and counter when we turn them over, pulling Sofia and Kristie back a bit from the front line to get releases from Morgan Brooks and Megan. Like Dani said, play to the best of what you know and let that guide you.

Marc: I'll chime in with some of my thoughts. Be in the moment. Don't think about what you're going to do when you get the ball or where you plan to position yourself to set up the perfect shooting angle. Think about what you can do presently to get the ball, to defend your mark, to move it out, to carry it down the field. Take the tasks as they come and don't get ahead of yourself. You know how embarrassed football players feel when they have a for-sure catch and drop it because they start running before they get firm possession of the ball? That type of thing could happen to you if you get ahead of yourself and shoot before having the ball firmly in your pocket.

Christen chuckled at the mental image Marc just laid out.

Angela: Dani told me that you were in coaching and then coaching education before coming to Trinity. How much do you think that prepared you for the chaplain's job?

Marc: It prepared me to see the students as co-facilitators of the mission we have, same as I did with my college players. I have stuck more or less with the same plan since I worked at Western Michigan, changing some of the pieces to fit new settings but not shifting the underlying concepts.

Dani looked at Marc and a huge smile came across her face, as his above-average intelligence was shining and making her a bit aroused. She reached under the table and tapped his hand, causing him to turn it over and squeeze hers in response. Wil was fidgeting a little bit next to Sarah, which Marc
noticed and decided to ask him about after lunch broke up.

Marc and Wil went back to his office to kill an hour until pre-game would commence at Niemoller Field.

Marc: The women told me about Saturday night from their perspectives. Care to share from yours, as it affects Dani indirectly and I am concerned for her?

Wil: I knew I shouldn't have gone out, but I was stuck on my overnight rotation the previous weekend and missed out on some prime opportunities, I was told. I went down to Walker's Point and started the evening at Fluid. Some good-looking guys, but most of them were coupled-up. I then poked into Walker's Pint for a few, but it was all women at that time. D.I.X. was where I spent most of the night, getting bombed and hoping to find some companionship.

Marc: When did you start texting Sarah?

Wil: I don't remember doing it before I got to D.I.X., but apparently I was blubbering a bit while at Fluid from what I saw in my phone the next morning.

Marc: Continue.

Wil: With no luck being had, and me in really bad shape, I called for an Uber to get home. Sarah was waiting for me on the doorstep and helped me get in and settled so I could sleep off the oncoming hangover. She asked if there was anything I wanted, and I told her that some naked cuddling would be nice. We hadn't done that in a while because I knew that putting us together in that close of proximity with neither one of us "on edge" could lead to some action that I frankly didn't want to have with her because it wouldn't be totally physical but emotional as well. As we cuddled, she rubbed herself against me and we ended up front-to-front. She moved around so that she could take me inside her and started riding me. I was too drunk to put up any fight and it felt SO DAMN GOOD! We both came and she confessed to me that she wanted me as more than a fuck buddy. I remember smiling when I heard that, but I don't know what to think about it.

Marc: You told me that you could see her as someone you could be with long-term, but that you didn't know if she could see you in that way and you'd rather not risk finding out. It seems like she made her opinion of you loud and clear. The ball is in your court, now.

Wil: I STILL haven't kissed her, and I know that's the next big step in answering that question.

Marc: Maybe do it to congratulate her after the game. Doesn't have to be dramatic or anything. Just a simple one that leaves her wondering a little and gets her to chase you back.

Wil: How are you so sly, man?!

Marc: Guess my advanced age has put me in more situations to act and to see others act. We should head over to Niemoller since I have to do the invocation before the game and won't be sitting with all of you right away.

The men left Marc's office and walked over to Niemoller Field, where the lacrosse teams from Trinity and Ripon were a few minutes into pre-game warm-ups. Wil joined Dani, Cali, Alyssa, Jessie, and Vanessa in the stands, while Marc stayed down at field level. Erin waved at him, to which he smiled and placed his hand against his cheek in reference to her usually pecking him on it when she sees him. Around a half-hour before opening draw, a number of the parents began arriving. Cody and Stacy Prince showed up first, followed by Bob and Melissa Mueller, Monica
As the clock wound down to triple zeroes, the two teams stood on the far sideline in anticipation of being led to the center of the field by the game officials. After introductions and Marc’s invocation, the teams took their positions around the center circle. Trinity’s Steph McNamara and Ripon’s Brandi Pearson knelt down to challenge the draw with McNamara snagging the ball from the air. She passed it back to Jess, who sent it out to Morgan Brooks, whose run through the center left channel drew a pair of Redhawks. She sent the ball forward to Kristie, who slung a pass to Lindsey for an easy put-away. The absorb-turnover-counter strategy was the Thunder’s chief mode of operation in the first half, with the forward line combining for twelve goals and eleven assists as Steph and Lindsey each picked up four goals and Sofia contributed three goals and five assists. After the first thirty minutes, Trinity led Ripon, 17-2.

Lauren turned over the entire lineup with the exception of Sam for the second half, sending them out in the following manner: Steph L.; Andi-Shelley-Sam-Emily; Maggie-Becca-Morgan A.; Kelley-Lauren-Christen-Savannah. The second string had a little bit more trouble dissecting Ripon’s defense, but still amassed twelve goals with the big scorers being Savannah and Christen with three goals each. The full-time whistle blew and the on-field celebration began, as a thoroughly dominating performance gave the Thunder a 29-5 win over the Redhawks.

Trinity 29 Ripon 5 (Steph McNamara 4 goals, Lindsey Hoffman 4 goals, Sofia Hernandez 3 goals 5 assists, Savannah Johnson 3 goals 2 assists, Christen Prince 3 goals, Morgan Brooks 2 goals 4 assists, Lauren Chandler 2 goals 1 assist, Sam Mueller 2 goals, Kristie Mueller 1 goal 6 assists, Kelley Ochowicz 1 goal 3 assists, Morgan Andringa 1 goal 3 assists, Maggie Dowling 1 goal 2 assists, Megan Racicot 1 goal, Jess Fisher 1 goal, Erin Matheson 2 assists, Emily Sommer 1 assist; Nicole Babcock 2 goals allowed 4 saves, Steph Lafleur 3 goals allowed 7 saves.)

**********

Outside the gates, parents, fans, and loved ones were waiting for their conquering warriors to emerge from the arena. The first ones to exit were Lauren and Kelley, with the latter’s two brothers running up to them. Dan and Lynelle congratulated their two favorite Thunder players with hugs and took their sons back from them so they could head to the locker room and get out of their gear. Erin and Steph walked out together and were met by their entourage led by Marc. After accepting their congratulations and affections, the two of them continued onto Buuck. As Morgan Andringa exited the field, Kevin Nemeth from the Trinity Times took a picture of her, then showed her the one he got of her scoring her first collegiate goal. She asked for a copy of it and gave him a peck on the cheek as a thank-you for getting it. As the last person out, Sarah locked the gate to Niemoller behind her, then turned around to see Wil standing in front of her with a smile on his face and a certain gleam in his eye. He congratulated her on the win with a kiss on the lips, which caught her a bit by surprise. Not wanting to let this moment slip away, she came to her senses and leaned down to give Wil a loving peck of her own, one that lasted for several seconds.

**********

While the players were with their circles of support by the Niemoller Field exit, Lauren had gone over to Buuck and posted the room list for the Spring break trip in the locker room, along with an announcement of no practice tomorrow and the projected itinerary for Friday. She left campus following that, allowing the potential turmoil to happen outside of her midst.

6:00am (CT) Leave Trinity
9:45am (ET) Meal stop in Merrillville, IN
11:00am (ET) Leave Merrillville
3:00pm (ET) Pit Stop in Dayton, OH
3:15pm (ET) Leave Dayton
7:30pm (ET) Meal Stop in Beckley, WV
8:45pm (ET) Leave Beckley
1:00am (ET) Arrive at Doubletree Raleigh-Cary
No practice on Thursday meant that the lacrosse players could spend their time on their studies, packing for North Carolina, and getting rest ahead of their early morning departure and 18 hour trip (including meal breaks). Elsewhere on campus, the Faculty Senate met this afternoon and passed Dr. Sinclair and Deacon Schmidt's proposal for the creation of a certificate in Practical Ministry, with courses for it to be included in the Fall 2019 course catalog.

**********

The room list posted after yesterday's match put some of the players into a bit of a snit, with others looking to plan their way around who they have drafted for the five nights in Cary (Friday-Tuesday). Steph went down to Lauren's room hoping they could plot out how to protect their partners from the whirlwind known as Shelley.

Lauren: This is NOT going to be fun, even though you, Kelley, and I will be together.

Steph: We know the seniors are going to help us deal with Shelley, but we should have some of our own tactics in play to keep her from hurting Erin and Kelley. The most obvious one is to not let any of us be alone with her.

Lauren: Something I'm thinking is that we sort of swap our protection, where you'll keep Kelley safe and I will stick up for Erin if she starts making noise.

Steph: That sounds like an excellent idea. If we stick up for our own, she is more likely to create a stand-off with us than if we're doing it for a teammate. The itinerary has the trip broken into four legs. How do we work on confining her on the bus so she's not making a nuisance of herself with the four of us for most of the 18 hours on the road?

Lauren: Stay with our girls, swap seats amongst ourselves, rely on the seniors to constrain her.

Steph wondered if she should tell Lauren what she and Erin had deduced from talking with Marc on Sunday, but figured that it would cause more harm than good for her to know at the present time. Kelley came in and plopped down across Lauren's lap, not paying any attention to the other person in the room.

Steph: Hi, Kelley. How was class?

Kelley: Sort of useless. The professor wanted this day done in the worst way, so she sped through the lecture and let us go 20 minutes early.

Lauren tousled her girlfriend's hair while she snuggled up to her, laying her head against Lauren's stomach.

Steph: You two are lucky in that you don't have to plan around your roommates' schedules to have exclusive access to your room, since you live together already.

Kelley: Easier access to each other and alone times doesn't mean that we're having more sex than you and Erin. In fact, the progression of our physical relationship is slower than you'd expect with us being roommates.

Lauren: Maybe I will need to correct that this weekend, provided Steph and Shelley don't mind hearing us go at it.
Kelley: Lauren! They don't need to know that we're planning to have some yum-yum-bouncy-bouncy time.

Steph: Won't bother me, because I'll probably be more worried about fending off an uninvited attack from the fourth person in the room than to care about the two of you rocking and rolling.

Lauren: You going to try to get some time with Erin on the trip?

Steph: I think I'm going to see if she wants to stay with me tonight and we can get that out of the way before leaving in the morning.

Kelley: Take pictures?!

Lauren: KELLEY! They are NOT going to make you a sex tape, even though I think it would be a good tutorial for those of us who aren't as experienced as others.

Kelley: Couldn't hurt to ask, right?

Lauren thwaped Kelley in the shoulder, then messed her hair up again.

Steph: I better get back and finish packing if I want Erin to stay over tonight. Byeeeeeee. Stay out of trouble, you two, and Lauren, I think we'll be good if things can run as we described.

**********

Erin finished packing around 8pm, then walked down the hall to Steph's room where the two planned to empty their sexual tanks with one another before the road trip. Once settled into Steph's bed, with her head against her chest, Erin attacked her neck and earlobe, then moved up to her lips and kissed them. Steph returned the kiss and opened her mouth slightly, inviting Erin's tongue to come and play inside it. Erin broke the kiss briefly so she could get her shirt off and remove Steph's as well.

Steph used the slight interruption to start working her way down Erin's body with kisses, then licked down the trail leading to her navel and waistline. Erin moved onto her back and Steph took the hint, removing her pajama shorts and panties. Seeing Erin's pubic region neatly trimmed, Steph ran her tongue from the top of her slit to the bottom, then back up. She swirled her tongue over Erin's clit, extracting a moan out of her. Steph moved her mouth back down and concentrated on getting her tongue inside of Erin, succeeding after a few failed attempts. Steph used her lips to rub against her vaginal lips while her tongue moved in and out of Erin. Erin's breathing became more frantic as Steph brought her to a rousing orgasm.

Once she came down from the high, Erin flipped Steph onto her back and went directly for her nipples, licking and sucking each one in turn. Adding a bit of a squeeze on each of Steph's breasts, she continued her ministrations on the nipples, arousing Steph even more. Steph grabbed Erin and went back on top of her. She striped off her boy shorts and connected her womanhood with that of Erin's, rocking slowly yet passionately. After a few minutes of this, the two women ground hard against each other, trying to find a mutual climax. Eventually, both of them would achieve their goal, with Steph collapsing on top of Erin's chest.

Erin: Wow! Was that the tribbing thing you mentioned when we were in North Carolina the last time?

Steph: Yes. After three months of not having a single urge to look at another woman in a non-platonic way, I knew it was time that I made my exclusive commitment to you, here in our own space.
Erin: I love you beyond words, Stephanie Lynn. If I could marry you now, I would, but I'm sure our fathers would send us to the nunnery if they heard that, or Marc for that matter.

Steph: Erin Danielle, one day I will ask you for that, but that is years in the future. For now, know that I will never be with another woman without you being present and OK with it, like our joint relationship with Jessie.

Erin: Speaking of that, maybe we should plan for a three-way after the Carroll game on the 16th. Neither of our roommates should be back yet, my parents will be staying either with Marc and Danielle or at a hotel, and Jessie will have access to her room since Becca will be on-campus.

Steph: Sounds like a lovely way for the two of us to wish you a VERY happy 19th birthday, angel.

Steph rolled onto her side and spooned Erin, with both falling asleep after a few minutes of post-coital cuddling.

**********

Savannah and Maggie went off-campus for dinner, with both hoping it might lead to something more after they returned to Maggie's room. Maggie lit a couple of candles and they basked in the glow of the light, with Savannah curling up under her girlfriend's chin. After planting a few kisses on its underside and along her neck, the attacker moved to Maggie's earlobe and sucked on it slightly. With no hesitation, the blonde turned Savannah onto her back and kissed her deeply, their lips parting for each other to enter their mouths. Maggie left a trail of kisses down to Savannah's cleavage and flipped the front of her strapless dress forward, exposing her breasts. Her mouth gently licked at her left nipple before enveloping it between her lips, which caused Savannah to moan softly. She played with Maggie's hair while she continued to suckle on her nipple. Savannah's hands reached up and pushed down the straps on Maggie's dress, then moved to its zipper and slid it down, letting the fabric fall away and leaving its occupant bare-chested. Savannah placed her hands on her breasts and squeezed them lightly, then tweaked her nipples. Savannah pushed the rest of Maggie's dress off of her and reached for the waistband of her lace panties, sliding them down her hips. Maggie helped her remove them, then slid Savannah's dress off of her. Savannah slid Maggie's boy shorts off her, leaving both of them naked. Maggie lied on her back, allowing Savannah to take the lead in loving on her previously chaste body. After a fair amount of time testing what turned her on, Savannah placed her mouth on Maggie's womanhood, then spun around and straddled her head, inviting her to return the favor. Though tentative, she found a pace and intensity that seemed to make Savannah quite aroused. They moved their mouths around one another's inner thighs and lower pelvis before going back to their primary objective. Savannah latched onto Maggie's clit and sucked hard, teasing it with her tongue and causing her to press up into her mouth while climaxing. After coming down, Maggie tried to do the same on Savannah while also using one of her hands to massage the outside of her mound. Savannah leaned back and rode against her lips as her oncoming apex got closer, with a slight graze of Maggie's teeth against her button the trick which set her off. Once her breathing returned to normal, Savannah climbed off Maggie and lied down next to her. Maggie looked down at her and got lost in her eyes. The two kissed for a while before Savannah went back to her room to get some sleep ahead of the 5am alarm that Morgan had set for them.
The motor coach carrying the lacrosse team from Trinity Lutheran University to Cary, North Carolina was in the process of being packed with the athletes' luggage and equipment bags. After everyone had gotten onto the bus, the seating arrangement for the first leg ended up as follows (front to back):

Nicole--------Steph M.----------------Shelley--Morgan B.
Jess---------Megan-------------------Maggie--Savannah
Sofia--------Christen----------------Erin----Steph L.
Morgan A.-----Julie-------------------Lauren--Kelley
Becca---------Ali---------------------Kristie--Sam
Jane--------Andi---------------------Emily---Lindsey

Once the bus was on I-43, Sarah stood up and gave a short introduction of how the road trip would play out.

Sarah: I am sure most if not all of you saw the room list and travel itinerary on the locker room bulletin board after Wednesday's game, so you're already aware of where and when we'll be stopping along the way. The trip is broken into four legs. On each of the first three, I would like you to sit with different people, to get to know your teammates or to catch up or, in the case of Julie and Morgan, work on a project for TrinityThunder dot com where they're chronicling the spring break trip. The fourth leg, from Beckley to Cary, you can return to any of your previous seatmates or choose someone else, as I don't expect many of you to be awake much after we hit the road following dinner. We have around 2 1/2 hours before our first stop in Merrillville, Indiana. Get comfortable, as this will be a long day for everyone.

Morgan and Julie got down to laying out their plans for telling the stories of the team over the six days of the trip, beginning with an opening installment previewing the two games and a number of the players who were expected to feature for the Thunder in the matches against Meredith and William Peace. The pair began typing on their laptops, with Julie focusing on the players and Morgan on the games themselves.

Across from them, Lauren and Kelley were listening to a playlist on the former's iPhone. In front of them, Steph and Erin were reading over highlights of the first week of NWSL pre-season, focusing on the news coming out of the North Carolina Courage's camp. They wondered if they might run into any players during the trip, either at the hotel or the mall alongside it, or if Kathy Proctor had been able to talk one or two into coming to their game tomorrow. Shelley was quite fidgety being near the front of the bus and seated with Morgan Brooks. She decided to break out a couple of fashion magazines, hoping that it would help kill the time until they got to their first stop and she could find a different seatmate for the second leg. Emily and Lindsey cracked jokes on one another, Christen talked Sofia through some of the things she might encounter on the trip that could cause her anxiety to spike, and Maggie and Savannah were still in the afterglow of their lovemaking from the previous night, curled up together in their seats. Good time was being made and they got through the Chicago Skyway and into Indiana before 9:00 Eastern time, leaving less than a half hour until they would reach Merrillville and stop for breakfast at IHOP.
Marc and Danielle were at Froedtert Hospital for the MRI of her head, brain, and skull. She was calm and relaxed as the radiologist injected the contrast into her IV, which would allow the images to be more vibrant and thus make abnormalities stand out stronger against the backdrop of the rest of the brain. The device began circling around her head and taking pictures at various angles. Once satisfied with the number and variety of images taken, the radiologist told Danielle that she could get up as soon as the device had come to a stop. The IV was removed from her arm and she changed into her street clothes before going to the lobby to wait to be called back to meet with the neurologist about the results of the MRI. Several minutes passed before she and Marc were escorted into an examination room, where they waited for a few more minutes until the doctor arrived.

Dr. Nathan Zawicki: Good morning, Danielle. I hope the MRI didn't make you too claustrophobic or cause you more anxiety than necessary.

Danielle: It actually wasn't too bad. The slight sedative helped me remain calm despite all the spinning of the machine.

Dr. Zawicki: I've looked at the images and we found a meningioma in the frontal lobe which is pressing on the optic nerve of your right eye. It IS benign and thus you do not have cancer.

Danielle: Is it dangerous?

Dr. Zawicki: It can be. You have three options, each of which has significant risks. First, we can try to remove it surgically. Unfortunately, it is too large of a tumor to extract without possibly causing collateral damage. Secondly, we can let it stay in place. It won't grow appreciably, but it will eventually kill you. The third option is to try and reduce the tumor to a size where it can be removed with little or no risk to your eyesight or brain function. The risk of going with chemo first is that the tumor could become dislodged and thus the risk for having a stroke increases. Also, the chemo will send you on a downward spiral for the first three weeks until the diet and supplements you will be on can replenish the nutrients enough to stabilize your health and allow you to start feeling better.

Danielle: Can my husband and I discuss our options?

Dr. Zawicki: Sure. I'll leave the two of you in here and come back in about ten minutes.

After Dr. Zawicki left the room and closed the door, the Schmidts talked over what they were facing. Marc told Danielle that it was up to her how they would proceed, as it was her health and life that were on the line based on the decision made. He said that he thought the chemo/surgery option offered the best chance for success even with the increased stroke risk and that the risk of trying to remove it now was too high. Danielle appreciated his input and laid her head against his shoulder, seeking a bit of comfort before the doctor returned to the room. When he came in, Danielle told Dr. Zawicki that she would take the chemical option in the hopes of reducing the tumor to an operable size. He gave Danielle a handful of prescriptions to take to the hospital pharmacy and scheduled a follow-up appointment for April 9th. Danielle and Marc left the hospital after getting the prescriptions filled and went home to reconcile themselves to the diagnosis and spread the word to their families and closest friends.

*******

Back on the bus after filling up on pancakes, fruit, orange juice, and the chocolate shake made for Nicole, the players switched around some and the second leg of the trip had the following configuration of seatmates:
Shelley chose to snooze for a bit being that she was very much isolated from anyone she wanted to talk with. Morgan asked Ali for some advice on guys being that she had become slightly smitten with Kevin, the photographer from the Trinity Times, while Steph and Sofia compared notes on their mental illnesses and the coping techniques and medications they use to sustain themselves. Lindsey and Lauren sat back and laughed at the conversation their two girlfriends were having in front of them. Around an hour into this leg of the trip, Erin got a text from Marc with the results of Danielle's MRI. She slid down in her seat and curled herself into a bit of a ball, trying hard not to cry over the diagnosis but unable to stop from doing so. Steph heard her and asked her what was wrong. Erin couldn't reply verbally, so she handed her her phone.

DeaconMarc: Danielle has a tumor on the right side of her brain. Sizable, but not cancerous. Don't worry. Call if you get a chance. Love you, Er-bear.

Steph took Erin's hand and held it in hers, weaving her fingers with hers. Christen, Emily, Julie, and Kelley all attempted to comfort Erin from their seats. Morgan Brooks heard Erin's crying and caught enough of the conversation behind her to know that she needed to inform Sarah about the situation. After being told, Sarah walked back to Erin and got the full story as best as the freshman could explain it. She went back up to the front of bus and tried to persuade Lauren to let Erin stay with Steph at least for tonight. She had become quite perturbed by Sarah's continued attempts to play around with her no-nonsense, objective, unemotional way of handling things and threatened to reduce her assistant coach's duties if she persisted in challenging her. Sarah got up and walked to the back of the bus, where she texted Marc.

CoachHawthorne: Erin is pretty shaken up over the news. I tried to get Lauren to let her and Steph room together for tonight, but no go. She also threatened to cut parts of my job if I kept taking the players' side against her distant approach to things. No magic words out of her, but another instance of her not giving a s*** about the players and team chemistry. I'm going to text Dani with the news so you don't have to worry about it. Tell Danielle that I'm praying for her and that I hope she can beat back the tumor. Know that you're also being thought of by me. We'll do our best to keep her spirits up while on the trip. But I'm going to encourage her to call you when we stop in Dayton around 2 your time.

Sarah walked back up to Erin and pulled her to her feet, then hugged her and said a few encouraging words to her, along with a near-demand to call Marc at their next stop. As word made its way around the bus, other team members came over and offered their support to her, even Sofia and Savannah, the least-outgoing of the players, and Steph McNamara, who asked Erin if they could talk at some point on the trip. After accepting the well-wishes of her teammates, Erin laid back in her seat and tried to get some rest before they got to Dayton, with Christen offering a comforting shoulder for her to lay upon.
The bus left the interstate outside of Dayton, Ohio to take on gas and to give the team a chance to stretch their legs and pick up munchies for the next leg of the trip. Erin called Marc while Steph shopped for the two of them.

Marc: Hi. I heard from Sarah that you didn't take the news too well.

Erin: No. Why did that have to happen to Danielle?!

Marc: You know that there's really no answer to why or how, it just is. It's not cancerous, but it's too large for them to take out without the potential for damage. She will start oral chemo on Monday in the hopes of shrinking it. That does mean that she'll be feeling and looking bad for a couple of weeks as the drugs start taking effect and the nutritional supplements build up in her system. The plan is for her to be on them for around four months, by which time the tumor will hopefully shrink enough that they can remove it safely.

Erin: Do my parents know?

Marc: Not yet. We contacted the very closest people first, then plan to call others once they're home for the evening. Don't worry too much, dear. Nothing dramatic is going to happen before you return to Milwaukee on Wednesday night. Concentrate on your team, your games, and lean on your friends, teammates, and Steph over the next few days. Sarah told me that she tried to get you and Steph paired up for the night but Lauren wasn't allowing it and put her job in a bit of a vise for pushing it.

Erin: I'm rooming with Becca, who is Jessie's roommate, and Lindsey and Emily, so I think I'll be OK. Now, Steph with Shelley, Kelley, and Lauren, that is going to be a whole lot of possible trouble.

Marc: Since I'm not able to say anything that I know about the Fall break attack and what is in my personal files concerning it, there's no way that Gavin is able to step in and force a change. Gotta live with it and hope no one breaches another person's boundaries.

Erin: We're heading back onto the bus, so I should let you go. Emily suggested the two of us sit together on this leg since a bit of back-and-forth between us might take my mind off what happening's up there and boost my mood a bit.

Marc: Keep your chin up, girl. I'll sit down with you when you're back in Milwaukee and we'll talk over what might be forthcoming along with plans the two of us made in case something like this were to happen to one of us.

Erin: Love you, Pops.

Marc: I love you too, Er-bear.

**********

Leg 3 of the trip, going from Dayton, Ohio to Beckley, West Virginia, was very loud and high-spirited, as the sugar and caffeine took effect on the players. Erin and Emily sat together and started ripping on their teammates and getting punny with comments being thrown at them by the others. The two Stephens chose to sit near the back of the bus, allowing them to talk about the women in their lives and certain problem characters.

Steph L.: So Steph, what's up?

Steph Mac: I know you're close to Kristie's girl Alyssa, and you and Erin are sort of having to fight
off Shelley's tricks to get at you, and I want to apologize for any advice I may have been giving her that might come to harm either of you, but I'm realizing with what Erin is facing with her aunt that life is too short to hold grudges against the people you love the most. I need some advice on how to restore my friendship with Kristie and Sam.

Steph L.: You know what I'm going to tell you might be tough to swallow, but it's what you have to do to get back on their good sides and ultimately become friends again at some level. First, you have to accept that Kristie is with Alyssa and that they are happy. Same goes for Sam and Alyssa's twin, Amanda. You'll have to apologize for the jealousy and controlling behavior you exhibited early last semester and the fight which put the three of you on the outs. I know Sarah has taken a bit of a shine to you, so maybe she'd be someone you could have mediate between you if necessary.

Steph Mac: I'd rather be able to handle it by myself with them, because this is more about developing something for the future than to just call a truce on the anger and bitterness of the past.

Steph L.: Very mature thinking on your part. Is this you finally coming to terms with the fact that your time with Sam as your person has ended, or are you thinking of maybe going for someone else and you need certain closure to do that?

Steph Mac: Well.......there IS someone that I MIGHT like to perhaps find out if she'd be interested in something with me, but I need to do some serious changing to make that happen. She is such a sweetheart and I don't know that she'd take to someone as gruff and hard-edged as myself.

Steph L.: Maybe ask Alyssa for some advice, since Kristie can be rough-around-the-edges sometimes, and I can help you as well, since my relationship with Erin has times where one of us is hard and the other soft, and times when it's the other way around. Is she a student at Trinity?

Steph Mac: Not yet. She'll be a freshman next year and I've known her for a few years already, though not as well as I know the Muellers.

Steph Lafleur thought she had an idea to whom Steph was referring, then gave a nugget of wisdom for the sophomore to chew upon.

Steph L.: Work to get your friendship with Kristie and Sam back in place before you leave for the summer, then use the break to work on getting closer to this other person so that you might be sort of together when the two of you come to Trinity at the start of Fall semester, leaving Kristie and Sam to work on their relationships with Alyssa and her twin.

Steph Mac: Sounds like a bit of a plan. I told Erin that I'd like to talk to her at some point on the trip, but getting this time with you probably solves my problem. Thanks.

Steph L.: You're welcome. Now get this thing between you and them patched up so that the team can benefit from your playing chemistry with Kristie.

Steph Mac: Now, onto you. Is there any way I can help you with Shelley?

Steph L.: Talk to the seniors. They seem to have a plan for dealing with her. Megan gave her a bit of what-for last week when she started getting snippy about not getting to play with me and feeling like the team is against her.

Steph Mac: Will do.

The two Stephens went back to their seats for this leg, with Steph Lafleur sitting with Lindsey and Steph McNamara with Shelley.
With the lacrosse team out of town, Dani and Cali were a bit to their lonesome for Friday night entertainment. Michelle suggested the three of them go out to dinner at the Anchorage, a long-time Glendale institution and a place both she and Dani had gone for family dinners in the past. While at the restaurant, Cali noticed that Gavin and his wife, Heather, were dining not too far away from them. During their meal, Dani saw Sara come in and speak for a minute or two with Gavin, then exit and return to the hotel lobby. Gavin and Heather wrapped up their meal and left, which allowed the women to start talking about what they had seen so far.

Dani: I've got a suspicion we might run into a couple of your teammates tonight, Cali. Gavin was here, Sara popped in briefly. The scuttlebutt that has been running around the dorms and through the lacrosse team to Marc is that those two head up some sort of alumni relations group at Trinity, which is code for female students and athletes schtupping for dollars.

Cali: So Carli and Lexi hook, you're saying?

Dani: That's what Lexi's roommate was arrested for a couple of months ago, and there is enough smoke to make the case for that. God how I wish I could find a way to bring this whole thing down, but do it now and I'm out a job and we have a mess of a situation with the program.

Michelle: So someone else has to put together the pieces to tear it apart, then?

Dani: Yes. We might want to hang out a little bit and see if anyone we recognize comes in.

Michelle, being the least-conspicuous of the three, got up and walked across the lobby to the small convenience store in the hotel to purchase a pack of gum. While walking back, she noticed a group of four college women checking in at the front desk, all with garment bags. Presuming it might be part of a wedding party, she didn't get a lot closer to check. From inside the restaurant, Cali recognized one of them as being Allie Lerner from the soccer team and pointed her out to Dani. After a few more minutes of people-watching, the three of them departed and walked out to Michelle's car. Cali took a couple of seconds before getting into the car to survey the area and saw Carli and Lexi walking toward the front door, then tapped Dani on the shoulder and whispered to her about the pair going in.

**********

The lacrosse team was back on the road following dinner at Pasquale's in Beckley, West Virginia. For the final leg, players were allowed to sit with anyone they wished, as Sarah didn't expect them to stay awake on the last four hours of the trip.

Morgan B.----Nicole-----------------Sam-----Kristie
Jess--------Megan---------------Maggie----Savannah
Julie-------Christen----------Steph L.----Erin
Andi---------Jane---------------Lauren-----Kelley
Becca--------Ali-----------------Lindsey----Emily
Shelley------Steph M.-----------Morgan A.--Sofia

Most of the pairings curled up with one another once the highway hypnosis started to take effect on them. Steph Lafleur, Sofia, and Savannah had all taken their evening anti-anxiety meds and were
very quickly out once they kicked in, with their seatmates cognizant of that. The long day had worn out most of the players as the trip entered its final three hours of eighteen. Morgan Andringa had been sent Julie's opening day log of happenings with the team by her before getting off the bus for dinner, so she incorporated her writing into the piece she would post on TrinityThunder dot com shortly. Once done and posted, Morgan leaned back her chair and rested her eyes for a bit, drifting off into slumber.

Just after 1am on Saturday morning, the motor coach rolled into the parking lot of the Doubletree Hotel Raleigh-Cary. Initial check-in was very quick and the players went up to their rooms. Formal check-in of the players would happen in the morning before their 11am pre-game meal. There was little if any fussing once everyone was in their rooms, as sleep overruled any bickering of who slept where and with who. Just before she turned over and fell asleep, Erin sent up some prayers, one for Danielle and her tumor, one for Marc and his emotional state, and one for Steph asking for protection against Shelley's wiles. Day One of the 2019 Trinity Women's Lacrosse Spring Break trip had finally come to an end, much to the relief of the players.
A Series Of Tests

Game day for the Thunder started off with most players sleeping as long as they could, as the previous day's travel had left a number of them fatigued and slightly dehydrated. Training table at 11am had no absences, although a large portion of the team fueled up on fresh fruit and coffee instead of waffles, bacon, and yogurt. Following brunch, the team had less than an hour of downtime before they would leave the Doubletree at 1pm for the short trip to Meredith College. The four seniors held a short meeting in their room to discuss the tone they wanted to set with the underclassmen for today's game, deciding that a positive but cautious one would be best given Meredith's level of success (five-time defending conference champions) and the youth of their roster. As they went down the fourth-floor hallway, they roused their teammates from their rooms and together went down to the first floor to load the bus. Lauren and Sarah were the final two on the bus, arriving a few minutes after the players.

**********

The first half of the Trinity Lutheran/Meredith match was played at a leisurely pace with the Avenging Angels controlling possession for large portions of the time. Nicole made 11 saves in the first 30 minutes, but at the half the Thunder trailed 12-3. Lauren started the second half with a more physical lineup, one that she hoped would be able to both generate offense and hold their opponents at bay.

------------Nicole
-------Becca-Julie-Erin
Ali---------------------Morgan A.
----Megan---Sam---Jess
Lindsey-----Steph M.-----Christen

On offensive forays, Sam dropped back to join the three defenders, allowing the outside players to push up, whereas on defense Megan stayed up with the three attackers while Ali, Erin, and Jess covered the lanes in which the opposition were running. Despite being outscored in the second half 9-5, the Thunder were able to claim a moral victory as their front line converted on all but two of their shots on net, with Christen scoring three goals and Lindsey and Steph Mac one each. Morgan Brooks' re-insertion in place of Jess helped in providing multiple midfield assist options, as she and Megan each picked up a pair of helpers.

Meredith 21 Trinity 8 (Steph McNamara 3 goals, Christen Prince 3 goals, Megan Racicot 1 goal/2 assists, Lindsey Hoffman 1 goal/1 assist, Kristie Mueller 3 assists, Morgan Brooks 2 assists)

**********

As the players exited the locker room and crossed the field toward the exit, they were greeted by a small throng of fans. Erin noticed Kathy Proctor and went over to see her, followed by Steph Lafleur. She introduced them to Kevin and Cheryl Reid, the parents of EJ's Duke and Philadelphia Hearts teammate Morgan Reid, as well as North Carolina Courage defender Schuyler DeBree, who also played with EJ at Duke. Maggie's parents, Kevin and Kathleen, were chatting with Morgan Andringa and Becca Curtin while waiting for their daughter and Savannah to get to their side of the facility. Once they got there, Maggie gave each of her parents a hug and formally introduced them to
her girlfriend, who shook hands with the Dowlings. As Lauren and Sarah departed the stadium for the bus, the head coach told those gathered that they could follow the team back to Cary, after which the players would be free for the rest of the evening.

**********

Steph and Erin were dropped off at the Doubletree by Kathy Proctor following their dinner-and-dessert out with her and the Reids. Cheryl asked for a bit of insight into Marc's theology and sense of humor, as she was told by Morgan about his gag at Becca and EJ's wedding involving her and her boyfriend, Michael. Erin opened up about Marc's demeanor and told her how they helped Michael surprise Morgan when they got to Cary for College Cup Media Day after meeting him on the plane down from Philly. Steph was curious about the questioning and asked Cheryl for an explanation. She was told that Morgan had begun thinking about the possibility of her and Michael making their relationship permanent, having dated close to a year by this point and knowing one another for three or four years before that. Therefore, she wanted to inquire about the person the two of them might ask to perform the ceremony if things came to pass and how close to their chosen denomination (Catholic) his liturgy ran.

Steph and Erin rode the elevator to the fourth floor and walked down to their rooms, which were across from one another. Seeing no one in the hallways or hearing much in the way of noise from anywhere on the floor, the pair spent a couple of minutes embracing and exchanging kisses. They broke apart when they heard the elevator ding for their floor, with Maggie and Savannah exiting it upon their return from dinner with the Dowlings. Steph went into her room, with Erin doing the same. After she and Savannah said their good nights to one another, Maggie went to her room and unlocked the door. She turned on the light and saw Christen and Julie in a very compromising position on their bed. She quickly turned the light back out and left, going down to the lobby for a little while to give her roommates a chance to finish up before curfew.

Over in Room 410, Steph Lafleur had taken her nightly meds and was out like a light when Shelley, Kelley, and Lauren returned from their evening excursions (Shelley with Megan and Jess at Greek Fiesta and Kelley and Lauren with Lindsey and Emily at Dickey's Barbecue Pit followed by all of them ending up at Cold Stone Creamery). Disappointed, Shelley changed and slipped into bed next to Steph, scooting her backside up against her right hip, as the goalkeeper was sleeping on her stomach. Following lights-out, Lauren and Kelley spooned with the taller woman behind her girlfriend. Kelley felt a bit turned-on by being held in Lauren's arms and decided to let her know it. She took one of Lauren's hands and slipped it inside her underwear, then ran it over her bare pubic region. Lauren got the hint and began rubbing on Kelley's lips before sliding a finger into her, the first time the pair had gone that far. After a bit of digital stimulation, Lauren removed Kelley's panties as well as her own and coaxed her to turn over so they were front-to-back. Once in that position, the pair intertwined their legs so their muffs were pressed against each other, which led to the more-experienced of the pair starting to rub hers against Kelley's. The two of them tried to keep their noise and movement to a minimum, not wishing to disturb the women in the other bed. Upon climaxing, they returned to their front-to-back positioning and fell asleep. Shelley, sort of unable to block out what she was hearing if not seeing, rubbed herself off to release some of the tension that had built up the past few days from being close to Steph.

Megan and Jess quickly got down to their planned extracurriculars after returning to their room. Nicole and Morgan Brooks tuned them out easily as they had had experience last season rooming with the other two and were aware that they would fool around sometimes on their road trips. Megan was the slightly more-aggressive of the pair, diving underneath the covers to orally satisfy her partner. Jess returned the favor before moving back up the bed and falling asleep against Megan's chest.
Daylight Savings Time arrived overnight, leading to the loss of an hour of sleep for the team. Erin and Becca were up by 6:30 and quickly changed before going downstairs to get breakfast. Seeing that the two of them were gone, Emily woke Lindsey up by sucking on one of her breasts, licking the nipple before nibbling on it. Lindsey was getting quite aroused by Emily's work and told her they needed to be sort of quick since Erin and Becca could come back and find them in the middle of something. Emily agreed and walked over to her luggage, from where she pulled out a double-ended dildo. Coming back to the bed, she slid one end inside her, then gripped it with her pelvic muscles before working the other end into Lindsey. The pair went at it hot and heavy, getting both of them off quickly. They then went into the bathroom and took a shower together, which led to foreplay and another session of sexual pleasure.

Coach Heberlein chose to forego a formal practice at William Peace this morning in favor of a film session of the team's first two matches. Overall, Lauren was pleased with the effort put forth by the players and the results gained. She told the team that she was still looking for that spot-on first XII that would allow the Thunder to steal a couple of unexpected wins and play the tougher teams on their schedule closer than the score from yesterday's game. She critiqued each of the players' performances and laid out her first depth chart of the season based on the 4-3-4 that she plans to use for most matches.

GK: Nicole, Steph L., Jane
RD: Ali, Andi, Kelley
CD: Sam, Julie, Emily, Becca, Shelley
LD: Erin, Emily, Kelley
RCM: Megan, Maggie, Lindsey
CM: Jess, Sam, Becca, Julie
LCM: Morgan B., Morgan A., Kristie
RA: Sofia, Lindsey, Kelley
CA: Steph M., Lindsey, Christen, Lauren
LA: Kristie, Savannah, Christen

The players now had something concrete on which to measure their place in the squad, with some happy and others less-so, while still others felt wrongly done by the spot they occupied at certain positions.

Lauren: Based on the first two matches and my expectations for Tuesday, this is how I'm thinking we'll line up against William Peace:

------------Nicole
Ali--------Julie------Sam--------Erin
----Megan-------Jess-----Morgan B.
Lauren: I want to start out with our strongest attackers and use them to pressure the ball coming out of their defensive third as well as create holes in their defensive set-up around the arc. I am hoping from there to switch in Kristie and Sofia out wide and Savannah in the middle alongside whichever of the four starters still has the most gas in the tank at that point and then use our speed and accuracy to throw the Pacers off-balance. This is a game we CAN win, and it's a game that I believe we NEED to win. We'll try some of this out tomorrow on the field, but for now just do some visualization work on how you see yourself performing on Tuesday, maybe 20 minutes or so. After that, you're free for the remainder of the day.

**********

Steph McNamara invited Sam and Kristie to have lunch with her at Remington Grill near the hotel. Sensing that their friend was trying to offer an olive branch to the pair, Sam accepted, followed by her sister. After placing and picking up their order, the three of them sat down and Steph broke the ice.

Steph: Even though we still live together, Sam, it's been months since we've done anything together besides share space in the same room. I know that I created that problem as a result of my hitting you inadvertently, and I want to apologize for that.

Kristie: I don't believe it! Hoodrat apologize?!?!

Steph: There's no need for you to be sarcastic, Kratcheeta.

Sam: Kristie, give Steph the benefit of the doubt for a second. She might actually be sincere about this.

Steph: I understand how the two of you can doubt me after all that I've done in the past, but I am trying to make amends. On the trip south, I got to see how torn up someone can be over the possibility of losing a person close to them. It made me think about what I'd do if either of you were in that position, and I knew that I needed to say I'm sorry and remind you that I still consider you my two best friends. I hope that you can forgive me and give me another chance.

Sam, being the more empathetic of the Mueller sisters, heard the truth in Steph's words and reached across the table to pat her hand. "Sure, so long as you stop calling me a giraffe around the team."

Kristie: After our mom was diagnosed with breast cancer, Sam and I came to learn that not much mattered when compared to the real chance that she could die. That's when I decided to not put up with being unhappy. Our friendship was making me unhappy, so much so that I turned my back on you more or less and threw myself headlong into my relationships with Alyssa and Sam. I know I pissed you off by spitting in your face over your threat of outing what the three of us were doing. That was not the best way for me to handle it, and for that I am sorry.

Steph reached out and took hands with her two besties and squeezed them. "Erin is going to need all of us to hold her up after the news she got on Friday, not the least of which is to make sure Steph isn't getting harassed by Shelley."

Kristie and Sam nodded in agreement with what Steph said and committed to doing their part to keep the potential homewrecker occupied.

**********

Sarah, Morgan Brooks, Lauren, and Kelley decided to have lunch at Chipotle after the team meeting
and film session. As they were finishing up, Lauren got a text from Megan.

YentaCenta: No-holds-barred Truth or Dare tonight, 8pm. Invitation-only. Place TBD. You and Kelley in?

While Lauren was typing her response, Morgan received a text of her own from Megan inviting her to the game.

Morgan: Lauren, did you get a text from Megan about something happening tonight?

Lauren: Yes. Take it you got the same one, then.

Morgan: Yep. I know this is going to be a ton of laughs, but I think I'll pass and come up with a different bonding activity for those not part of the game.

Lauren: Smart idea, especially if you-know-who is left out.

Sarah: If you're referring to who I think you are, yeah, definitely wouldn't be a good thing for her to be skulking around making a nuisance of herself on some of our less-aggressive and less-extroverted players.

Lauren finished her response to Megan saying that she and Kelley were in and also asked who else was on the list. A couple of minutes later, Megan's response was received.

YentaCenta: Me, Jess, Steph L., Erin, Christen, Julie, Lindsey, Emily, you, Kelley, Becca, and Morgan B.

Lauren: Looks like she's inviting the very-out couples and Becca and you, Moe.

Morgan: I'll see if I can talk to Kristie about taking my spot. She's fairly uninhibited and I'm sure would give as good as she would get from the rest of you.

The four of them left Chipotle and wandered the outdoor mall for a while. They ran into the Chicago threesome outside Dick's Sporting Goods, with Kelley a little surprised to see them together and actually in a good mood. Morgan broached Kristie about participating in Megan's Ultimate Truth or Dare in her place, giving her the reason why she wanted her to do it. Kristie agreed and passed the word onto Steph and Sam that they'd have Morgan's help tonight in managing the team's biggest malcontent. Following a quick browse of the store, the group walked back to the Doubletree for some slotha yoga time before dinner.
Enter At Your Own Risk

The invitees for Megan's Ultimate Truth-Or-Dare (Steph L., Erin, Christen, Julie, Lauren, Kelley, Lindsey, Emily, Becca, Kristie, and Jess) began showing up at the seniors' room just before 8 o'clock. Once all twelve had arrived, she got the game started.

Megan: As host of the game, I will throw out the first question. Lauren, Truth or Dare?

*Lauren: Truth.

Megan: When was the last time you and Kelley bumped uglies?

Lauren: Last night, and it was the first time as well.

Steph: And according to Shelley, they weren't very quiet about it. I was fast asleep and didn't notice anything.

Kelley: She was really good with her hands and, well, other parts, so it was hard to keep things in.

Lauren blushed at Kelley's description and moved onto selecting the next contestant. "Julie, Truth or Dare?"

*Julie: Truth.

Lauren: Have you and Christen gotten after it while here?

Julie: Yes.

Christen: You forgot to mention that Maggie walked in on us.

Julie turned beet-red of embarrassment at her girlfriend's admission. She eventually composed herself and selected her target, settling on Kristie. "Truth or Dare, Kristie?"

*Kristie: Dare.

Julie: I dare you to confess who your get-out-of-jail-free-card is on our team.

Kristie: JJ, that's mean! It's a toss-up between Christen, Moe, and Lauren, since all of them I'm sure are fantastic in bed. If I had to pick just one, it'd be Christen, just because I think she could handle my "freakish" side. Jess, Truth or Dare?

*Jess: Truth.

Kristie: Where is the strangest place you and Megan have had a snog?

Jess: I don't know if it's THAT strange, but at a rest area just outside Lyndon Station on our way back to Oregon following a weekend trip up to the Mall of America. It was late, and we had had a wonderful two nights exploring one another in the hotel in Bloomington. Megan said she needed to make a pit stop to clear out her bladder and pulled off. After doing that, she got back in the car and ran her hand over my leg, then onto my quim and we just took the opportunity to do it one more time before returning to real life.

Kristie: That's not TOO weird, but for one of the first times, it could be considered an odd place.
Jess: Kelley, Truth or Dare?

*Kelley: Dare.

Jess: I dare you to select one of the other femmes in the group and make out with her.

Kelley cringed while considering who she should choose. After a quick look around the circle, something inside told her to pick Emily, which she did. Trying to be a bit seductive, she crawled over to the sit-down comedian and placed her lips against hers, running her hand over her face and through her hair.

Lindsey: Well.....guess Lauren has been teaching Kelley some of her tricks.

Kelley grinned at Lindsey, then winked at Lauren and returned to her spot. "Erin, Truth or Dare?"

*Erin: Truth.

Kelley: Do you or have you ever had a crush on a guy?

Erin hemmed and hawed over the answer, as she does have certain feelings for someone, although nowhere near as significant or as deep as those for Steph.

Erin: Yes.

Kelley: Who?!?!

Erin: I'm not telling you people. Besides, it's more idol worship than anything really emotional or physical. Lindsey, Truth or Dare?

*Lindsey: Dare.

Erin: I dare you to describe what you would like to do to one of the women in this room other than Emily.

Lindsey: More what I'd want one of them to do to me. I'd LOVE to let Steph have her way with me, to be able to lie back and accept her passion and fire. Sorry, Erin.

Erin: You're not Shelley, so I'm not THAT concerned. Besides, you do that, I get to do the same to Emily.

Lindsey: Fair enough. Christen, Truth or Dare?

*Christen: Truth.

Lindsey: Is there anything you haven't done before that you'd like to try with Julie?

Christen thought about the question for a few seconds before responding. "I'd like to use a strap-on with her. Preferably each of us using it on the other."

Julie: Serious, babe?

Christen: Yes. Never tried with my ex and, I don't know, it'd be something different than the usual sex we have. Steph, Truth or Dare?

*Steph: Dare.
Christen: I dare you to bench-press Jess.

Steph: You know I'm not THAT strong, and this will prove it, CP.

Jess moved over to where Steph was, then rested on her hands length-wise. Steph tried to push her up with her arms, but barely moved her.

Steph: Emily, Truth or Dare?

*Emily: Dare.

Steph: I dare you to flash the North Carolina skyline.

Emily walked over to the windows, opened the sliding blinds, and lifted her shirt to reveal her breasts to the great outdoors.

Emily: Becca, Truth or Dare?

*Becca: Truth.

Emily: I remember you telling us once about getting pulled over for speeding and paying off the cop with some donuts. Anyone you know do more than that to get out of a ticket?

Becca: One of my high school teammates got picked up for having a small stash of weed in her car. She offered to give the cop a cut of the eventual proceeds if he didn't cite her for having it.

Emily: I take it she wasn't cited.

Becca: Didn't hurt that the cop was her sister's boyfriend. Megan, Truth or Dare?

*Megan: Dare.

Becca: I dare you to take Krisite into the closet for seven minutes of heavy breathing.

Megan got up, lifted Kristie up by the hand, and they went into the closet.

Megan: I know that Becca is trying to get one or both of us in trouble with our women by doing this, but we don't have to do what they think we will.

Kristie: So.....how do we get her back?

Megan: I think we'll need Lindsey and Emily's help, plus Erin's stealthiness to pull this off. Someone passed on a story to me about something you and Sam did to Steph one night after a bit too much drinking on her part.

Kristie: You mean us stripping her and making her piss herself?! That is decidedly cruel. I don't know that Becca deserves THAT level of payback. What else can we devise?

Megan: Let's talk to Steph and Erin since they're friends with Becca's roommate. Maybe the three of them can come up with something and execute it on our behalf. I live in the same hall as her, so I'll be able to get them in when they want to pull it off.

The pair emerged from the closet to a chorus of boos from the other ten. With curfew drawing near, the game broke up with the combatants returning to their rooms.
Dealing With The Truth

Spring break allowed Marc to take on a lighter schedule than normal. Rather than go to campus for a couple of hours, then leave for his therapy appointment, he chose to telecommute, working in the cafeteria at the Dewey Center ahead of his session with Stephanie. He studied over the figures that Gavin had placed in the athletic department's budget for FY 2020, wondering what his long-term goal was with the increased income projected. He planned to discuss this with Paul when the two met on Wednesday, along with his office's budget, the synodical accounts designated for Trinity, and Paul's choice of nominees for the Board of Trustees, all of which would be presented at its April 5th meeting. He also began developing the framework for the upcoming Easter Sunday service, laying down the order of service and some of his initial thoughts for who to utilize in various spots. At 11 o'clock, Wil and Dani came into the cafeteria seating area and found Marc. After they sat down, Marc opened the dialogue.

Marc: You both know about Friday's diagnosis, right?

Wil: Sarah just said that Danielle had a tumor, but not much more than that.

Dani: She told me more based on her conversations with Erin and your response to her from that day. Is the tumor terminal?

Marc: The tumor itself isn't necessarily fatal unless it grows out of control and affects other organs or processes. The risks are more based on the method of treatment. Surgery now with the tumor at its present size is dicey because something could easily get clipped or damaged while removing it, resulting in any of several outcomes, including death. The oral chemo option she chose should reduce the tumor to a size where it can be extracted, but the risks include potential organ damage and a higher incidence of stroke.

Wil: So, you're in uncharted territory then.

Marc: Right. I don't know if this will work or what her condition will be when she goes back for a follow-up in a month. The only thing I can really do is support her decision to go this route, which is the one option which provides a fair chance for victory over the tumor, and provide whatever assistance she needs as the drugs sap her of strength and energy over the next couple of weeks.

Dani reached over and took Marc's hand, then squeezed it. "What do you need help with this week, love?"

Marc: Some things I have to handle on my own, like the meeting with Paul on Wednesday and a sit-down with Kathy O'Leary and Amber Sasser, Ashley's twin, to address some future planning with the finances and legalities of UCP given Danielle's current state and the potential for the Urban Coaching Institute to gain approval at the next Faculty Senate and Board of Trustees meetings. What I COULD use help on is getting things together for Erin's birthday party on Sunday. I'll send you some notes based on what she, Steph, Danielle, and I discussed a couple of weeks ago and the email her mom sent us.

Dani: No problem. I'll text Steph and see if we can get together after their trip to make some decisions and do whatever shopping is necessary for it.

Marc: Thanks, bae.

Wil: What time do you see Stephanie?
Marc: 2 o'clock.

Wil: OK, so we still have a bit of time. Marc, you said you wanted me to help you work through some of your thoughts concerning Dani and the future.

Marc: Yes. Some of what I'm going to say will be brought up later when I see Stephanie, but some won't be, and some of it I am wanting a more-friendly approach to deciding than what I'll get from her.

Dani: Last week, you told me that you were contemplating where our relationship would head should you "come free". Is this a more definitive explanation of that?

Marc: Yes, Dani. Now that we know the situation ahead of us with Danielle's health, the possibility is that she could die at any point between now and mid-July. After that, the odds get a whole lot better for survival and physical restoration. I can't make a decision about us while things are up in the air, but I know the decision I will come to if there is some finality to this. What I guess I want to know is, what would the four words be that you said I'd need to say for you to commit to me?

Dani: So you did hear me say that when we were together in Chicago. I was doing some FAR-down-the-road thinking, but the words would be "Will you marry me?"

Marc: As of now, I don't know that I would want to get married again. I know that I'd want to be with you and to commit myself to you, though.

Wil: If I may. Marc, this is what you wanted me to help work out, correct?

Marc: Yeah.

Wil (to Dani): Can you live with the possibility of you and Marc not getting married but being committed to each other long-term?

Dani: The love, the commitment, Marc and I being a couple, that's what I want. Whether it would be as his wife or as his partner doesn't necessarily matter.

Wil (to Marc): Does that work for you?

Marc: Yes. The love I have for you, Danielle, there is no denying that. The desire to be with you is something I want to pursue in the future. Might not come quick, and it might end up being a slow go, but I'm not interested in anyone else holding that place in my life, in my heart.

Wil left the two of them to prepare for the Intensive Outpatient Therapy session he was overseeing at 1. Marc and Dani went outside and walked around the complex for a bit, holding hands and sharing their thoughts about the current state of affairs for them. When Marc went to the Lorton building for his session with his therapist, Dani left the hospital campus for home.

**********

Today's practice for the lacrosse team covered the roster changes that Lauren was considering for tomorrow's game against William Peace. In one of the 7v7 drills, Lauren fielded the following defense: Kelley-Becca-Emily-Kristie; Maggie-Sam-Lauren. The defending was mediocre, but the quick breakout from stealing the ball impressed her as something that could prove useful in certain situations. The Big Four offense (Lindsey-Steph Mac-Christen-Lauren), buttressed by Megan, Jess, and Morgan Brooks proved quite effective in creating spaces and shooting opportunities. Satisfied with the work accomplished, Lauren called practice early. Once the team got back to the hotel, they held training table. Lauren announced at the conclusion of their meal that the team would be leaving.
Raleigh after the game tomorrow rather than staying over an extra night as originally planned. She said that this was being done so they could spend the night in St. Paul following their game against Macalester on the 20th and also to have two normal practice sessions at home prior to their game against Carroll on Saturday.

**********

Room 410's occupants were all in their room as Monday evening slowly drifted into Monday night. Lauren was doing some recreational reading while Kelley was watching Monday Night Raw. Steph Lafleur was on the floor doing some yoga and meditation as she hadn't had much time in the past few days to do so. Shelley flipped through her magazines for a bit before playing around on her phone. Around 9 o'clock, Shelley went into the bathroom and changed into a purple silk chemise, then returned to her and Steph's bed and lied upon it.

Lauren: Shelley, don't you EVER give up?!!

Shelley: At least I'm not afraid to go after what I want. If you had any guts, you'd have gone after Moe or Christen instead of settling for less.

Lauren: I didn't settle when I chose Kelley. She is more woman than you can even IMAGINE being.

Shelley: I highly doubt that. It took some pretty strong intoxicants to loosen her up enough so she'd be fun to play with.

Lauren: Most of us are really pissed at you for your lack of attentiveness to Kelley that led to her being harmed at your alumni party over Fall break.

Steph heard the voices starting to raise and decided to walk across the hall to Lindsey, Emily, Erin, and Becca's room for a bit. Meanwhile, back in their room, all hell was about to break loose, as Shelley and Lauren were now on their feet, with just a couple of steps between them.

Shelley: Lack of attentiveness?!? I was with her almost the entire night and did a very fine job of paying attention to her.

Lauren: Then how was someone able to slip her GHB and then assault her if you were with her most of the night?

Shelley: She enjoyed the hell out of what I did to her. The moans she gave off as I sucked on her nipples and licked her vag showed that I was paying VERY close attention to her needs and wants. She's actually not bad at giving oral, probably better at it than you are.

Lauren: Did I hear you right in that YOU were the one who molested her while she was out cold?!

Shelley: She wasn't supposed to be knocked-out by it, just slightly numbed.

Kelley realized what the argument was over and fled the room, running down to Kristie and Sam's. Once inside, she opened up about what she had heard and how it related to her assault. All four women in the room seethed at learning this and went back with Kelley to her room to give Shelley a piece of their mind. When they arrived, they saw her on the ground with her hand over her left cheek. Lauren was sitting on her bed, shaking out her hand and trying to calm herself down.

Steph Mac (to Lauren): Good job, Chandler, sticking up for your woman against her abuser.

Lauren: I didn't want it to come to that, but between her taunting me about Kelley and describing what she had done to her, I couldn't control myself.
Sam knelt down and offered to get Shelley some ice to keep down the swelling. Shelley stood up, threw a pair of sweatpants and a t-shirt on over her outfit, then walked down the hall to the coaches' room, where she informed them of what Lauren had done to her. Coach Heberlein pulled up her laptop, filed a report of the incident along with her decision to suspend both athletes from tomorrow's match, with further discipline at the discretion of Deacon Schmidt once the team returned to campus. Sarah chose to follow Shelley back to her room so she could get Lauren's side of the story and deliver to her the decision which was made by the head coach. She also had Lauren and Shelley switch rooms for the night with Becca and Moe, respectively.

Once everything was back to relative calm and curfew had arrived, Sarah went down to the lobby and sent a text to Marc as a heads-up to the report and a plea to call her tomorrow for a more extensive review of what had happened.

CoachHawthorne: S*** got real tonight here. Lauren punched Shelley. Both players suspended for tomorrow's game. Report filed on incident. Call me for more information on the fight. Hope your meeting with Dani and Wil went well. Erin's doing better and I'm sure can't wait to get home.
Tuesday began with an early-morning phone call between Marc and Sarah.

Marc: What does Lauren expect me to do with this report? There's really nothing in it other than her choice of discipline, what rule(s) the two players violated, and a directive that my office take up the case when they return to campus.

Sarah: I think this is her response to the whole "no drama" thing, that she doesn't want to deal with the fall-out of any of her actions. It's why she posted the starting lineup for the season opener and left before the players saw it. Same goes for the roommate listing. I just don't think she really WANTS to be a head coach, but without D-I playing experience, this is how you get on the radar to move into a D-I program as an assistant.

Marc: True. That's how one of my coaching colleagues went about it after graduating from Lakeland. Assisted there for a couple of years while doing some graduate work, then was hired to head up Ripon's women's program before going to Indiana State as an assistant.

Sarah: Anyways, I went down and talked to Lauren afterwards since I only had heard Shelley's version of "she hit me" and I needed to inform her of the suspension for today's game. She told me that the fight originated after Shelley had changed into something risque which was in her opinion meant to grab Steph's attention. She reiterated the need to stop chasing her, which led to some insults thrown by Shelley about Lauren's lack of "guts" to chase after someone better than Kelley. A bit of verbal back-and-forth happened and Shelley admitted to being the perpetrator of the fall break incident, which led to the punch. There seemed to be no additional marks on either one of them, just the bruise on Shelley's cheek and a little soreness in Lauren's hand and wrist.

Marc: I have to call anyone who was privy to the fight into my office to move this case to resolution, but based on your story I have some preliminary sanctions in mind. If Lauren confirms that her actions were in defense of Kelley, either for the past act or the fear of future harm, then she'll be found guilty of the assault charge, but not receive any additional punishment and the incident report will be redacted and sealed in her records. As for Shelley, given that she finally confirmed what the DNA evidence proved back in October, I would like to keep her off the field through the end of the month, which would be six more games: three for the previous bad act, one for instigation, one for emotional harm on a third party as I assume Kelley heard at least some of the story, and one for harassment on Steph if there is some degree of corroboration from others. Steph told me recently that things were picking back up with Shelley's pursuit of her.

Sarah: Can you make that stick?

Marc: That's the tough part. Since the DNA report isn't public knowledge and Kelley never filed charges with River Hills police or a formal complaint with my office, I can't use it as an aggravating factor that allows me to give her sanctions befitting the crime. Gavin has already overturned one suspension I handed out, that being Lexi Millen's for her false complaint on Dani. I don't want to hand down something that can be appealed and cut back. The biggest thing in my mind is to keep her off at least one of your two remaining long-distance road trips, which would mean sitting on the punishment until after you play Carroll on Saturday. I'll send Lauren a copy of the hearing schedule for Thursday and bcc you so you're able to fill in additional individuals that you or the others feel should be involved.

Sarah: How do I handle her lack of involvement in the off-field parts of the job?
Marc: Keep me in the loop with anything you hear or see that falls under dereliction of duty. I have comments from you about her homophobia and antiquated views on female athletes, as well as some from members of your team concerning other actions, including a conversation with Coach Manning where they talked about a side project Gavin is running with their support and how Lauren is looking to run off players to make room for some additional recruits who would fit into that.

Sarah: I ought to be going, since the players will start to rouse shortly. As I said, Erin is handling it as well as can be expected, but I wish I knew how to get through and have her open up a little about what she's feeling.

Marc: Might be something Wil can advise you on.

Sarah: Good idea. I'll give him a call when I have some free time between now and us leaving for William Peace.

The phone call ended and Sarah went back to her room.

**********

The Trinity Lutheran Thunder and William Peace Pacers took the field for both teams' third-ever match in college lacrosse. The Pacers entered the game 0-2, having lost to Montreat College and Saint Mary's College of Indiana, while TLU was at 1-1. With Lauren suspended, Coach Heberlein's Big Four offense was revised as Kristie took her place at outside left attack. The remainder of the lineup was the same as the first two matches for the Thunder (Nicole in goal; Ali, Julie, Sam, and Erin across the back; Megan, Jess, and Morgan Brooks in midfield).

A tight first half led both teams into committing errors on both sides of the field. At the halftime whistle, Trinity led William Peace, 7-6, on the strength of Christen and Steph McNamara's two goals a piece. The second half began with Savannah being inserted in place of Kristie and Sofia taking up Lindsey's position at outside right attack, with her moving inside in place of Steph McNamara. Additional substitutions by Lauren (Emily for Jess which moved Sam into the midfield, Morgan Andringa for Morgan Brooks, and Kristie re-inserted for Christen, placing Savannah alongside Lindsey) kept the Thunder ahead, albeit slightly. With seven minutes remaining and holding onto a 13-12 lead, Trinity's defensive structure looked content to allow the Pacers to try long shots or one-on-one attacks toward the net. A turnover in the midfield by Megan was rushed down the field and entered the Thunder's defensive zone. All four Thunder midfielders chased back, resulting in a offside call for too many players in the zone (only seven of the eleven outfield players for a team may occupy the offensive or defensive zone at any time). The resultant free position restart resulted in a goal to even the match at 13.

Trinity scored with four minutes remaining to re-take the lead at 14-13, Switching into a 5-3-3 that played more like a 3-3-5 on offense, the middle of the park became prime attacking space for William Peace and a pair of goals in short succession gave the Pacers the lead at 15-14 with two minutes on the clock. After a shot that was saved by Nicole, she threw it out to Erin who motored down the left side, drawing defenders and leading a massive counterattack for the Thunder. As she neared the offensive zone, she saw Savannah open and passed her the ball. It was jostled out of her crosse and landed on the turf. Not realizing that both Ali and Erin had crossed the restraining line, Morgan Andringa stepped forward to pick up the ball and was called for offside. A quick restart by the Pacers beat the Trinity defenders and Morgan back down the field and, with them unable to get a seventh player back into the defensive zone, gave up a goal with twenty seconds left, making the final 16-14 in favor of William Peace.

William Peace 16 Trinity 14 (Christen Prince four goals/one assist, Lindsey Hoffmann two goals/three assists, Steph McNamara two goals, Savannah Johnson two goals, Kristie Mueller one
Following the match, Coach Heberlein allowed the players to shower before engaging them in a post-game review, similar to how she has handled the first two matches. Shelley and Lauren were allowed to stay to listen to her breakdown of the match despite not playing in the encounter. Once the players were back in the main part of the locker room so they could dress, she started.

Lauren Heberlein: I am slightly disappointed in the result today. This was a match we could have won, and I think we would have if it weren't for two players deciding that last night was a good time to engage in a real-life version of Mike Tyson’s Punch-Out. Having those two bodies would have allowed us to wear out the William Peace defense and given us another center defender to put in when we started pressing numbers forward late in the match. The two silly offside calls near the end were a direct result of not having the right bodies in the right places.

Both Morgan Brooks and Jess thought to themselves, "Isn't that part of your JOB, to make sure you put the players where you want them and give them the right directions so we DON'T end up with too many players in the offensive or defensive zone?" The pair exchanged a quick glance, with the latter making plans to get the seniors and a couple of others together near the back of the bus for a pow-wow between Cary and their meal stop in Greensboro. Christen and Lindsey knew they would need to boost Lauren's spirits a bit after she had been called-out and exchanged looks of their own to that effect.

Lauren Heberlein: We are planning to stop in Greensboro for dinner, then go through to Beckley where you'll have a final chance to load up on junk and caffeine before driving onto Lafayette, IN, stopping there for breakfast somewhere around 7am. After that, it's non-stop to home. There will be no practice on Wednesday, naturally, but we will run two on Thursday, at 9am and 2pm. Several of you will need to see Deacon Schmidt concerning last night's incident, and that will happen during our morning practice time. I have been given the names and schedule for the meetings and will inform you of them when we're back at Trinity.

The team exited the Pacer Performance Center and loaded onto the bus for their overnight trip back to Mequon, one that was sure to be long and grueling.
Too Many Cooks

As the bus rolled out of Raleigh for the 18-hour trip back to Wisconsin, several groups of players staked out little sections of the bus to dish on the game and the trip as a whole. Near the back, Morgan Brooks had called together Megan, Jess, Nicole, Sam, and Steph Lafleur to set forth a plan for dealing with Coach Heberlein and her laissez-faire (more like lazy and unfair) attitude with managing the team.

Morgan B.: I hate to say it, but keeping this team motivated and in good spirits is going to rely on us and Sarah, because Lauren is proving to care not one whit about anything other than what's happening between the lines.

Nicole: What's her deal?! Things were never like this at Carthage.

Megan: That's because we didn't have eighteen freshmen on the team, or players from so many different places, or with such a wide spread of personalities and mindsets. She wants the kind of team here that she had there, and that's not in the cards. The sooner she realizes it, the better.

Steph L.: I'm glad Christen and Lindsey took the initiative to console Lauren after her being bad-mouthed by the coach, who had NO CONTEXT from which to blame her for the loss because she didn't bother to find out the whole story of last night. Since I roomed with her, Shelley, and Kelley, I will probably have to give some kind of account to Deacon Schmidt about what happened, but I didn't see the actual fight fight because I went over to Erin's room once the voices started to get raised.

Sam: You and him are close, and he probably has or will get a fair bit of information on what happened from either Erin or Sarah, so if you tell him the truth about your knowledge, he'll believe you.

Steph L.: He's also been telling me to stand up for Erin and finally confront Shelley over her pursuit of me. I really don't want to hurt her, which is why I've been hoping all the visual evidence will cause her to accept reality without me beating her over the head with it.

Megan: I guess the question is who are you more willing to hurt, Erin for not getting Shelley to back off or Shelley for officially turning her down?

Morgan B.: After seeing that display in the locker room, where Coach tried to blame others for the loss and absolved herself of all responsibility for what she did to contribute to it, I have the feeling that that lashing-out is only the start of what we might face from her.

Jess: She's not ALL bad, but the attitude that has sprouted up with her since the move is making some of the players a bit jumpy about their place here.

Sam: Has anyone thought yet about the Michigan trip? That's a two-nighter and if she's still being hard-headed about who rooms with who, that could be another disaster, which would be made more so because of the joint-team banquet that Friday night.

Megan: Speaking of that, has anyone shopped yet for it?

Steph L.: No, but I'm planning to talk to my personal stylist about getting together before then so she can help me pick out something. You should come as well, Sam.

Sam: I'm in. We have Friday free from Noon on. How about we do an afternoon trip somewhere and
get our shopping on?

Megan: Good idea. I'll send out an all-team text and let everyone chime in with where they want to go.

Lindsey, Christen, and Becca were seated around Lauren and told her that Coach was off her rocker pinning the result on her being suspended for getting a bit of retribution on Shelley for her treatment of Kelley. Julie and Morgan Andringa were catching up on their blog entries for TrinityThunder dot com, walking around the bus to get quotes from some of the players for inclusion. Erin was resting her head against the window with her back to the aisle. Seeing her in a bit of a bad place, Emily sat down next to her and offered an open ear if she wanted to talk. Erin said that she wasn't much for talking at the moment, leading Emily to embrace her and give her the space to let her feel what she's feeling in the comfort of her arms. Steph Lafleur saw it and informed Sarah about Erin's condition. Sarah took Marc's advice and texted Wil to ask what she might be able to do to help her over the rest of the road trip. Wil told her that the best way to get onto Erin's level would be to share her own cancer battle (she had been diagnosed with a secretory carcinoma the summer following her sophomore year at Nicolet). Sarah was a bit apprehensive about sharing that with Erin, but also knew that Wil was correct that she needed a means of connecting to her so that they could address her fears about Danielle's tumor, deciding to take it up with her after their dinner stop.

**********

Before stepping back on the bus after dinner, Erin sent Marc a series of texts on Monday night's fight based on what Lauren and Kelley told her, hoping it would prove useful. Once aboard, Sarah asked Erin to sit in back with her. She also asked Sam and Kristie to come back after about 15 minutes.

Sarah: I see your mood has dropped since the game. Any reason?

Erin: Well, we lost, and I was in part responsible for us giving up the last goal because I went into the offensive zone which contributed to the offside call.

Sarah: You did exactly what you were supposed to in that instance. The ball ended up on the ground. That wasn't your fault nor was Morgan going in to retrieve it your fault. A bit of bad luck in that circumstance. I will say that we looked like a team that can have a decent first season. We competed, we had the ability to win that game if we had gotten a small bit of luck on that last attack to tie the score. Now, off of lacrosse and onto you.

Erin: Down there, with the team and the practicing and playing, I could keep my mind off what was happening back in Milwaukee. Now that there is nothing but time and space between me and there, I'm starting to think about Danielle and how she'll be when I get home.

Sarah: The tumor is benign, so it won't grow out-of-control. Getting it down to a reasonable size so it can be removed will take some time, according to Marc's message to me. You may not believe it, but I know what both you and her are dealing with. The summer after my sophomore year at Nicolet, I saw my doctor for my every-other-year athletic physical. In the course of my exam, she found something wrong with my left breast. Further testing and imaging revealed a secretory carcinoma. She referred me to a surgical oncologist who was able to remove it. Combined with the support I received from the Jonny Mac Fund, I've been cancer-free since, but imagine being 16 and finding out you have breast cancer.

Erin: Jonny Mac Fund?

Sarah: A former Milwaukee Buck founded and initially endowed it as a retirement gift to the community. The purpose of the fund is to help fund research on childhood cancers and blood
disorders, which includes juvenile breast cancer, and to support those who are fighting the diseases. The idea for this came because his close friend Eddie Dillon's son Brett had been diagnosed with leukemia and he wanted to do something to help.

Erin: Eddie and Brett any relation to Dani?

Sarah: Brett's her uncle.

Erin: So when Marc said that she had some heavy-hitters in her tree, he was referring to her grandfather, then?

Sarah: Yes.

Kristie and Sam came back and sat down in the aisle seats just in front of Sarah and Erin.

Sarah: I asked the Muellers to join us because they have some experience as well in this arena.

Kristie: Our mom developed breast cancer while we were in middle school. Sam and I were kept a bit in the dark as to how serious it was because Dad didn't want us to worry. She had a radical double mastectomy to remove the cancer from her breasts and did a course of radiation to eradicate any cancer that might have spread elsewhere. She's been cancer-free for almost seven years now and we're grateful for her every single day.

Sam: Danielle is a tough SOB and she'll fight tooth-and-nail to beat back the brain tumor she has. If you need to talk, or need to cry with someone who might understand your fears, Kristie and I are always available to you.

Erin stood up and hugged both sisters, letting a couple of tears fall. She then sat back down and thanked Sarah for telling her story and bringing in the Muellers to share theirs as well. As the bus continued on its long trek north, most of the players began drifting off to sleep, hoping to get a bit of shut-eye before the stop in Beckley.

*********

Breakfast at Cracker Barrel was quite filling and definitely got the players' engines running. On the final leg of the trip, some of the more adventurous Thunder got into a game of FMK.

Christen: We'll start with Lauren. Amy Rodriguez, Morgan Brian, Tobin Heath.

Lauren: Not making this easy, are you? Marry A-Rod, kill Tobin, and rub out with Bean.

Lindsey: Surprised you killed Tobin instead of Moe.

Lauren: Had to pick someone. Steph, you get to pick between Shelina Zadorsky, Kelley O'Hara, and Ali Krieger.

Steph L.: Kill KO, marry Ali, and make She-She scream with pleasure.

Erin: I don't know if I should be offended by those choices.

Steph L.: You weren't an option, so I had to choose from those Lauren gave me.

Erin: I guess that's a good answer.

Steph L.: Kristie, your choices are Rachel Daly, Abby Dahlkemper, and Sydney Leroux.
Kristie: How did you come up with those three?

Steph L.: Sort of random, sort of based on who I thought might be women you'd want.

Kristie: Fuck Syd, marry Rachel, and kill Abby. Emily, you get Danielle Colaprico, Moe Brian, and Sam Mewis.

Emily: I'd have to kill Sammy, then marry Moe and carry on a side thing with Danny.

Lindsey: Very good, my dear.

Emily: Thank you, Hoff. Julie, your choices are Crystal Dunn, Sofia Huerta, and Becky Sauerbrunn.

Julie: Gotta marry Becky because she's so smart and stable. Ride Sofia because she's just hot as all heck. Leaving Dunn to get whacked.

Christen: Love your selections, but I hope I rank above them for two of those spots.

Julie: Love you too, Chrissy, and of course you do. Erin, who can I give you that will make you hem and haw a bit.....Katelyn Rowland, Savannah Jordan, and Emily Sonnett.

Erin: Sonny would have to go, because I don't think I could handle her trying to be funny 24/7. Savannah looks like she could be a fun lay, and Katelyn is SUCH a teddy bear like Alyssa and Steph that she'd make good spouse material. Got a thing for goalies, I guess.

Steph L. smiled widely at Erin's comment and blew her an air kiss.

Erin: Becca, your choices are EJ Proctor, Jessie Fleming, and Christina Gibbons.

Becca: I love all three of them....why you making me choose?!?!

Erin: No one said that the choices would be easy.

Becca: Ok.....as much as it pains me, I'd have to kill Jessie, leaving me to sleep with EJ and marry Gibby. Your turn, Moe. Sam Mewis, Lindsey Horan, and Emily Sonnett.

Morgan B.: Sonnett would be my undercover lover. I would then need to kill Lindsey so she doesn't unleash her jealousy on me and marry Sam for appearances' sake.

Lindsey: Seriously?! That seems a bit mean, to kill the fiancee of the one you want to take to bed.

Morgan B.: All's fair in FMK. Hoff, since you seem to be eager to get in on this, you're next. Tobin Heath, Mallory Pugh, and Cari Roccaro.

Lindsey: Cari would be my wife, Mal my bedmate, and Tobin an afterthought. We're now back to Christen. Your threesome: Kelley O'Hara, Alex Morgan, and Alyssa Naeher.

Christen: I don't want to kill any of these dimes, but I have to put Alyssa to the sword. As for the other two, can't I just marry and sleep with both of them?

Julie: WHAT?!?!

Christen: Alright, alright. Marry Kelley and fuck Alex.

The bus cleared the toll booth for entrance to the Chicago Skyway, leaving just about two hours until they would be back at Trinity.
Following lunch in Siebert, most of the players chose to catch up on their sleep. Meanwhile, Marc and Paul met at the synod office to go over next year’s budget, the bishop’s choices for replacements on the Board of Trustees, and the monkey business that Gavin seemed to be doing in the athletic department. As the first two parts were relatively easy and both of them agreed for the most part on what would be presented at the April 5th meeting, they quickly moved on to discussing the third topic on their agenda.

Marc: I read over Gavin’s budget proposal and the department’s year-to-date balance sheet and, though they are bringing in a significant amount of money under the auspices of alumni relations, he is spending like a fish to get it.

Paul: So he’s reaching out to former athletes and students to raise money for the athletic department?

Marc: Yes and no. He may be getting graduates of Carthage and Concordia to pony up the bucks, but he’s most likely using his own female athletes to make it happen. At big-time Division I universities, the athletic department has a group of female students they like to call “ambassadors”. Their job is to encourage recruits to come to the school, and the department expects them to use any means necessary to make that happen. There are some athletes at Trinity that I believe are caught up in this racket, but I haven’t been able to link enough pieces together to go after Gavin or them.

Paul: When you say any means, what would that include?

Marc: World’s oldest profession. Quid pro quo. Sex in exchange for something, in this case money.

Paul: And you think Gavin is running this out of his office?

Marc: Several students have come forward in the past with snippets of conversations they’ve overheard involving some members of the women’s soccer team as well as one between their head coach and the head lacrosse coach.

Paul: That would explain how he’s getting the money, but what is he planning to do with it?

Marc: Let me play Devil’s Advocate for a minute. Remember how he put up a stink with you for going around him to fund Coach Dillon’s trip to College Cup?

Paul: Yes. He argued that the school and his department would get a better return-on-investment by sending a significant portion of the football staff to their national convention. I told him he had the resources to do both and, if he didn’t, the synod would step in.

Marc: Take that notion and play it out. He wants to elevate the stature of the school’s football program, which means getting better talent to come here and developing better facilities for them. Being a new school, tradition isn’t part of the picture yet, so he’s probably looking to find a means of gaining access to the gargantuan pools of money that trickle down from the College Football Playoff and March Madness.

Paul: How would he do THAT?

Marc: By taking one of the teams at the school and elevating them to Division I. Every Division II and Division III school is allowed to have one men’s team and one women’s team at the D-I level. A number of D-II’s in the Midwest do it with their men’s hockey teams, like Minnesota State and Northern Michigan. Some D-III’s place men’s lacrosse, women’s soccer, men’s volleyball, and women’s field hockey in D-I. Examples are Johns Hopkins, Colorado College, and some schools in the Greater New York/New Jersey area.
Paul: So what would be the blueprint based on what you know about this part of intercollegiate athletics?

Marc: Start with getting the "donations". He turns that into better facilities for one of the minor sports that he's considering elevating, such as redeveloping Niemoller Field with seating on all four sides and built-on locker rooms. The capital campaign is sold as "doing something good for female athletes" by linking the upgrades to a move for either soccer or lacrosse to Division I. Lacrosse would be difficult to do because there isn't a large pool of nearby opponents or a ready-made conference affiliation, but women's soccer could slide into the Horizon League rather easily. UW-Green Bay and UW-Milwaukee are members of it, as are Illinois-Chicago and Valparaiso. The money goes to the upgrades, the upgrades lead to women's soccer moving up to D-I and joining the Horizon, the move gets Gavin into the room with the other D-I athletic directors and access to the football/basketball money trickle-down, which he then funnels into building a football powerhouse.

Paul: Is there a way someone can get him to provide details on the income/outgo part of this alumni relations program?

Marc: Any member of the Board of Trustees can ask him in their next meeting to give an explanation of the program, how his budget request further advances it, and if there is a long-term purpose to it.

Paul: I'm sure he will want some kind of university money to go into the hypothetical facility upgrades, which means the board coming to us for additional resources for the school. THAT'S when I get to put in my two cents. I think we've gotten through everything I wanted to cover. How's Danielle?

Marc: The first couple of days on the drugs have been an adventure. Lots of nausea, lack of appetite, more lethargy than she had before them. I'm crossing my fingers she'll be OK enough to go to Saturday's lacrosse game against Carroll with me and Erin's parents.

Paul: Remind her that she's in my and Lynn's prayers, and I'm sure Matt and Jessica's as well.

**********

After the meeting, the chaplain headed home to start work on tomorrow morning's interviews with the lacrosse team. Erin called about 8 o'clock to check on Danielle and was told that she was sick from the drugs, but not down in spirit. They talked for a few minutes about the rest of the week and her parents' arrival on Friday evening for her birthday weekend. He reassured her that everything was OK and that she should use the next couple of days to get some rest and focus on Saturday's game. Erin ended the call and rejoined Steph in her bed, where the two curled up and went back to sleep.
While most of the lacrosse team was at practice, several of them were in Deacon Schmidt's office to provide testimony as to the happenings from the Spring break trip, specifically the fight on Monday night between Lauren and Shelley. Marc drew up the interview schedule with Shelley first, followed by Lauren and others who could confirm or refute their stories and interpretations of the incident.

Marc: Shelley Zembruski?

Shelley rose from her seat and walked into Marc's office, then sat down in the chair across the desk from him.

Marc: Give me your recollection of the fight on Monday night.

Shelley: I had gone to change into my sleeping attire while my roommates were doing other things in our room. When I returned to my bed, Lauren took a verbal swipe at me about my outfit. I returned the comment with a swipe of my own, we went at it face-to-face and then she slugged me.

Marc: What was the subject of your oral jousting?

Shelley: It started off with her chastising me for chasing one of our teammates despite her being taken, then elevated to my mentioning her girlfriend and what a FREAK she can be in bed.

Marc: Did you retaliate physically against Lauren?

Shelley: No. Once I had been punched, I sat on the floor for a couple of minutes to get over the shock of being hit, then changed into more presentable clothes and went to tell the coaches what had happened.

Marc: You know that I have several more witnesses to hear from today. If there is anything you want me to take into account before they testify, do so now.

Shelley: Most of them will probably say that I started the fight so you will suspend me longer, which I know you would LOVE to do given that your precious little Erin is in possession of the woman I want.

Marc: What goes on outside these walls between you women is none of my concern. Only when one's actions cross the line into harassment or some form of violence is it necessary for me to step in. If you have nothing else to add, you are dismissed.

Shelley left Marc's office and returned to Buuck to do some cardio work for the remainder of the morning practice session. Lauren arrived a few minutes later.

Marc: Lauren, sit down. I just spoke with Shelley and got her side of the story. Now let me get yours.

Lauren: Knowing her, she downplayed her part in the fight and made it seemed like I hit her unprovoked.

Marc: She admitted egging you on with comments concerning Kelley, but yes, she said that you hit her without a real reason.

Lauren: Oh, there was a reason. A BIG reason.
Lauren told Marc her version of the blow-by-blow, starting from the attempt to turn Steph Lafleur's head to the eventual admission of what happened at the Fall break party.

Marc: She confessed to performing oral sex on Kelley while she was drugged?

Lauren: Yes, and after saying how good it was and how I probably couldn't please her like she did, I punched her.

Marc: You might find this hard to believe, but I've known that Shelley did it for five months now. Dr. Bucholz sent me a copy of the medical report, which included the identity of the perpetrator based on foreign DNA found on Kelley's body. Without a formal complaint or her pressing charges, I'm unable to act on it or release the information. Rest assured, I will be taking it into account when I decide on additional sanctions. I will tell Kelley when she meets with me that she can still file a complaint or charges if she wishes. Based on the evidence presented, I find you, Lauren Chandler, guilty of assault against a member of the student body. Based on mitigating factors, I hereby sentence you to time served. You are free to go and rejoin the team.

Lauren smiled slightly and thanked Marc for believing her testimony, unaware that a number of others had already told him their sides of what had happened and that her rendition did not contradict what they had said.

Next up in the hot seat was Kelley. Marc asked her about the incident and how she viewed it. Kelley told him that Shelley insulted Lauren with her stating that she settled for her because she was too afraid to go after someone hotter or riskier, which started the verbal war between the two. Kelley said she fled the room and went down to Kristie and Sam's after Shelley laid out what had happened on fall break. When she and they returned to her room, they saw Shelley on the floor and Lauren on the bed shaking out her hand.

Marc: Very well. Since she confessed to the crime itself, you have a right to press charges or have her punished internally for her assault against you by filing a formal complaint. Would you like to do either?

Kelley: I don't think so. I got through the trauma of not knowing what happened and the violation of my body without much harm, so doing something that would hurt Shelley heavily is not how I want this to be resolved. Her mom's anger over Shelley "playing gay" only makes it more likely that she will continue to act out and cause trouble.

Marc: So you're willing to let this drop?

Kelley: It's best for her that it does. I file a complaint and she faces further discipline from your office, which would exacerbate the hole she's in at home and with the team as a whole.

Marc saw in Kelley's answer a fair amount of grace being displayed and offered to her assailant. After Kelley left, Marc locked the door to his office and went to use the restroom before his final two interviews of the morning. When he returned, Steph Lafleur was waiting outside his door.

Steph L.: This shouldn't take long because I didn't see much of what happened.

Marc: That doesn't mean I won't question you about what you did see and if there needs to be further investigation into any underlying factors that precipitated it.

Steph L.: Lead on, boss.

Marc opened his door and the two of them went into his office.
Marc: Give me your interpretation of the incident.

Steph L.: I was on the floor of our room doing yoga, with the other three engaged in other activities. At one point, I heard Lauren say to Shelley, "Don't you EVER give up?!?!?", which was responded to by a questioning of Lauren's behavior in not going after Christen or Morgan Brooks when she had a chance at the start of the school year. Both of them started getting louder and it disturbed my vibe, so I left and went across the hall to Erin's room for a while. About a half-hour later, Sarah came by with Lauren and asked Becca if she would switch rooms with her for the evening. The two of us went back to my room, where we were joined by Kelley and Morgan Brooks. Shelley was placed with the seniors for the night, I presume.

Marc: You've said before that Shelley has upped her pursuit of you. Have you ever told her to back off?

Steph L.: No. I have been quite overt around her about Erin and I being a couple, thinking that she'd get the hint and stop. I don't want to hurt her by saying it outright.

Marc: You have to do something. If she continues to chase you and you don't act to quash it, I will have to place a comment in your candidacy file about it and how it appears to show a lack of ability to deal with conflict.

Steph L.: Don't do that, Marc, please.

Marc: I don't want to, and I'm willing to help you and the rest of the team deal with her, but you have to do your part as well.

Steph L.: I'll try to find a time and way to make it known that I'm not interested.

Marc: Interrogator Marc off, Pops on. Did Dani contact you about helping her put together Erin's party for Sunday?

Steph L.: Yes, and we're going to do some of that while Erin is having lunch with you. How's Danielle?

Marc: Not feeling great because of the drugs. I told her she could be a hermit all she wanted starting on Monday, but I'd like her to push through and be around for some of Erin's birthday weekend since Val and Jim are coming for it.

Steph L.: The four of us are going to dinner on Friday night after Erin and I return to campus from our afternoon shopping expedition with some of our teammates. That banquet at Concordia-Ann Arbor is in two weeks and hardly anyone has thought about clothes for it.

Marc reached into his wallet and handed Steph one of his credit cards. "Anything you end up buying for the party, put on here. I'll send along with you organizational approval for Dani to use it as she is on the staff of UCP." Marc typed up a quick note giving his authorization of Dani to use the card, then printed it and gave it to Steph. She went around the desk, gave Marc a hug and peck on the temple, then showed him heart hands and left to catch up with Dani and leave campus for lunch and shopping.

Marc's last witness for the morning was Kristie, who confirmed Kelley's coming to her room and telling her and her roommates about Shelley's confession related to the assault on her. She then told Marc about their return to Kelley's room and what they saw (Shelley on the ground in some lingerie with a small bruise rising on the left side of her face, Lauren on her bed in a quiet rage). Feeling he had enough anecdotal evidence to make a decision, he thanked Kristie for her testimony and asked
how things went with her, Sam, and Steph McNamara rooming together in North Carolina.

Kristie: The first night was fine since everyone was wiped out by the time we got to Cary. Second night was a little tense as we lost and a good portion of the team left the hotel for dinner. On Sunday, Steph invited the two of us to lunch and we talked about what had happened during fall semester that got our friendship off-track. After reconciling with one another, the rest of the trip was good. She even helped us keep Ms. Diva Queen under control on a portion of the trip home.

Marc: That's good to hear. Is she OK with you and Sam being with the Norman twins?

Kristie: It seems that way, but we won't know for sure until she sees me with Alyssa around campus or after games.

Marc wrapped up his questioning of Kristie and she left. While waiting for Erin to arrive, he typed up his preliminary ruling that would be sent to Gavin on Monday. As the evidence fell in line with what he had been told by Sarah, he didn't plan to change what he had originally told her. Since Kelley chose to drop the potential case against Shelley, Marc couldn't use the previous bad act as an aggravating factor in sanctioning her, but believed he had found a way around it that would be in the best interest of the team and unlikely to be overturned or reduced by Gavin.
Love In Action

Just after 11 o'clock, Erin came over to Luther to meet Marc before they headed off-campus for lunch and the talk he wanted to have with her. She entered his office and he closed the door. She walked back to him and wrapped her arms around him, then crumbled. Marc held onto her so she wouldn't fall, then said that they should go sit on the couch. Once there, she rested her head under his chin and held on for dear life as another crying jag came on.

Marc: Erin, just let it out. I know you've been away for a few days and that you were struggling on the way down and back to keep it together. We've talked a couple of times since I sent you the news, but that's nothing compared to being back here and being able to see me.

Erin: It hurt like hell being away. I kept thinking that she's going to die while I was there and that someone would have to tell me the news without you near me to help me handle it.

Marc: I've given you the best information I have from the doctor, which is that it's a slow-growing tumor but had gone undetected for a few years, he imagined, which is how it got to the size it is.

Erin curled up into Marc, appreciating his strength and sensitivity in helping her work through her thoughts and emotions about Danielle's prognosis. He stroked her hair and continued to reassure her that her godmother was a fighter and wouldn't succumb to this if strength of will had anything to do with beating it. After a few more minutes of taking comfort in Marc, Erin sat up which led Marc to stand and the two left his office for Culver's. The five-minute drive went quickly and, after having their order delivered to their table, Marc opened up about his and Danielle's plans for the future.

Marc: Danielle and I haven't had a lot of time yet to discuss what the future might hold as to her treatment and the changes in her health that have started. Over the past couple of years, we have taken steps to ensure that, were something like this to happen, we'd be in a position to not leave our spouse holding the bag financially. When we bought the house on Washington Blvd., I insisted on mortgage insurance that would pay off the debt were one of us to die while in repayment, as my parents didn't have that and everything fell to my mom after my dad passed away. The cost for that was too high, but we were able to get a policy that would wipe out half the remaining balance, leaving monthly payments reasonable for a one-income household or allowing the surviving spouse time to consider his or her options. Danielle also has an educational insurance plan through the VA and Thrivent Financial that will pay for a portion of her dependents' educational expenses should they still be in college at the time. Since we don't have kids of our own, she named you and her niece Sydney to be the recipients. Since it's insurance and not a bequest or educational grant, it doesn't have to be claimed as income or assets on your FAFSA.

Erin: So I would get help with school should she pass on?

Marc: Yes. There is also some provision made for you in her living will/trust, along with her niece and nephew Zach.

Erin: How long have the two of you secretly had me in your final documents?

Marc: Probably since we got back together in 2009. When we realized we probably wouldn't end up being parents, we decided that the best thing we could do is to dote on the ones that were in our lives already, them being you, Sydney, Zach, Matt, and my niece Samantha. I am meeting tomorrow with my UCP business team to protect the organization's future based on what might happen to Danielle. I have asked Amber, the lawyer half of the team, to draw up documents that will allow me to name a successor and thus cede a percentage of ownership in it to that person. It is a temporary move to keep
the assets of the organization from ending up in probate or forcing me to liquidate them to pay for future treatment. I plan to name you as such. I am also going to ask that any income earned from licensing agreements not be claimed until August 1. On Tuesday, the two of us will be meeting with our financial planner to see that everything is in place as we wished.

Erin understood in part what Marc was saying, but her business courses to date had yet to touch on financial accounting or any of the legalities that he was laying out. Once they finished eating, Marc drove back to campus with Erin, leaving her around 45 minutes to get her equipment and be back at Niemoller Field for her team's afternoon practice.

**********

Dani and Steph went around the North Shore to get items for Erin's birthday party. First, they traveled to Party City in Brown Deer, hoping to be able to blend St. Patrick's Day decorations and party supplies with a birthday theme. Having done reasonably well in representing Erin's tastes while also integrating the holiday, they went next to Pick N Save on Port Washington Road, where Dani had worked while in high school and college. They settled on a menu of appetizers and sandwiches and placed the order with their catering department in the deli. Following a quick stop for lunch at Kopp's, the pair drove east on Silver Spring Drive to Regina's Bay Bakery, where they placed an order for a half-sheet Jameson, Guinness, and Bailey's Irish Cream Chocolate Cake. With all of that completed, they returned to campus around 1:30, giving Steph enough time to put her gear on in Buuck and walk over to afternoon practice. Dani stopped in to see Marc, bringing a pint of Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough custard with her. They sat and talked for a bit about Sarah and Wil, the two of them, and her shopping adventure with Steph. She handed Marc his card back, along with the receipts from the places they went. Dani left just after 2:00 to visit Cali, Courtney, and Dylan at her sister Angela's house.

**********

Sarah came to see Marc to deliver her hands-on report about Monday night and other happenings around the team.

Sarah: Your Honor, if it pleases the court, I submit into evidence Exhibit A, my conversation with Lauren Chandler following the incident on 11 March 2019 in Cary, North Carolina.

Marc laughed at Sarah's formality, but then went along with it. "Without objection, it is entered into evidence."

Sarah: Sorry to go off like that, but I felt that coming before you in an official capacity, I should act as formal as possible in delivering my testimony.

Marc: It's quite alright, Sarah. You gave me a rundown of your conversation with Lauren when we talked on Tuesday, so I presume this typed-up copy is your best recollection of it.

Sarah: Yes. I should also add that the team did a really good job of sitting on Shelley on the way back, not letting her get anywhere near her three roommates or Erin. How did the player interviews go?

Marc: Went as well as I was expecting. Shelley attempted to downplay her role in all of it, Lauren was upright and honest, Kelley gave her vantage point but also showed grace for Shelley by choosing to not file anything against her for the assault in October. Steph told me what she could since she wasn't around for most of it, while Kristie explained what she saw when they returned to the room. All the stories are for the most part in agreement, so I don't doubt that Lauren's explanation is the way things went down.
Sarah: You said on Tuesday that you had some preliminary idea of how you were planning to rule. Anything more concrete?

Marc: I told Lauren after meeting with her that she would be found guilty of assault, but sentenced to time served due to mitigating factors. She's not under any sanction by my office for the incident. As for Shelley, since Kelley declined to file anything against her, I can't give her the six-game suspension I was desiring. What I will do is give her three games on top of the one Lauren gave her, with the second and third ones stayed. I will announce both decisions on Monday so that her suspension will start with the Macalester game. If she keeps her nose clean the rest of the season, she won't have to serve the other two games of the suspension. If she doesn't, she will.

Sarah: Anything else?

Marc: Are you still desiring to file something with HR?

Sarah: At the moment, no, but I would like to have it noted by you that I will support the players should they choose to move something forward in the future.

Marc pulled out the women's lacrosse file and jotted down her statement. "It is so noted. Before you leave, has anyone told you about Erin's birthday party on Sunday?"

Sarah: No. Is that why Steph and Dani were getting together for lunch between practices today?

Marc: Yes. They went to Party City for supplies, Pick N Save for the food, and Regina's to order the cake. We're starting at 1pm. Spread the word to the team if they don't know.

Sarah told him she would do so. She then left to return to practice at Niemoller Field.

**********

After two practices and the overnight trip back to Milwaukee, most of the players were beat. Christen suggested a movie night in her and Julie's room, which most of the team planned to attend. Megan and Jess chose to indoctrinate the rest of the squad in a Carthage tradition, the viewing of "High School Musical". As the movie played, a number of the couples dozed off against each other. With Erin comfortably asleep on Julie's bed, Steph spread the word to their teammates about Erin's birthday on Sunday and directions to get to the Schmidts for the party. Near the end of the film, Steph got a message from Val checking up on her daughter.

StephLafleur: Erin is sleeping more than I think she should and is taking Danielle's tumor diagnosis hard. She and Marc had lunch today and I've been with her as much as possible so she doesn't slip too much into her own head. Glad that you and Jim are coming this weekend. She needs you, but she won't say so. I also think she needs Marc more than she wants to admit to help her deal with it. Did all the shopping/ordering for Sunday between practices today with a former player of Marc's who coaches here. Text one of us when you get to the state line tomorrow so we can tell you where to meet us as we're going out with others from the team to shop for the banquet at CUAA on the 29th.

A couple of minutes later, she got a response.

V-Math: Thanks, Steph. Didn't realize that she would be so distraught over it. I'll let Jim know about her state of mind and maybe he can break through her despondency. Also thanks for your part in helping Marc, Danielle, and I make Erin's birthday something that we hope she'll remember. She couldn't have a better partner, and I hope you know that. <3

When the movie ended, Steph woke Erin and they went back to her room for the night. Emily
suggested that they watch the second installment of the High School Musical trilogy, which Christen, Julie, and Kelley thought was a good idea. After coaxing Lindsey and Lauren into staying, the six of them settled in for the sequel. Kelley and Emily were singing along to everything, with their girlfriends laughing at them. The party in Christen and Julie's room finally broke up around 1am, meaning that all of them would be on short sleep when they showed up at practice on Friday morning.
I Feel Pretty

Chapter Summary

The lacrosse team goes shopping for the banquet at Concordia-Ann Arbor in two weeks.

On Friday morning, Marc met with Kathy O'Leary and Amber Sasser at the latter's law office. He wanted to make some changes in the timing of payments from the licensing agreements and the ownership structure of the Urban Coaching Project.

Marc: I'm not sure either of you know, but Danielle was diagnosed last week with a brain tumor. It is not cancerous, but the risks of eliminating or removing it are notable. If she survives the next four months, the odds for long-term survival are fairly good. I'm worried about being forced to do something with UCP in order to either pay for her treatment or settle her affairs in probate. What I want to do is push off the receipt of income from UCP and the effective date of new licensing agreements until August 1st, so that our assets and discretionary income are lower and thus she might qualify for resources from outside agencies. Additionally, I am desiring to name an official successor to myself at UCP, with a modest ownership share in the organization, so that it will not be forced into liquidation should Danielle pass.

Kathy told Marc that it was possible to postpone income until the date he desired, which would coincide with when he wished new licensing agreements to begin. Amber offered him a couple of options for structuring the organization so it would remain separate from his and Danielle's jointly-held assets and income, of which her estate would be entitled to 50% following the pass-through of any real or tangible property from her to him. Amber gave him the documents which would name Erin his successor and grant her 10% ownership of UCP, which needed to be returned to and filed by her after both signed them, with an effective date 30 days from its submission.

**********

Following practice, most of the lacrosse team spread out around the Milwaukee area to look for outfits for the banquet at Concordia-Ann Arbor on the 29th. The Big Girls (Steph Lafleur, Sam Mueller, Sarah Hawthorne, and Dani Dillon), Kristie, Erin, Christen, Julie, and Sofia went to Mayfair Mall in Wauwatosa, not overly far from the Schmidts and Princes. After spreading out in the food court to obtain lunch, they sat around and discussed what they were looking to get, with the resident fashionistas (Kristie and Dani) offering their opinions on what would look good on them.

Once lunch was finished, the nine of them went to Nordstrom to hopefully get the hard-to-fit women items from the Curves and More Collection the store carried. The first one to find a pretty good match was Sarah, who came across a burgundy one-shoulder floor-length dress with a high slit on the left side. Dani thought it was quite pretty and showed off her 5'11” frame well. Steph and Sam both chose black knee-length dresses, with Steph's having a sheer overlay on the right side and Sam's having sheer cut-outs at the shoulders and just above the hips. Erin swooned slightly at how Steph looked in her dress and Kristie was amazed by Sam's understated beauty in hers. Dani took the opportunity to pick up something new for her wardrobe, a dark pink and black paisley fit-and-flare dress that would make for a good going-out-to-dinner outfit in the spring, summer, or early fall.

The next stop for the group was Charlotte Russe. Sofia found a silver off-the-shoulder skater dress
that Christen thought showed off her legs very nicely. Christen and Julie decided to let the other
dress them and were equally surprised at how well their partner did. Erin hit the jackpot with a blue
cut out sweetheart skater dress that matched her cute-and-flirty style. Kristie struggled a bit to find
something, but eventually landed on a long-sleeve velvet bodycon dress in cherry.

**********

Savannah, Maggie, Morgan Andringa, Becca, Jane, and Andi chose to go Grafiton for their shopping
expedition. After having lunch at Costco ($1.50 for a hot dog and soda can't be beat) and strolling
the aisles at Meijer (nothing found in their clothing section), the group went to Target, where they
were joined by Savannah's mom, Denise. The players went looking through the racks and found a
few options that they thought might work. Maggie found a salmon sleeveless high-low dress, while
Jane and Savannah both got long sleeve shirt dresses (Jane in a mottled midnight blue, Savannah in
black). Morgan came across a blue lace dress that came below the knee with just a tie around the
neck, which would allow her shoulders to show prominently. Andi landed a pink ruffled jumpsuit,
with Becca settling on a button-down blouse and high-waisted slacks.

**********

Shelley's dad, Peter, took her out for lunch at Kawa Japanese Restaurant, a few blocks from their
home in Whitefish Bay. The pair hadn't seen much of one another the past couple of months between
his basketball schedule and her classes and lacrosse practice.

Peter Zembruski: Did you have fun in Carolina with the team?

Shelley: Not particularly. We lost both games and I didn't see a whole lot of playing time.

Peter: The second part is to be expected since you're a freshman and you have to earn your way into
playing time ahead of some upperclassmen, I'm sure.

Shelley: There is only one non-freshman that is playing defense at the moment, and she's a
sophomore.

Peter: Your time will come. Tomorrow is another chance to prove that you belong in the rotation if
not the starting lineup.

Shelley: I get not starting, because Sam and Julie are definitely better than me in the back when we
play with four, but I feel like I should be in there when we move to three center defenders. At least
classes start again on Monday, so I'll have SOMETHING to do other than wallow in my own self-
pity over life.

Peter: What's got you down?

Shelley: The team is a bunch of unfriendly twits who have been working together to shun me after
what happened to Kelley over Fall break when we went to a party in River Hills.

Peter: Because you were with her, they blame you for her getting assaulted?

Shelley: Yes. Dad, can I be open and honest with you?

Peter: Sure.

Shelley: I know Mom has been clutching her pearls over me possibly being gay. All her disapproval
has done is made me more determined to find a woman to love. I have my eye on someone, but most
of the team is defending her choice to be with one of our teammates who is clearly not in my league
either looks-wise or passion-wise.

Peter thought deeply about how to respond to his daughter's statements. He wasn't exactly supportive of her attitude concerning the team or the impression she has given that she's not at fault for anything bad that might have happened to her.

Peter: I don't know what to say. I'm not sure where this line of thinking has come from, but it clearly is somewhat faulty. Your mom for whatever reason has ignored the signs that you are, well, a lesbian and is wanting you to "straighten up". About this teammate of yours that has you interested, has she ever signaled that she's interested in return?

Shelley: No, but I just know that if I were given a legitimate opportunity to be around her, I'd be able to show that I could be so much better for her than the goody-two-shoes she is currently dating.

Peter: You're setting yourself up for heartache, girl, if you keep pursuing her while she's already with someone.

Shelley: At least you're willing to let me be who I am and want to be instead of trying to talk me out of it. Thanks, Dad.

Peter: I'll always support you to live as you feel called. Now, this means we will eventually have to confront your mom together to get her to face reality. Any idea when you want to do that?

Shelley: Not right away. Maybe after school is out and the season's over.

Peter and Shelley left Kawa and walked back down Silver Spring Drive toward home. When they were stopped at a red light on Santa Monica Boulevard, Shelley wrapped her arms around Peter's waist and squeezed him. "I love you, Dad. Thanks again for accepting me."

**********

After the player group at Bayshore (Lindsey, Emily, Morgan Brooks, Ali, Lauren, and Kelley along with her mom, Lynelle) finished their shopping, they stopped in at La Coppa Gelato for a mid-afternoon snack. Cali was at the shopping center with her babysitting charges, Courtney and Dylan, and saw the group from outside the shop. She went inside and they talked for a few minutes before Cali's phone buzzed with a message from Dani, along with several pictures from their shopping at Mayfair. Cali passed her phone around so everyone could see the selections they made.

Lindsey: I'm really impressed that the taller girls on the team, including Coach Sarah, were able to find such good-looking dresses.

Cali: Dani is a wiz at knowing where the good stuff for the bigger-than-average woman can be found. Her favorite designer has portions of her collection at Lane Bryant and Nordstrom, so that's where I'd presume they got their outfits.

Ali: How can Erin look just SO CUTE in literally everything she wears?

Lynelle Ochowicz: When you know what looks best on you, it's pretty easy to make whatever you choose work. Still working on that with my daughter, but the dress she chose for your trip to Michigan was a really good choice. I think I can thank Lauren a bit for helping Kelley remember that she's a woman and not a boy with boobs.

Emily laughed at Lynelle's dig on her first-born, with Morgan and Cali joining in. Cali then looked at the two kids and worked on keeping them from making too much of a mess of their treats.
Lauren: The cinnamon rolls are going to look SO GOOD on the 29th in their selections.

Ali: Agreed.

When they finished their gelato, the group left La Coppa and went to Lindsey's car for the trip back to Mequon, with Lynelle heading home and Cali and the kids going back to Angela and Brent's.

**********

Erin and Steph went to Marc and Danielle's after Mayfair, waiting for Val and Jim to arrive from Rockford. While there, Erin and Danielle spent some time one-on-one, with Danielle hoping to alleviate her goddaughter's fears about her health and treatment. Marc and Steph talked in his office about the party on Sunday. She showed him the gift she had gotten for Erin (a crucifix with a small clock embedded in it and an engraving on the back) and they worked out some of the logistics for the day. Around 5:00, the Mathesons showed up at the Schmidts' and whisked their daughter and her partner away for dinner at Mo's Irish Pub.
Ten Minutes of Hell

Game day at Trinity started with a brief walk-about by a number of the Augsburg residents, hoping that the fatigue from the past week could be shaken out prior to this afternoon's match against Carroll University, who were 3-0 on the season with wins over Alma, Monmouth, and Cornell. Marc's postponement of rendering a decision on the fight in Cary meant that both Shelley and Lauren were eligible to play today. The team gathered in Siebert at 9:30am for their pre-game meal, with Sarah overseeing it and offering some tidbits about the game and how best to handle the constant changes in formation that Lauren had been deploying.

Sarah: When Lauren moves to either a three-D or five-D, one of those centers needs to push out of the defensive zone immediately upon our gaining possession. Against William Peace, we didn't do that, which allowed Ali and Erin to get caught a bit further up-field than desirable. Also, when she goes to 4-4-3, one of the center mids should take up a position about 5-7 yards outside the defensive zone so that we don't end up with eight in the box and offside. If the outside defenders push, an outside mid needs to fall back or a center needs to slide wide to make room for someone to tuck in alongside the remaining center defender.

Megan: I wish she would stick to the 4-3-4 most of the time, since that's a pretty safe formation for keeping our players from being out of position or ending up offside. We haven't had enough time in training to get the freshmen up to speed on the switches and responsibilities they have when we're in a set where there isn't a clean split of 7 up and 7 back.

Nicole: We have a smart enough team to do it, but expecting it to come by instinct when the only group of players who sort of know it are Megan, Jess, and Moe is asking way too much.

Sarah: I'll try to encourage her to go back to the 4-5-2 that we used against Ripon, since it offers a couple of ways to keep four up and push seven back so there's a little more room for error.

Steph L.: Just curious....with the games coming fast and heavy over the next 15 days (six games, including road trips to Minnesota and Michigan), is Lauren planning to ride Nicole the whole way or will she spell her at some point? Not trying to angle for playing time, just wondering how much of a beating she can take given our all-freshman defensive corps.

Nicole: I played every minute the past two seasons at Carthage, so I'm used to a heavy workload. That said, the mental side can be a struggle when you face as many shots game after game as I did the two games in Raleigh. Sarah, what are Lauren's thoughts on how we're supposed to do in the non-conference part of the slate?

Sarah: She hasn't been too open about that with me, possibly so it doesn't place undue pressure on the team. With us losing the one to William Peace, I'm sure she will want to steal it back somewhere between now and the start of NACC play, even though the schedule isn't really conducive to that. I think she's aiming for a win today, along with the game against CUAA and she probably wants to take one of the matches against Capital and Augsburg. I don't know how that is possible without pushing you to play every minute from now through the Illinois Tech one. As for you, Steph and Jane, you might not see time until Edgewood unless we get so far behind in a match that Nicole begs out or Lauren pulls her.

Nicole: Which means going the full 120 on the Michigan trip, with the matches less than 24 hours apart.

Sarah: 'Fraid so. Were it me, you'd be sitting at least some of that just to give your body a bit of a rest.
and get the other two some experience in a not-so-friendly environment ahead of next year.

A number of the players listened intently as the conversation rolled while they were fueling up, liking what they had heard from Sarah but slightly concerned she may move on after the season for a head coaching job somewhere, such as the rumored Spring 2021 debut of lacrosse at Alverno. On the walkover to Buuck from Siebert, Sam and Steph McNamara talked between themselves about it and thought they should bring in Steph Lafleur and Erin as sounding boards before they addressed their thoughts with any of the seniors.

**********

A large crowd was on hand for today's battle between Trinity Lutheran and Carroll, with a decent segment of the stands filled by supporters of the Pioneers. The last time these teams faced, Carthage won, 13-7, but that was with a VERY different lineup than the one which would take the field this afternoon.

--------Nicole

Ali----Julie----Emily----Erin

--------Sam

--Megan---------Jess

--------Morgan B.

Lindsey---Steph M.---Christen

While the ladies were warming up, Dani had gone down to the edge of the field to get the starting lineup from Sarah so she and the contingent of Thunder parents and fans would have it ahead of the game to engage in a bit of pre-game analysis with one another. Once getting it jotted down, she went back up into the stands and sat down between Wil and Cali, with Marc, Danielle, Jim, and Val in the row behind them. The Ochowiczes were seated to Marc's right and the Princes were on Jim Matheson's left. Dani went over the first XII with the group and discussion began.

Melissa Mueller: Sam finally gets a shot in the midfield. Hope the two behind her can handle the defending so she'll be able to stay there.

Cody Prince: Chris is starting. Guess her offensive prowess got noticed.

Val Matheson: Who's ahead of Erin in midfield, since the way this is jotted down, there doesn't seem to be any wide players of those four?

Marc: I'd say no one, Val. Megan, Jess, and Morgan Brooks are the normal three in midfield, with Sam generally in defense. Pushing her up sets those four into somewhat of a skinny diamond, which is fine if you have width on the front line, which Trinity doesn't in this lineup. Lindsey, Steph, and Christen are all versions of a number 9 in soccer. Bullish, determined, tough to move around, but not known for exceptional speed or creative movement. Right, Dani?

Dani: Correct. With no width up top and none in the midfield, a LOT of how this game plays out is whether Ali and Erin can help Sam pinch the Carroll attack in front of their restraining line to allow Megan and Jess to get back. We'll known early on if this set-up is genius or madness.

The draw was won by Carroll and they made an immediate foray through the midfield and sped past the three-player shield in front of Julie and Emily, leading to a quick goal. The skinny diamond had
trouble getting the ball outside their own dimensions on the pass, which required Morgan to come back and get the ball so she could run it forward into the attacking zone. A jostled-out ball to Lindsey was scooped up and played quickly into the pocket between the four midfielders. Sam stepped forward to close up the space, but was a step too late as a pass was looped back to the left and the Pioneer player ran around Ali before firing a low shot that snuck past Nicole at the near post. After ten minutes of play, Carroll was ahead, 6-0, which forced Lauren to call a time-out to attempt to rectify the situation. When the team retook the field, Emily had been pulled out for Kristie, with Sam dropping back to defense and Megan and Lindsey switching positions. The two teams traded goals for much of the remaining twenty minutes, with the Pioneers leading, 11-4 at halftime.

The second half was more or less a continuation of the last portion of the first, with the teams matching each other point-for-point. Savannah picked up a pair of goals in short succession after her insertion around the 45 minute mark, but Lauren chose to maintain a limited rotation and utilized only 16 of her 21 field players (Andi, Sofia, Kelley, Shelley, and Maggie did not make an appearance in the match). Fatigue, the experience difference between the two teams, and that opening ten minutes were the main culprits in the Thunder losing their third straight match, 19-11.

Carroll 19 Trinity 11 (Christen Prince 3 goals/1 assist, Steph McNamara 3 goals, Megan Racicot 4 assists, Morgan Brooks 1 goal/1 assist, Kristie Mueller 3 assists, Lindsey Hoffman 1 goal, Savannah Johnson 2 goals, Lauren Chandler 1 goal/2 assists)

**********

Steph and Jessie were in the process of stripping Erin so they could wish her the happiest of all birthdays. Once their third had been fully declothed, Jessie placed her lips against Erin's neck while Steph leaned across to lay a soft kiss on her lips, which the defender responded to tenderly. Steph and Erin exchanged several kisses before going deeper with them. Jessie began sucking a little on Erin's neck before moving downward to her collarbone and licking along it. Steph's hand found its way onto Erin's breast and she squeezed it, eliciting a moan from her. Jessie's hand was moving over her abs as it headed up towards her other breast. The two women began kissing and licking her nipples, sucking now and then. The sensations were causing Erin to squirm a bit, which Jessie took as a hint to move onto the main course. She got off the bed and walked to the end of it, then crawled back onto it and teasingly moved up her legs to her neatly-trimmed and very wet vaginal region. Jessie buried her face in Erin's pussy, licking her lower lips and tickling her clit now and again with the tip of her tongue. Steph meanwhile had pulled Erin's head toward her chest and offered up her breasts for some attention. Erin greedily dove into her girlfriend's cleavage and licked on her breastbone before taking her left nipple into her mouth. As Jessie picked up the pace with her tongue, Erin clamped down tighter on Steph's nip to stifle the moaning she wanted to let out. Jessie put one finger into Erin and rubbed her clit with her other hand, bringing her close to climaxing which came when Jessie wrapped her lips around Erin's clit and sucked.

After catching her breath, Erin put Steph onto her back and removed her jeans and boy shorts, then ran her hand up the goalkeeper's thigh, squeezing and teasing as she went along the inside of it. She placed a light squeeze on her love zone and used her fingers to scope out Steph's opening. Steph moaned slightly as Erin slipped two fingers into her and rubbed the inside of her vagina with them. Jessie, feeling a little left out at the moment, stripped off her leggings and thong, then moved to the top of the bed and mounted Steph's face, begging to be eaten out. Erin used her free hand to start removing Jessie's shirt, which the midfielder helped her with. The three women shifted their body positions slightly so that Erin could get at Jessie's breast with her mouth. Steph sped up her licking and sucking on Jessie's vulva, then started thrusting her tongue in and out of her lover. A slight graze of her teeth over Jessie's love button was enough to send her over the edge and she pressed her pelvic region square into Steph's face while orgasming. Steph was close to her own apex when Erin slid a third finger into her and, while rubbing her clit with her thumb, felt Steph's vaginal muscles
clamp around her fingers as she came onto them.

With all three satisfied for the moment, they lied naked against one another, with Erin’s head on Steph’s chest and Jessie curled up into the side of Steph’s neck. Erin moved up so she was on Steph’s shoulder and left a nibble on her earlobe. Jessie leaned across and put a kiss on Steph's throat, then looked over and caught eyes with Erin. Erin looked back and leaned across to kiss Jessie, which led to a few more kisses and another round of lovemaking, with Steph tribbing Erin while Jessie was being eaten out by her, resulting in a trio of orgasms for them in quick succession. As the clock struck midnight, Steph and Jessie sang "Happy Birthday" to Erin as the three of them positioned themselves to go to sleep, with Jessie on the inside, Erin in the middle, and Steph behind her. Before dozing off, Erin said to her two lovers, "Thank you for this wonderful start to what I hope will be a memorable birthday. I love you both, and I wouldn't want to wake up later this morning with anyone else beside me."
Erin Go Bragh

Chapter Summary

St. Patrick's Day, which is also Erin's birthday.

Up at the crack of dawn, Marc went into the kitchen and made himself a bowl of Lucky Charms, a small commemoration of what today was. Around 8am, Danielle got up and joined Marc in front of the big-screen TV to watch "Outside the Lines" and "The Sports Reporters". A few minutes later, Val and Jim came into the living room and the four of them talked about the day to come.

Val (to Marc): Are you sure everything is covered?

Marc: Yes. A couple of my minions are supposed to pick up the food and cake on their way here, Steph dropped off the party supplies at my office on Friday, which I brought home, and she is supposed to work on keeping Erin occupied until some of the guests get here and we have most things in place.

Danielle: Who did you get to take care of the running around and ordering?

Marc: One of our new peer ministers who lives on Erin and Steph's floor and her cousin who works at Trinity.

Danielle: I'll have to thank them for coming to your rescue this week now that I'm a bit incapacitated.

Jim: What did you get Erin?

Marc: It's actually a gift for her to use with several others. I ordered group tickets for Irish Fest and am giving her six of them to take you two, Steph, and her parents. The festival is the weekend before she and Steph move back into the dorms and the PMA does a couple of days of planning and team bonding before the freshmen move in on Thursday.

Val: Jim and I decided to go practical and got her some additions to the luggage set she received for graduation from her uncle Glen. She already had the big case and small case, so we picked up the garment bag, which she will need if she's doing events with you across the country in the future, and the messenger bag that can be used for school or carrying her laptop.

Danielle: Very nice. Marc, did Steph tell you what she was getting Erin?

Marc: At first, she thought about getting her something blingy like my crucifix, but changed her mind and went with a more demure option. It has a small clock in it, but isn't nearly as outlandish as mine.

Jim: Do I dare ask about yours?

Marc: Cubic Zirconia encrusted cross on a 36" chain.

Danielle: His Flavor Flav cross. Erin knew he wanted it and suggested to his protege at Trinity that she should get it for him.

Marc: Yeah Boyeeeeeee!
Danielle: I suppose we shouldn't get too too comfortable. You never know when people might start arriving.

Val and Danielle went into the kitchen to start prepping some items for fruit and vegetable trays, while Marc and Jim began setting up extra tables and chairs for their guests.

**********

The first arrivals were Christen and Julie, who walked up from her parents' place in Washington Highlands. After being greeted by Val and Jim at the front door, they stepped inside and sat down with Danielle, who was starting to drift due to the effect the oral chemo had on her. Christen asked how she was and offered a sympathetic ear. A few minutes later, Kristie, Sam, Steph McNamara, and Alyssa showed up, with the latter two joining Christen and offering words of encouragement to Danielle. Cali, Dani, and Sarah came to the back door with the cake and catering trays, which Marc and Julie helped them get in the house and situated on a couple of small banquet tables. The three of them entered the living room, with Cali going to talk to Kristie and Sam, Sarah with Val and Jim, and Dani with Alyssa. A number of other players on the lacrosse team made their way in before Steph, Jessie, and Becca arrived with Erin just after 1 o'clock. Seeing the nearly-full house of friends, teammates, family, and other well-wishers, Erin choked up slightly, then went over to Danielle and thanked her for helping to make this birthday something special for her. Once the birthday girl was seated, Marc started the festivities.

Marc: Welcome, everyone, to our home for today's celebration of Erin's birthday. Before we all dig into the food and fete the spitfire cherub, I have a surprise. With today being St. Patrick's Day, I felt it only fitting to have a couple of bagpipers and drummers make an appearance and play "Happy Birthday" for her.

Stacy Gilbert, Denise Parker, and Kent and Trent Brackett (all members of Danielle's band, the Lady Elgin Memorial Pipes and Drums) entered the house by way of the front door, having just played at O'Brien's Pub on 50th and Vliet. As they took their places, Danielle smiled at the foursome, with their appearance bringing her a slight bit of joy amidst the pain and lethargy of the past week. As pseudo pipe major for the group, Kent gave direction for Stacy and the two drummers to begin. The others in the house began singing while the pipes and drums played, with Erin blushing and feeling a little self-conscious over all the attention.

After the quartet departed for the next stop on their St. Patrick's Day bar hop, the guests began to make their plates of food. When Marc saw that the eating was dying down, he went back into the kitchen and got the cake, then brought it into the living room and laid it on one of the tables.

Marc: Again, a St. Patrick's Day birthday should have elements of the holiday included. The cake I had ordered is based on one that Galway Bakers in the Chicago area makes to sell at Milwaukee Irish Fest. It is a double chocolate cake with Guinness Stout in the mix and Jameson and Bailey's Irish Creme added to the frosting. Some people call it an Irish Car Bomb Cake, I just call it delicious. Erin, will you come up, blow out the candles, and give yourself the first slice?

Erin got up and walked over next to Marc. He held back her hair while she blew out the 19 candles on the cake. The cutting of the cake went quickly and all got a piece in short order.

Jim (to Marc): How did you get someone around here to make this?

Marc: I have my ways. You should know that by now. Seriously, I asked around to some of the local independent bakeries about their ability to do it, since I knew Pick N Save probably wouldn't. Regina's Bay Bakery over by Bayshore got back to me quickly and said that, if we could get them the recipe and were willing to pay a little extra so they could purchase the necessary liquor, they'd be
willing to give it a shot. It's your basic double chocolate cake with vanilla buttercream frosting, just kicked up a notch with the added elements of the Irish Car Bomb.

Jim: And you say they sell this at Irish Fest?

Marc: The ones there are around 3” x 4” or 3” x 4.5”. I pick one up on Friday night of Fest to have for Saturday morning breakfast, and it never disappoints.

**********

Val and Jim left to return to Michigan just after 4pm, giving their daughter and her partner hugs and pecks along with promises of coming to see them play the two games in Michigan in two weeks. Marc, Erin, and Dani cleared out the living room a bit before returning to sit down with Danielle, Steph, Jessie, Becca, Cali, and Sarah.

Danielle: I want to thank all of you for coming and being such close friends to Erin. When she came to Trinity, she knew only Marc and myself, and I was worried that she would be too self-conscious to step out and make friends or get to know people. Luckily, her and Steph met in the dorms before the opening worship service that first day and it gave her someone who she could be real with that wasn't me or Mr. Slick.

Steph: I still remember how nervous I was meeting you and Marc the Sunday before classes started. I wanted to make a good impression on you since you are in essence her substitute parents.

Sarah: In the two months or so that we've been in season, I have been awestruck by how the two of you have been able to balance the on-field relationship and the off-field one. Yeah, Steph, you and Erin have yet to play together in a game, but what I see in practice is a unity of purpose and the ability to support one another through bad moments, even if you can't do it overtly in front of the rest of the team.

Erin: Having a wonderful community around us in Augsburg has been very helpful in that regard. Seeing other teammates of ours working out their relationships in front of Steph and I provides a bit of feedback to what we're doing right or wrong. If we didn't have three roommate/teammate couples on the floor, things would probably be a bit harder.

Cali: Gotta admit, you both picked a winner off the bat. I'm hoping Matt and I are able to develop a bit of a bond before the end of the semester so we can keep things moving while apart for the summer. Oh, by the way, Marc, GREAT idea on the cake. I'm thinking the people at Regina's gave Steph a pretty odd look when she told them what she wanted.

Dani: It wasn't THAT odd of a look. More of an "Are you sure?" than "You're daft!".

Danielle connected the dots mentally and realized that Cali was the dorm friend Marc mentioned and Dani the cousin who worked at Trinity. "My husband, the ever-cryptic one, told me that a couple of people at Trinity helped get things done for today's bash, but never said who. Now that I know, I want to thank you both, Dani and Cali, for helping us out so we could give Erin the party we and her parents felt she deserved."

Marc: If I had told you outright that Dani was involved in this, you'd probably have ripped my head off and wondered if there were something else going on.

Danielle: No, I wouldn't have. I know she's with Sarah and the jumping-to-conclusions and sniping has gone away a bit since starting this god-awful treatment to reduce the tumor.

Dani: You're welcome, Danielle. It was actually fun to be part of it.
Cali: No sweat, Danielle. Getting to collaborate with Steph and Dani on this after Marc asked for help was a blast.

Dani suggested to Sarah that the two of them and Cali should head back up to the North Shore before it got too late. Hearing that, Erin thought it wise that they return to campus so the four of them could get a better night's sleep than what they got the previous night. Upon exiting, Erin gave Danielle a kiss on the forehead and one on the nose, hoping it would lift her spirits. Steph gave Danielle some words of encouragement and a big hug, which was reciprocated. Marc walked the four college students out to Erin's car, where she gave him a hug that was a little tighter than usual and a kiss on the cheek a bit tenderer and longer than normal. Steph noticed and thought she might need to ask about it when they were alone again.
Pay The Piper

Chapter Summary

Shelley gets her comeuppance and the mood of the team shifts.

When Marc arrived at his office on Monday morning, the first thing he chose to do was send onto Gavin Winchester his decision regarding Lauren Chandler and Shelley Zembruski's fight last Monday evening.

Case OIA2019-14

Student-Athlete: Lauren N. Chandler

Charge(s) Found To Have Merit: Assault

Sanction(s): One-match suspension (served 3/12/2019)

Student-Athlete: Lara M. Zembruski

Charge(s) Found To Have Merit: Verbal Assault, Emotional Harm Inflicted On A Third Person

Aggravating Factor(s): Instigation

Sanction(s): Four-match suspension (first served 3/12/2019), with last two matches stayed; Student-Athlete is barred from road trips which coincide with serving of suspension.

Attached: Transcripts of all interviews

Having completed that task, he started working again on the formulation of the Easter Sunday service which would be the major task of Friday afternoon's session at the Peer Ministry In-Service. At 10 o'clock, Shelley showed up at Marc's office to discuss the sanctions he prescribed.

Shelley: Deacon Schmidt, I get that you don't like me much because I want Erin's girlfriend for myself, but FOUR GAMES when I didn't throw a punch??!!

Marc: Did you actually read the decision? You've already served one match of the four, and the last two will not need to be served if you aren't involved in another incident the rest of the season.

Shelley: When did you come to this decision?

Marc: Friday afternoon, after re-reading the transcripts of the interviews from Thursday. There wasn't time to file it with Gavin for you to serve the first of those extra three matches against Carroll.

Shelley: I still think four games total is too much and plan to appeal the decision to Gavin.

Marc: What are you hoping to accomplish? It's ONE GAME that you'll be serving if you stay out of the trouble the rest of the season.

Shelley: It's the threat of you forcing me to serve the other two if I so much as sneeze wrong over the next six weeks. So I have to sit out against Macalester. Does that mean you had to bar me from going
with the team to and from St. Paul?

Marc: That sanction is to protect you from the temptation of creating trouble for yourself and to protect the team from you.

Shelley: This isn't over. I will be appealing this to Gavin so that there's no wiggle room on your part for what I am to serve and to overturn the road ban.

Marc: I don't think you want to do that. To support my decision, I would have to provide evidence of aggravating factors, which would be the doctor's report of your assault on Kelley along with her interviews concerning the incident. She has chosen not to pursue charges against you either through my office or the River Hills Police Department, but that doesn't mean it didn't happen.

Shelley thought for a bit about whether she wanted to take the risk of getting a longer suspension or Gavin making her serve all three games of this one immediately. "I still plan to appeal because I believe I have a stronger case for reduction than you do for any possible extension."

Marc: Then go ahead and file it. Gavin will contact me and ask for my explanation of the decision.

Shelley: There's no hearing, then?

Marc: Appeals are typically done on paper. Gavin weighs your argument against the case file, then renders a decision.

Shelley: Then I best get to writing if I want to be able to travel on Wednesday.

Shelley left Marc's office without an additional word. As he thought over the conversation, he found himself a bit miffed as he thought the sentence was fair if not slightly lenient given her previous acts against members of the lacrosse team. He put the Easter service aside and began penning his response to Shelley's forthcoming appeal. He silently hoped that Gavin would take the file, call him to clarify what was in it, and support the sanctions given without him having to introduce the medical report of Kelley's assault.

**********

At the weekly meeting of the Peer Ministry Alliance leadership team, Marc laid out the plans for Friday, then had Alyssa take charge of the remainder of the agenda. She brought up the SGA elections and their organization's being on the ballot as well as Liz Edwards standing as an at-large candidate. She also told the newcomers who their mentors would be, eliciting a number of smiles. When asked if anyone had anything to add, Steph made mention of Erin's birthday being yesterday, which led to the others singing to her. Marc had brought a portion of the cake from the party, cutting up and passing out slices to everyone.

**********

Gavin Winchester: Marc, it's Gavin. I received an appeal from Shelley Zembruski regarding her suspension. I also have the case file from you with the transcripts of your interviews and the notes sent to you following the incident. Taken together, I think you're being a little heavy-handed with four games, even if you are staying two of them. I'm starting to be concerned that you are using your position to deliver retribution to those who cross you in some way. The sanctions against Alexandra Millen, the allowance of Hope Stevens to give Mallory Putnam a two-month campus confinement, and now this. How did you come up with three games on top of the one she served in North Carolina?

Marc: I mentioned in my decision that there were aggravating factors that contributed to the sentence.
I gave her one game for instigating the conflict and another for involving a third party, both of which are common sanctions in hockey. The third game came due to the totality of her conduct so far this year. As the airing of some of those actions is prohibited by HIPAA, I cannot divulge what they are without consent of the other party and she has chosen not to press charges against Shelley.

Gavin read through the case file again and saw the places where the evidence pointed at both aggravating factors, then gave Marc the benefit of the doubt as to what else he knew that he was unable to discuss.

Gavin: The numbers then seem to be fair even if a little stiffer than I would have handed down. She also claimed in her appeal that you were biased against her in the handling of this case.

Marc: That is pretty much bushwah. If I were biased, the sanctions would be more severe and I would have handed them down before the team even got back on Wednesday. She will only have to serve ONE GAME if she stays out of trouble the rest of the season.

Gavin: The last point of her appeal is that the road ban violates her freedom of movement and association.

Marc: The ban only goes so far as to keep her from traveling or staying with the team. If she wants to hop in her car and make the trip to St. Paul, she’s free to do so. Nothing anyone can do about that.

Gavin: Right. I’ll let the suspension stand along with the ban from traveling with the team on Wednesday. If she ends up serving the additional two games because of another incident, we can take up extending the travel ban.

Gavin finished the call and sent notice to Shelley and Coach Heberlein of his decision denying the appeal.

**********

Lauren chose to hold a shortened formal practice, believing that limiting the reps today and tomorrow might give the team additional energy for their match on Wednesday against Macalester. Most of the players chose to stay on the field and work in groups on things they perceived as weaknesses. Sarah checked in with the players and suggested they do a bit of unstructured play, 7 v 7 on a short field. After getting the goals moved into position, she asked Steph Lafleur and Jane to select their seven field players to start, with the rest cycling in over the course of the scrimmage.

Lafleur's Lightning: Steph L., Erin, Emily, Sam, Lauren, Christen, Savannah, Jess
Carrington's Crew: Jane, Andi, Julie, Megan, Morgan B., Steph M., Lindsey, Kristie
Subs: Ali, Shelley, Sofia, Morgan A., Becca, Maggie, Kelley (Nicole sitting out)

On a short field and with seven field players a side, the game was meant to be all-out attack in both directions, with Sarah hoping to see some identifiable building blocks that she could recommend to Lauren for the two matches this week. The Crew won the draw and brought all guns blazing at the Lightning, but Erin, Sam, and Emily marked up well against Steph Mac and Lindsey, forcing a turnover which the sophomore midfielder flung out quickly to Lauren who hit Savannah with a pass as she split Megan and Andi, then rounded the defender and blasted a shot past Jane. Sarah put Ali in for Andi and Kelley in for Savannah, then had the action re-start with Jane. The Crew's front four of Megan, Steph, Lindsey, and Kristie got the better of the Lightning's back three and Lindsey slipped a shot under Steph's armpit. The next switches were Sofia for Lindsey and Becca for Emily. The back-and-forth attacking from both sides resulted in a LOT of goals scored and a fair amount of turnovers.
from overaggressive play. Sarah called "Next Goal Ends It" with the Lightning in possession of the ball. Erin dumped the ball into Sam, who played it wide to Kelley. The spritely squirrel's speed drew out Shelley, who accidentally chopped at her stick, resulting in a spot foul called. Once Kelley was given four meters clearance in front of her, she looked for an open player, then tossed the ball back to Sam. She took three steps forward and ripped a shot that Jane didn't see due to her defense being backed up. It bounced just in front of the lower left corner of the net and went in. As the players walked back to Buuck, Nicole and Sarah talked about what they had seen.

The atmosphere in the locker room was a complete 180 from that of Saturday's post-game. Nicole sat down with Steph and Jane to give them some advice on their positioning and need to command the defense. Elsewhere, Steph McNamara, Lindsey, and Christen compared notes on how they preferred to play the forward position, hoping that between the three of them a solid starting pair could be formed, with the third acting as a super sub to pick up cheap tallies after the first two wore out their opponents' defenders. Sam spent a couple of minutes advising Shelley on her tendency to challenge for the ball too quickly instead of jockeying the attacker until a turnover opportunity presented itself.

As the players departed, Sam and Steph Mac made a point of leaving with Steph Lafleur and Erin so they could talk over with the pair what the sophomores discussed among themselves after training table on Saturday. After finding a table in Luther's Landing, Sam broke the silence.

Sam: Hood and I were talking on Saturday about how things seem a lot more pleasant when Coach Heberlein isn't around and that Sarah has a lot of good ideas that I fear aren't being utilized. It got us to wonder about her plans for the future and whether she'd be looking for a head coaching job after the season.

Steph L.: She's from here, she moved back when she could have landed a gig elsewhere, and she's a bit tied to the area due to her partner working at Trinity as well.

Steph M.: There are rumors about Alverno starting a team in a couple of years. She's Catholic, no?

Erin: Yeah, so that would be a possible destination.

Sam: I REALLY don't want to see that happen. As you saw in that little bit of open play we did this afternoon, the team responds to her and feels more capable of mixing constructive criticism with encouragement toward one another. It happened in the locker room, where Nicole, Steph, and myself went up to some of the other players and talked about what happened on the field and how we could get better.

Steph L.: Morgan told us a few weeks ago what she overheard from Lauren about us and her opinions on various subjects. She's passed those onto Deacon Schmidt, along with what a couple of others have heard or noticed. No one's gotten the magic words out of her that would possibly lead to Gavin administering some form of discipline, but it's not too far-fetched that he should blow up at some point the way she did in practice a while back.

Erin: She's still our coach until something happens to make that not so. Therefore, we owe it to her to play hard and give our best effort.

The foursome finished up dinner and headed back to Augsburg to start their night of studying.

**********

Jane Sommer called Emily to talk about her and Lindsey's homecoming on Wednesday.

Jane: After the game, we'd like to have the team and their supporters come out to the house for
dinner since you're staying over on Wednesday night and won't be in a rush to get back to Milwaukee.

Emily: You sure about that? Our team has 24 players, plus the coaches, plus any of our friends who come out to see us play.

Jane: Your dad and I talked it over with Mark and Linda Hoffman and we all agreed that we should do this, since none of us know when you might play up here again.

Emily: Can you send me directions from Macalester to our place so I can pass that along to our coaches tomorrow?

Jane: Consider it done. Any requests for food or drinks or what-not?

Emily: I'll ask around and get back to you tomorrow night. You'd still have time to pick up stuff on Wednesday before the game, right?

Jane: I've taken Wednesday and Thursday off work so I can put this together.

Emily: Thank everyone for the two of us and I'll talk to you tomorrow. Love you.

Jane: Love you too, girl.

Emily told Lindsey what their parents had planned, which put a smile on her face. Bored but not interested in roaming the hall, Lindsey texted some of her teammates with the news about Wednesday, asking for input for Emily to send onto her mom tomorrow after practice.
Removing All Doubt

Tuesday morning began for Marc and Danielle with a visit to their financial planner. With her health declining, the pair wanted to make sure everything in their portfolio was in order and that the necessary paperwork was on file should she pass away or become unable to declare her wishes verbally.

Bryan Stewart (to Danielle): Angela and I were sorry to hear about your tumor. How are things at the moment?

Danielle: I've been on the oral meds for just past a week and have been feeling like crap, but apparently that's to be expected. I should begin feeling better in a week or two, according to the surgeon who is supposed to remove the tumor in a few months.

Bryan: Looking over the portfolio you and Marc have in place, we should probably get a bit more aggressive with your mix of financial instruments, as the risk of loss is a bit less than the reward of a sizable jump over the short term. We should also move some of your long-term investments to more liquid ones so you will have funds available to supplement your long-term care insurance and the catastrophic care rider.

Marc: I sat down with the accountant and lawyer I use for the Urban Coaching Project to protect it against being liquidated in the case of either exceptional expenses for Danielle's health care or a battle in probate. I have signed over 10% of the company to our goddaughter temporarily, with that expected to be transferred back in nine months, after Danielle's surgery and subsequent treatment would be.

Bryan: I'd call that wise, Marc. We also have the insurance policies that were set up to handle future expenses upon the passing of either of you. At the moment, the mortgage insurance would cover approximately nine years of payments. Danielle's educational benefits through Thrivent and the ELCA are at $26,000 with a schedule of ten semesters of payments, four for her niece, Sydney, and six for your goddaughter, Erin. The whole life policies the two of you have will pay $100,000 to the other upon death of the first person, with the same amount going to your secondary beneficiary upon death of the second unless changes are made in the future. As for the living trust, all real and tangible property transfers from joint to sole ownership in the event one of you dies, avoiding probate altogether.

Danielle: How expansive is Marc's right of ownership of what I leave behind? Can he do whatever he wants or is he limited in his actions in order to allow others to inherit?

Bryan: You'd have to write an addendum to the trust excluding certain items and then bequeath them to who you wish. We can handle that today if you're interested.

Danielle: I'm not sure that's necessary at the moment. Just thinking that he wouldn't need two cars and I'd like to have the option of passing mine on to someone who might need it. My mom sat on two minivans after my dad passed away and it was sort of "odd", I'd say, for her to have both even though she didn't use one of them.

Marc: In our case, my mom didn't drive until after my dad passed away, then couldn't keep up the payments on the car, which they had gotten less than seven months before he died. Had to trade it in for something smaller and more budget-friendly.

Bryan: Understood. That's something you could discuss between the two of you and come to an
agreement that he would execute, or you can use the trust to gift it to someone specific. Any other questions?

Marc: How would cash be handled from our investments? Would I have to liquidate those instruments and then place 50% of it into her estate for distribution through probate?

Bryan: Same principle. All that she would leave behind becomes yours unless she specifically excludes it. Part of the joy of being in a community property state.

Marc: Guess that answers my questions. Danielle?

Danielle: Nothing on the trust and financials. I was wondering where Colleen had decided to go to school next year.

Bryan: MSOE. She gets direct admission to the nursing program and guaranteed enrollment in the clinical sequence as long as she meets academic requirements. Not getting that at UWM or Trinity or Alverno.

Marc: True, Bryan. My sister adjuncts at St. Kate's and UM-TC and the standard for admission to their nursing programs and the clinical portions is very high, plus the wash-out rate is more than she expected. I applaud Colleen on doing her research and finding a good fit to get through in four years at a price point not much different than Alverno or TLU. Would she commute or stay on-campus?

Bryan: Angela and I are still working out with her the dollars and her prospective class schedule for the first year to see which makes more sense.

Danielle: Marc, we should let Bryan get onto his next meeting and you need to get up to campus, right?

Marc: Yeah. Have to get my homily for tomorrow written and also get prepared for tonight's eventual conversation with Matt. When I told Laurie that Erin's team was playing at Macalester, she said she might be interested in going. I'd like to confirm that so I can hopefully get her and the girls to meet up afterwards.

Danielle: I'm sure getting your script together to deal with Matt will take up more time than the homily, right?

Marc: Yep. The sermon is sort of defined already with us now in Lent, but plays on the same theme I've been drumming all year, which is love in action.

The Schmidts left Bryan's office satisfied with the plans they had in place. Marc dropped Danielle off at home, then drove up to Trinity to take care of his responsibilities for the day.

**********

Denise Oliver and Abby Davidson were at Luther's Landing for lunch in between classes when Coaches Heberlein and Manning walked in, already in the midst of a conversation. When the pair sat down at the table next to the two students, Lauren let loose on some of her athletes and their perceived benefactors to Sara.

Lauren Heberlein: I'm losing control of my program, and Gavin's not being much help. The players have been holding meetings among themselves over the last six weeks or so, which I KNOW are about how I am treating them and my critical-but-hands-off approach to what I see happening.

Sara Manning: With us just in spring training at the moment, I'm not getting much defiance from my
squad. I haven't had to go to the whip with them because they're just happy to get out on the field and shoot around a bit. I heard that there was a fight on your spring break trip.

Lauren: Yes, and the administration f'ed up handling it. Two of my players got into it over I don't know what, and one punched the other. I suspended both of them for the match the next day and sent the incident report to the chaplain for him to administer additional sanctions if he saw fit. He gave the one who threw the punch time served, and the recipient an additional three games, two of which are stayed. She appealed to Gavin, who took her story and compared it to the case file. He denied her appeal, which means she's out against Macalester and isn't even allowed to travel with the team per Deacon Schmidt's decision.

Sara: Sounds really out-of-balance. Did the aggrieved have a reason to believe there was bias?

Lauren: I'm sure she did, but how this all came about is another example of why I'd like to ban teammate relationships altogether and why I don't want these chapsticks and lipsticks on my team. I can't do that, of course, so I have to find other ways to keep them from playing out their love fantasies in front of me, especially the chaplain's golden children. I swear, if either one of them makes the slightest of missteps, I'm going to throw the book at them just to prove that I can.

Sara: Girl, you're not thinking straight. You do that, and you'll be starting an all-out war against Deacon Schmidt. He's already taken down the HR director TWICE, plus upbraided the Board of Trustees to get the new Code of Student Conduct passed. That doesn't count whatever influence he has over members of the SGA. He's got a lot of power on this campus and it's starting to get in the way of how other departments and offices do their jobs.

Lauren: Hopefully this road trip will turn out better than the spring break one, both in terms of our play and the off-the-field shenanigans of the players. The parents of two of our freshmen are putting together a post-game soiree at the home of one of them, which will be a nice break for the girls.

Lauren and Sara threw out their trash and left Albrecht to return to their offices in Buuck. Denise and Abby debriefed with each other over what they heard, then resolved to let the people they knew on each of the teams (Julie for Abby, Cali for Denise) about what was said.

**********

Marc dialed up Laurie on Skype to talk to her and Matt about a number of subjects.

Laurie: To what do I owe the pleasure of this invasion into my quiet evening?

Marc: First, I wanted to find out if you were going to the Trinity/Macalester game tomorrow.

Laurie: We're planning on it. Taking Matt and Sam with me.

Marc: OK. I'll let Erin and Steph know you'll be there so they can seek you out after the game. There is going to be a post-game gathering at the house of one of the players' parents in Minnetonka, to which all Thunder supporters are invited. It'd be a good way for Matt to get to know some of the student-athletes and for you to become acquainted with the Sommers and Hoffmans. Their daughters are together, so Matt better not be thinking about making a play for one of them. I'd also say be sure to have an extra pair of drawers on you in case Erin and Emily decide to go silly with the one-liners.

Laurie: I'll be prepared.

Marc: Can you get your little nerd onto the screen? Being that he is officially coming to Trinity, I should lay out the rules of the road before he comes here in July.
Laurie told Matt that Marc wanted to talk to him. He sat down in front of his mom's laptop to speak with his uncle.

Matt: Greetings, Marc.

Marc: Shave, son, seriously! If you can't grow it right, you shouldn't have it. Anyways, I wanted to give you a bit of a preview of how life will be down here when you start at Trinity in August.

Matt: Thanks! What do I need to know?

Marc: First, my job at the school has responsibilities in a number of areas. Because of that, I am trusted by the bishop to not use my access improperly. If you happen to get in trouble with the law or with Residence Life or Student Affairs, I can't step in and help you unless the transgression involves either a student-athlete, someone who is part of the Peer Ministry Alliance, or a person in the candidacy process.

Matt: But you CAN help me stay out of trouble by letting me know the unwritten rules around campus, right?

Marc: Yes. As it relates to tomorrow, know that more than half the team is together, and others are attached. Don't go chasing without knowing what's what.

Matt: More than half, with each other?!?!

Marc: Yes. 14 of the 24.

Matt: Guess I need to be pretty careful, then.

Marc: I won't be helicoptering you or lawnmowing or snowplowing for you. If you want a good idea of how I will act, ask Erin tomorrow. Rather, let your mom start that conversation with her and you chat up her girlfriend, Steph, about riding in my shadow. Both of them can advise you on how to get on my good side, stay on it, and how one can get on my s*** list.

Matt: Got it.

Marc: Unlike what you might think, I will not push you into being involved religiously here. Freshmen tend to either gravitate to it or run for the hills when they get to college, but the best thing to do is just investigate what's around you and see if it fits with what you want or believe. Any questions?

Matt: Not at the moment. I'll probably have a few when I come down for Pre-Orientation. Thanks for the chat and the primer.

Marc: You're welcome, goofy nephew.

Matt got up and told Laurie that he was finished. She returned to the laptop and she and Marc talked for a few more minutes before ending the call.
The Trinity Lutheran women's lacrosse team gathered in the Buuck Athletic Center parking lot to embark on their second road trip of the season, this time to Macalester College in St. Paul, MN. A handful of students (Corey, Kevin, Jessie, and Alyssa) had arisen early to see off their favorite players. Alyssa gave Kristie a peck on the lips and Sam one on the nose, then told the two to kick butt and play their best. Kevin got a picture of the squad that he planned to submit with a recap of today and Saturday's games for Monday's edition of The Trinity Times. Jessie gave Becca a hug, then was embraced by her two main women (Erin and Steph). Corey wished Ali well and squeezed her hand. The players loaded the bus and found their preferred seating companions in relative short order. Once the coach was on the interstate, the conversations began.

Steph McNamara (to Kristie): Guess I'm going to have to get used to seeing you and Alyssa being affectionate. Same with Sam and her being cute and extra-friendly.

Kristie: Sam and I need to help you find someone. Anyone on-campus you want us to check out?

Steph M.: Not really. I've seen what all is out there already and nothing really stirs my pot. The two of you were assigned to Danny Coleman from Fremd on Recruit Day, right?

Sam: Yes. You know her from the Chicago circuit, right?

Steph M.: A bit, but not as well as others because we're two years apart.

Kristie: I could see her as a possible someone for you. Cheery personality like Erin and Lauren, plus just as cute in her own impish way, I'd say. She'd be a calming presence for you, unlike Sam or I, the same way Erin is for goalie Steph and Lauren reins in Kelley. Who knows if she goes that way, though. I'll see if Sarah can reach out and invite her to one of our games in Chicago.

Steph M.: Thanks, Kratch.

Lauren and Kelley were curled up together near the back, trying to pick up a bit more sleep. Christen and Julie were also attempting to gain some more rest over the five-plus hour trip to the Twin Cities. Lindsey and Emily were listening to a playlist on the latter's iPhone as part of their pre-game routine, which Coach Heberlein noticed and thought it cute that the roommates got along so well. As the bus passed Johnson Creek, Megan noticed a familiar car driving alongside the bus and pointed it out to Jess, mentioning that it was Shelley's.

Jess: That's not going to be good if she is planning to follow us up to Macalester and then possibly end up at the post-game gathering at the Sommers' place.

Megan: Dang right. Should we tell anyone, at least to give fair warning in case she IS going to St. Paul?

Jess: Probably should tell Steph Lafleur and Sarah, so both are prepared.
Megan went to talk to Sarah while Jess walked back to where Steph and Erin were seated.

Jess: Guys, you're not going to believe this, but Shelley is on the road next to us. Megan recognized her car and mentioned it to me.

Erin peeked out the window and saw a late-model Acura in the left lane, but couldn't get a really good look inside it to see if Shelley was driving it.

Erin: Just what we DON'T need! Between the post-game at Emily's parents' place and Steph and I meeting Marc's sister and her kids, she could stir up a lot of tension and undesirable crap. Wait a minute....wouldn't the travel ban also preclude her from staying with us at the hotel or partaking of our post-game meal?

Jess: I really do not know. Maybe fire off something to one of the people back at Trinity and see if you get an answer.

Erin took a couple of minutes to determine where she could get the best answer, then decided to walk up and ask Sarah to inquire with Gavin via email, sending her a bcc so she could pass the note onto Marc and Dani. Once that was accomplished, she went back to her seat and waited for a response, watching some YouTube videos on her tablet in the interim.

**********

Sarah received an answer from Gavin just before the team took its meal stop in Eau Claire. In short, he said that she could not partake of the team's official pre-game or post-game meal, nor stay with the team at the hotel (she could get a room of her own, however). In this case, since the post-game meal was not being provided by the team but rather a third party, she could be part of it provided invitations were extended beyond the team and coaches. She went back and informed Erin of what she learned, then was informed that it looked like Shelley had pulled off around Portage and she hadn't seen her since. Both women crossed their fingers and hoped the stubborn freshman had turned back or gone elsewhere.

**********

The Thunder were in pre-game warm-ups when Laurie, Matt, and Sam arrived at Macalester Stadium. They looked up into the stands and saw a small contingent with Trinity Lutheran attire. She and the kids climbed the stairs and sat down behind the group.

Laurie: Nice day for a game. Not as bad as I was expecting for mid-March.

Jane Sommer: Yeah. I was worried when I saw the schedule at the start of the semester and saw the date of the match against Macalester.

Linda Hoffman: Do you have a daughter on one of the teams?

Laurie: I guess she would be my godniece (?). My brother's goddaughter and her girlfriend both play for Trinity. Guessing you each have one with the Thunder from your gear.

Jane: Yes. Mine is #16 and Linda's is #7. By the way, I'm Jane.

Laurie extended her hand to Jane, which she shook. "Laurie, and these are my kids, Matt and Sam. Do you have a program so I know who I should be watching?"

Linda handed Laurie her program, which she looked over briefly. "It looks like the two I need to watch are #17 and #1."
Linda: Ahhhh. Erin and Steph. Those two give our pair a run for the money in the perfect-together department. Erin's also about as funny as Jane's daughter, Emily, but the girls say neither of them can keep up with Trinity's chaplain. He's like...

Laurie: Mel Brooks and Bill Cosby rolled into one, right?

Jane: Right.

Matt: Good old uncle Marc.

Linda (to Laurie): The chaplain's your brother?!

Laurie: Guilty, and Matt is starting at Trinity in the fall, hoping that Marc's humor and bull-in-a-china-shop demeanor rubs off on him. When Marc and I bet on the Super Bowl, Matt's suggestion for a prize was a date with Erin. You can figure out how far THAT idea got.

Mark Hoffman: Nowhere, I'm sure.

Laurie: One point for the dad. You with Jane or Linda?

Mark: Linda. Jane's husband, Bill, is back at their place getting things ready for the team's arrival after the game.

Laurie: Marc mentioned the post-game get-together last night when he Skyped us to find out if we were coming to the game and to give Matt a bit of a primer of what he can expect come August. He also told me that your daughters were together, so Matt better not try being Rico Suave with either of them.

Sam: Mom, you know as well as I do that my darling brother doesn't have any game, unlike our stepbrother.

Jane and Linda chuckled at how Sam ratted Matt out.

Linda: Game is about to start. We'll chat some more at the half.

Steph McNamara won the draw and passed the ball to Megan, who sent it back to Sam. From there, the ball was passed onto Erin, who ran about 15 yards before delivering a laser to Kristie. She brought the ball into the attacking zone and held it up so the rest of their front seven could join her and get set up around the 12-meter arc. A number of passes back and forth between Kristie, Lauren, Jess, and Megan eventually opened up an alley where Lindsey was able to take a pass from Jess and fire a shot over her shoulder for the opening goal. That would be one of the Thunder's few highlights in the first half as the Scots meticulously carved up their defensive alignment, taking a 11-4 lead after thirty minutes. Lauren decided to once again switch up her formation, relying on a 3-5-3 that brought in Andi for Ali, added Emily to the left side of the back line in place of Kristie, and pushed Erin up a bit. Megan and Jess went over how the back five needed to play so they wouldn't be caught with eight in the box on offense. The deeper push from the flanks proved somewhat productive, but the class of the Scots made any chance of a comeback by Trinity a hard ask. When the final whistle blew, the Thunder's losing streak had reached four games with a 20-9 setback.

Macalester 20 Trinity 9 (Lindsey Hoffman 2 goals, Savannah Johnson 2 goals, Sofia Hernandez 1 goal/1 assist, Christen Prince 1 goal, Steph McNamara 1 goal, Lauren Chandler 1 goal, Kelley Ochowicz 1 goal, Megan Racicot 3 assists, Kristie Mueller 2 assists, Morgan Brooks 1 assist, Andi Susskind 1 assist, Jess Fisher 1 assist)

**********
At the Sommers' house, the lacrosse team, coaches, and supporters were welcomed by a spread of hamburgers, hot dogs, bratwurst, chips, cookies, and beverages. Erin and Steph were entertaining Matt and Sam, introducing them to some of their teammates and making sure they were enjoying themselves. Laurie spoke with Lindsey and Emily briefly along with Christen and Sofia. Following that, she rejoined the older set and coaches.

Lauren Heberlein (to Linda and Jane): I have to give your daughters a lot of credit for how they've done so far this year on and off-the-field. They've been exceptional teammates, look to have a great friendship and roommate relationship, and haven't caused me much if any consternation, unlike some of the other freshmen. Seems they have their minds at times on things other than playing, and not necessarily the right things.

Bill Sommer: Like what, Coach?

Lauren: Hooking up with each other. I'm really glad that Emily is not part of that crowd, wanting to eat out one of her teammates like some of the munchers on our team.

Sarah and Laurie heard what Lauren said and shook their heads, knowing just how wrong she was about Lindsey and Emily. Laurie was also a little shocked at her reference to the lesbians on the team.

Mark Hoffman: You don't seem to be much of a fan of gay players or teammates being together.

Lauren: If I knew I wouldn't run afoul of Trinity's and the NCAA’s rules, I'd ask players during recruiting about their sexual orientation and predilections so I could avoid having players on the team who don't measure up to my standards.

Laurie: What would those be?

Lauren: Straight, sort of pretty so the male athletes on campus will be interested in them, and fairly open to using their freedom at school to explore some of the more carnal areas with said male athletes. I have no need for friggers or spray hitters.

Laurie had to bite her tongue so as not to say something she would regret. Meanwhile, Jane asked Linda to stick around after the team left so they and their husbands could talk. Erin, Steph, Matt, and Sam came over to the group, with Laurie asking the pair if they wanted to spend some time with her and the kids before going back to Milwaukee. Erin cleared with Lauren that she and Steph could leave with Laurie for some "family time", promising that they would be back at the Embassy Suites by 10pm curfew.

An accident on I-94 just east of downtown Minneapolis delayed Erin and Steph's return to the hotel. Once Laurie was able to get off the interstate and find an east-west road that would go into downtown St. Paul, she made good time but ended up dropping off Erin and Steph at the Embassy Suites at 10:10. The pair were able to get back to their rooms unnoticed, but bed check had already been done and they had missed it. Lauren went into her room and pulled up the incident report form on her laptop, then typed in the pertinent information and sent it to Deacon Schmidt along with her sanctions for the two players. She asked Sarah to inform the pair in the morning about their suspensions for the match on Saturday against Capital for breaking curfew, then turned in.

Steph McNamara was watching KARE 11 News at 10 while winding down from the long day. Just
before the weather report, anchor Randy Shaver mentioned that a stretch of I-94 East was still impassable due to a three-car pileup involving a cab, a hotel shuttle, and an SUV. Steph asked Sam to pull up Mapquest on her iPad so she could get a bigger picture of the travel snag. Sam handed her the device and she studied the map.

Steph M.: That accident looks like it's right on the path by which Erin and Steph would be coming back to the hotel. Sure hope they got past there before it happened, or they'd probably miss curfew.

Kristie: Coach has to know that they wouldn't be late unless there was a really good reason, and this is a really good reason. Besides, they're with Deacon Schmidt's sister, so that should count for something.

Sam: You'd think, but I heard some third-hand gossip that Coach was looking to go after the pair hard if they slipped up because of her dislike for Marc.

Steph M.: Who from?

Sam: One of Julie's peer minister mentees told her Lauren and the women's soccer coach were talking at the table next to her in Luther's Landing yesterday and brought up "the chaplain's golden children" and how she wanted to bring them down a few notches just to prove that he wasn't all-powerful at Trinity. Also said that she referred to lipsticks and chapsticks and how she'd like to get rid of them.

Kristie: Whoa. Can she actually do that without getting in trouble? Anyways, I hope this newscast will be available online tomorrow in case they did get hung up in it and missed getting back here in time.

There was a small clip of the Macalester/Trinity game near the end of the sportscast, with Kristie's assist on Lauren's goal shown. Once the news ended, Steph turned off the TV and then turned out the lights.
Chapter Summary

Thursday's response to Wednesday night's stumbles.

Over breakfast in the Embassy Suites lobby, Sarah informed Erin and Steph Lafleur of Coach Heberlein's submission to Deacon Schmidt and her decision to suspend the two of them for Saturday's game for breaking curfew. Erin attempted to plead their case to Sarah, telling her about the accident and traffic snarl on I-94 last night, which delayed their return to St. Paul. Sarah told her that she could appeal the decision to Gavin, stating that along with any corroboration to that effect. She also suggested dropping the good chaplain a note about it so he could work some magic on their behalf while they were on the road back to Mequon.

**********

Erin and Steph got on the bus a good ten minutes ahead of the rest of the team, with the spitfire defender feverishly writing an email to Marc with her explanation of last night, hoping that he would believe her and try to get Gavin to overturn the suspension. Kristie, Sam, and Steph McNamara boarded next, with the three of them noticing Erin's stern look and determinedness.

Kristie: Uh-oh. Something has gotten under Erin's skin and she does NOT look happy. Steph, wanna check it out?

Steph walked back and sat down across the aisle from Erin and asked her what had her in a mood.

Erin: Lauren has suspended Steph and I for Saturday's match for missing bed check, and it wasn't our fault. We got stuck in traffic on the way back from the little excursion we took with Marc's sister, nephew, and niece and had to get off the interstate to maneuver around an accident.

Steph M.: So the two of you DID get caught in the one that I saw mentioned on last night's news. Can you look to see if KARE 11 has last night's 10:00 telecast online?

Erin opened a new tab on her Google Chrome browser and went to KARE 11's website. The newscast from last night wasn't on it, but an article detailing the accident was. She copied the address of the article, then pasted it into the email she was writing to Marc.

Erin: No full telecast, but found an article on the accident. Sending the link to Marc as verification of the timeline I laid out.

Steph M.: You've also got others who can vouch for you. I can say I saw it on the news last night, which Kristie and Sam will back since they were in the room at the time.

Steph L.: Thanks, Steph. What changed with you? At first, you were all mean and divisive with the Muellers and by extension everyone around them. Now, it seems you're happier, maybe, and more helpful.

Steph M.: Guess I needed the wake-up call that came on the spring break trip. The talk I had with Kristie and Sam on that Sunday let me finally tell them what I felt and how I'd hurt if something happened to either of them.
Steph L.: Well, thank you for your help in keeping Shelley off my back and possibly getting our suspensions tossed.

Steph M.: We have to stick together since it seems Lauren is getting a bit more loose-lipped about her dislike for teammate relationships and lesbians in general. According to something your buddy Cali's roommate overheard at lunch a couple days ago, she'd like to boot those of us who are openly gay and dating within the team.

Erin finished up her note to Marc, then sent it onto him, offering up a small prayer as well that everything would be resolved so that she and Steph are able to play against Capital.

**********

Marc got into his office just after 9:00 and began by reading through his email. He first looked at the incident report sent last night by Coach Heberlein, then read the response Erin wrote him this morning. He clicked on the link and read over the details mentioned. Marc then wrote her back and said that he would start working backwards from the accident to accumulate enough corroboration to back her and Steph and make it almost impossible for Gavin to not overturn Lauren's decision.

He began the investigation by calling Laurie.

Laurie: Marc, why the early-morning call?

Marc: This isn't social, sis. Erin and Steph were suspended for their team's next game for missing curfew last night. They claimed that they were with you and that you had to go around an accident on the interstate which caused them to get back to their hotel late. I found evidence of the accident, so I need you to confirm they were with you and the timeline they gave me.

Laurie: I asked the two of them if they wanted to go out for some one-on-one time with me and the kids after the post-game barbecue at Emily Sommer's parents' place. While driving them back to the Embassy Suites in St. Paul, we came across a traffic jam caused by a three-vehicle accident on I-94 East just the other side of downtown Minneapolis. I got off the interstate and drove East Franklin Avenue to Franklin Avenue SE across the river to University Avenue West to Jackson Street North which got us within a couple of blocks of the hotel. If we'd been able to stay on I-94, we'd have made it by 9:45. Instead, it was about 10 after 10 when we got there.

Marc: Can you send me those details via email? Having hard copies of the facts will help their appeal. So what did you think of them?

Laurie: Erin is a beast on the field. Steph didn't play, but that's the life of a goalkeeper at times. The two of them are cute together and I HOPE they got it through my son's head that they are in fact gay.

Marc: Speaking of Matt, did you notice him doing much scoping during the game or at the post-game?

Laurie: He seemed a bit intrigued by a couple of the players. Both of them are out of his league looks-wise, but I can see him trying to smooth-talk them once he gets to Trinity in the fall.

Marc: Great...anyways, I have a few more calls to make to pull the whole story together. Take care and I'll let you know the final result.

Laurie: Good luck and tell the girls I hope I'll see them again in the near future.

After Marc hung up with Laurie, he called Jane Sommer to get her input on the timeline. She told him about meeting Laurie, Matt, and Sam at the game and them coming to their place afterwards for
the barbecue. She said that they left around 8:30 with Erin and Steph, who had gotten clearance from Coach Heberlein to spend some family time with them.

Marc: Sounds like everything lines up with what Erin told me and Laurie confirmed. Can you drop me an email with that information so I have it when I filed their appeal with the athletic director?

Jane: Appeal? What happened?

Marc: Erin and Steph missed curfew due to an accident on the interstate and were suspended for Saturday's game by Lauren.

Jane: I saw something about that on the morning news. Glad there were no serious injuries, but it had traffic tied-up for a couple of hours in that section of I-94. I'll write up something, then send it onto Bill and the others to throw in their two cents and forward all of it to you. By the way, I enjoyed talking with your sister and hope your nephew fits in at Trinity like Emily has.

Marc: Thanks. I'll be sure to tell them and I look forward to getting your collective recap of the night.

Jane: Can I ask you something about the program, since you're there and have an inside beat on it through Erin?

Marc: Sure. Might not know the answer, but I'll give you the best info I have.

Jane: Is Lauren a homophobe? Last night, she was complimenting Emily for not being part of the group of players on the team that were hooking up with one another and used a couple of terms that were anti-gay epithets.

Marc: She's got that reputation from a number of things she has said so far this season, but no one has heard anything that would allow me to file a complaint on behalf of the players. Did she use any "magic words" that were clearly anti-lesbian?

Jane: Munchers, for one.

Marc: Which is short for carpet muncher. I take it the others heard this as well?

Jane: Yes. Bill and I along with Linda and Mark Hoffman, Lindsey's parents, talked after the team left about what we heard. I think one of the guys is planning to contact you about it, so be prepared.

Marc: I will be, and I promise you that something will be done about it now that she has said something that can be construed as an actual anti-gay slur.

Marc ended his call with Jane, then left his office for a few minutes to clear his mind and let the wheels of justice turn in his absence.

**********

Mark Hoffman: Deacon Schmidt, this is Mark Hoffman. My daughter, Lindsey, is on the women's lacrosse team at Trinity and I was told that you handled cases of misconduct for the athletic department.

Marc: Yes, Mr. Hoffman. I take it you're calling to talk about what happened last night at the post-game gathering at the Sommers' place.

Mark: Exactly. I heard Lindsey's coach refer to some of her players as munchers and say that she had no use for friggers or spray hitters. That last one is a term I hadn't heard before, so I don't know
necessarily what she meant by it.

Marc: You've heard of switch hitter, right?

Mark: Yes. Someone who goes both ways.

Marc: The baseball idea got expanded a couple of years ago to include pull hitter and spray hitter or hitting to the opposite field. Pull is the normal way for a hitter to take a ball, so it refers to straights. Opposite-field then means going the other way, and spray can mean hitting to all fields or is used as a synonym for opposite-field.

Mark: And friggers means what I think it means, which is someone who digitally stimulates a female?

Marc: Yes. It comes from the notion of a woman masturbating, which is called frigging off. So she used three clear anti-gay slurs in your presence to describe her players and/or your daughter specifically?

Mark: It sounded like she didn't know that Lindsey and Emily were anything more than friends and roommates, which I thought was odd considering they're not really shy about their relationship.

Marc: Jane is supposed to send an email around to you, your wife, and her husband with her impressions of last night along with a timeline of the evening so I can appeal the suspensions of a couple of Lindsey's teammates for missing curfew due to the three-vehicle accident on I-94.

Mark: OK. Heard about it on the radio on the way to work this morning.

Marc: Can you tack on what you heard from Coach Heberlein to that email so I have a hard copy of it for the formal complaint that will be coming from me on behalf of the players?

Mark: Taking no prisoners on this, are you?

Marc: Not when it involves my surrogate daughter, her partner, and their teammates.

Mark: Right. Your sister fit in quite well with the four of us yesterday. I hope we get a chance to see her again.

Marc: You will. My goofy nephew is coming to Trinity in the fall. I told him not to get any bright ideas about hitting on Lindsey or Emily since I know they're together, which makes Lauren not knowing a real baffler.

Mark: I should let you get back to kicking some tail around campus and I'll get my comments to you once I get Jane's email.

**********

The team got back to campus just shy of 2pm. After storing their equipment in Buuck and their duffel bags in their rooms, Erin and Steph went to Luther to meet with Marc about the appeal. He greeted both of them with hugs and had them sit down across from him at his desk.

Marc: Let's get this mistake of a decision overturned. Here is what I have so far that will be sent on with your appeal:

* A copy of the KARE 11 article on the accident.

* A map of the Greater Twin Cities area denoting the Sommers' place, the hotel, the most likely path
between the two, and the route that Laurie took after confronting the traffic jam.

* A recap of the evening from the Sommers and Hoffmans.

* Laurie's confirmation of your being with her and the kids after leaving the post-game gathering, along with her rendition of the trip to St. Paul.

* Your explanation of the evening.

Erin: DANG! You're not playing around, are you?

Marc: Not in the least. I also got some VERY interesting information from Lindsey and Emily's parents concerning your coach's true feelings about some members of your team.

Steph: Magic words?!

Marc: Yep.

Steph: Cali's roommate apparently overheard Lauren and Coach Manning talking on Tuesday in Luther's Landing and she let slip some of her opinions about the team, including a desire to come down hard on Erin and I if we slipped up because she dislikes you so much.

Marc: Anything anti-gay?

Steph: Referring to some players as lipsticks and chapsticks and wanting to get rid of them.

Marc: I'd consider those slurs, even if she didn't say the word lesbian, because it's inferred.

Erin: Do we have enough to file a complaint?

Marc: I think so. I'd like to hold off on filing it until Monday to see if she makes any additional missteps between now and then. As for the two of you, I will send over the appeal once you leave and I am hoping to hear from Gavin before the end of the day.

Erin: Thank you SO much for first believing us and then putting in the time to gather supporting stories.

Marc: I'm pleased that everything fell together for this to be a slam dunk. Don't worry yourselves about how this will turn out. I'm pretty confident that the totality of the evidence will leave Gavin no choice but to grant your appeal and overturn the suspensions.

Erin and Steph got up to leave Marc's office, thanking him again for his work on their behalf. Marc typed up the last bits of the appeal, then sent everything to Gavin. Following that, he wrapped up his work and headed home.
A quick resolution came on Erin and Steph's appeal, as Gavin overturned their suspensions late Thursday afternoon. Friday's Peer Ministry In-Service ruled the two of them, Julie, and Christen out of Friday's practice, leading Coach Heberlein to test Shelley, Emily, and Becca as possible partners for Sam in center defense and Kristie, Morgan Andringa, and Emily in the left defense position. Following the in-service, the group of students along with Marc and Danielle had dinner with Bishop Emerson and his wife, Lynn, at their home in Greenfield.

**********

As the players arose on Saturday morning in anticipation of that afternoon's match against Capital University, little did they know that it would be a day that would test both their physical and emotional limits. At training table, Sarah announced the starting XII for the match, which had a few changes from the one sent out on Wednesday at Macalester.

---Nicole

Ali----Sam-----Shelley----Emily

----Megan---Jess---Moe

Lauren-Lindsey-Steph M.-Kristie

Sarah: Today's starting lineup is probably the best one we'll have put out since the opener. The formation is basic so the two new defensive starters won't be over their heads from the outset, and the midfield and front line are stable from previous matches. Why she doesn't have Erin or Julie starting today is a bit puzzling. Same for Christen, but I don't think she's really set on which combination of attackers she feels gives us the best chance for victory over the sixty minutes.

Kristie: Those three weren't at practice yesterday due to an all-day in-service for the Peer Ministry Alliance. Maybe Coach is not starting them because of it.

Sarah: Quite possible.

Megan: What do we know about Capital?

Sarah: Based on their first six games, they're a team that scores 18-19 goals a game and gives up 12-13. They play a structured 3-5-3 that is used to take advantage on the flanks in transition, which means our left side is probably going to get a lot of traffic with the two new starters and Moe and Kristie being more offensive-minded. I'm not sure why you take out two starters who have played almost every minute of the last four matches for a pair that aren't even placed in their strongest positions.

Nicole: Can I make a comment? I'm thinking either Coach doesn't know that Capital's strength is on the outside or is trying to prove a point by not starting Erin or Julie as she perceives them to not be
Sarah: Gotta hope she sees the light if we fall behind a bit early. Otherwise, you'll be in for a long day back there.

Shelley had a bit of a smug look on her face over getting the starting nod ahead of her on and off-field rival for the first time this season. In the back of her mind, she hoped that Nicole would be lifted after the first half so she'd have a chance to play with Steph today. As training table broke up, Sarah received a text from Wil saying that he wouldn't make the game due to a pounding hangover from the previous night.

**********

A large group of Trinity lacrosse parents were on-hand today for the inaugural meeting between their Thunder and the Capital Crusaders. Given their linkage as educational partners through the ELCA and Trinity Lutheran Seminary (both schools have admission set-asides for several of the graduate programs at TLS), a long-term scheduling agreement between Trinity and Capital was something that was being considered by Gavin and Dwight Burnham, the athletic director at the Columbus, Ohio-based institution. In the stands, Melissa Mueller was introducing Gina McNamara to the rest of the Thunder throng. Dani and Cali were seated behind Alyssa, the Muellers, and Gina, with the Princes, Johnsons, and Marc and Danielle behind them. Just before opening draw, Monica Hernandez along with Vanessa and Veronica DiGregorio arrived and sat down behind Cody and Stacy Prince. Corey was with Ken and Debbie Kramer, picking the former's brain a bit about Ali's playing style and some of her off-field interests.

Lindsey Hoffman and Taylor Barclay from Capital took the opening draw, which was won by the Crusaders. The unbeaten (6-0) visitors immediately got out on the front foot, taking advantage of the lack of cohesion on Trinity's left side. Kristie and Moe had to play deeper than they'd prefer to give Emily and Shelley additional outlets to move the ball into the neutral zone, which limited the number of attacking forays the Thunder were able to attempt. With the score 12-1 in favor of the Crusaders after 20 minutes, Lauren inserted Julie for Shelley and Savannah for Lauren, moving to a 3-2-3-3 to mirror Capital's formation. The half ended 16-3 with the coach lifting Nicole from the match and tapping Jane to replace her in goal. Other substitutions made included Christen in place of Kristie, Lauren brought back in to spell Lindsey, Becca to take up Jess' deep-laying position in front of the back three, and Morgan Andringa in place of Steph McNamara, which resulted in the following lineup for the final thirty:

-----------------Jane
-----Julie-------Sam------Emily
Ali-----------------------------Morgan A.
-----------------Becca
----Megan--------Moe

Lauren-----Christen-----Savannah

The balance on the field resulted in the Thunder being able to move the ball at a reasonable clip and use their swarming front eight to push the ball up the field. Though being able to get no closer to the Crusaders than eleven points, the team's offensive output was their highest since the 14 goals scored against William Peace on March 12th. The 28-13 defeat extended Trinity's skid to five games and resulted in a lot of long faces leaving Niemoller Field.
Capital 28 Trinity 13 (Lindsey Hoffman 3 goals, Christen Prince 3 goals, Lauren Chandler 2 goals/2 assists, Steph McNamara 2 goals, Megan Racicot 1 goal/3 assists, Becca Curtin 1 goal/1 assist, Savannah Johnson 1 goal, Morgan Brooks 2 assists, Morgan Andringa 2 assists, Sam Mueller 1 assist, Kelley Ochowicz 1 assist, Ali Kramer 1 assist)

**********

The team was seated in the locker room being stared-down by their head coach. While she tried to find the words for this rare post-match review session, a number of the players looked at each other and at the ground waiting for the wrecking ball to swing at them.

Lauren Heberlein: I have NEVER seen a team with which I was associated deliver such an uninspiring defensive performance. NEVER has any team of mine surrender TWENTY-EIGHT GOALS IN SIXTY MINUTES! I guess since SOME PEOPLE CAN'T TELL TIME, all of you had to suffer from my decision to sit them today. (to Erin and Steph L.) Gavin might have cleared you after being awestruck by your insider's detective work, but that did NOT mean that I had to play you. So many beetches in this squad. Can't take direction, can't act normally, can't TURN OFF THEIR FUCKING DESIRE TO FEAST ON EACH OTHER'S CLAMS! How hard can it be to DO YOUR JOB and act like regular student-athletes?! I could probably compile a list of hundreds of jocks in this campus who'd love nothing more than to TAKE YOU TO BED, but NOOOOOOOOOOOO, you just HAVE TO piddle one another! Think you're TOO GOOD for the men here?! Think their dicks don't deserve to penetrate you?! A show of hands, how many of you are screwing one of your teammates?

Erin and Steph Lafleur stood up, followed by Lauren and Kelley. As Coach Heberlein denigrated the four of them for their off-field actions, Andi and Jane rose, then Christen and Julie.

Lauren H.: How DARE YOU embarrass yourselves, your families, this august institution by cavorting with each other. I've had enough of this. Come Wednesday, this kind of thing will BE NO MORE, because I will bench any player from here on out who I find out is frigging someone on the team, with harsher sanctions if it doesn't stop. Have a good evening and I will see you chaps on Monday.

Lauren left the locker room and exited Buuck on the opposite side from where the players' families and friends were waiting for them, eager to get away from the mess she had just caused.

**********

Coach Hawthorne: All hell broke loose in the locker room just now. Stick around if you can, because I think a few of the players will want to talk to you once they're showered and changed.

Marc read Sarah's text and shared the information with those around him. He asked Cody Prince if he and Stacy would be able to take Danielle home as the chaplain would be tied-up for a bit with the players and Sarah, which he said was fine. The first players to emerge from Buuck were Savannah and Maggie, both looking a little shaken. Mark and Denise Johnson embraced the two of them and led them away from the crowd. Out next were Megan, Jess, and Nicole, who caught eyes with Marc. Megan told the other two to head back to Nicole's room and that she'd meet them there in a bit. Kristie, Sam, and Steph McNamara went over to their parents and implored them to get them off-campus so they could decompress from what happened in the locker room. The last ones to leave the athletic center were Sarah, Erin, and Steph Lafleur. The three of them walked over to Marc and were joined by Megan, after which the five of them walked over to Rincker Library and grabbed a study room.

Marc: Who wants to start?
The players looked at each other, with the freshmen deferring to their captain.

Megan: After the game, before we were allowed to shower and change, Lauren had us gather for a post-game review, which is rare since she doesn't much like sticking around after home games. She believes that giving us space after the match led to calmer heads when we saw each other at training the next day. After deriding us for our defensive effort today, she then went after Erin and Steph over the curfew snafu. Then the worst of it happened. She referred to the squad as beetches and clam eaters, suggested that they sleep with the school's male athletes, and closed by asking the players to in effect out themselves.

Sarah: Erin and Steph stood up first, which took a LOT of guts after being benched. A few others stood after that, which led to another diatribe from Lauren. She then threatened to bench players if they were found to be banging one of their teammates. She threw out another anti-gay slur at the team before she walked out of the locker room.

Marc: Between what you've told me and what the Sommers and Hoffmans told me on Thursday, there is more than enough to support Morgan Andringa's original assertion of Lauren's being anti-gay. Nothing will happen until Monday, since the complaints won't get read over the weekend. Use tomorrow to put together your description of her behavior and actions, get as many of your teammates as possible to sign onto it, then send it to me so I can file it on your behalf Monday morning. Sarah, I take it you are ready to go to HR with your own grievance?

Sarah: YES! I'll write up my account of everything I've heard and seen so far this semester, including what she said on Wednesday in front of myself, Emily and Lindsey's parents, and your sister.

Marc: I am deeply sorry that your team has had to deal with someone who clearly holds attitudes and beliefs that don't comport with what Trinity Lutheran University professes. She'll be dealt with, one way or another.

The group left Rincker and went their separate ways, with Marc departing for home, Sarah going to Wil's to check on him, and the other three going to Katharine to meet up with Nicole and Jess.

**********

The Muellers and McNamaras were at Highland House for dinner, the first time the six of them had been together since the fight which followed the parents' last joint visit to Trinity. While eating, Steph and Kristie kept looking at each other, wondering if they should disclose to their parents what was going on in the program. Meanwhile, Sam was distracted by the thoughts running in her head, causing her dad to inquire.

Bob Mueller: Sammy, what's on your mind? It seems like you're just pushing around your food and are a million miles from here mentally.

Sam: Our coach read us the riot act after the game, blaming anyone she could for our performance. She got personal about it with a couple of our teammates, then insulted most of us by using some anti-gay slurs and rhetoric. She also threatened to bench players she found fooling around with others on the team.

Gina McNamara: None of you three are together any more, right?

Steph M.: No, Mom, but she also told us we should be boinking the male athletes on campus instead of being stuck-up and "eating one another's clams".

Melissa Mueller: Disgusting. I hope the powers at Trinity take her to task.
Kristie: Some of our teammates and the assistant coach met with Deacon Schmidt after the game to go over what was said and to file a complaint with the athletic director.

Steph M.: I think I need to catch up with one of them when we get back to campus, because I might have something that will help them.

Steph pulled her phone out and handed it to Kristie. "Pull up the file titled boom." Kristie clicked on the icon, which started an audio file of Lauren's tirade from the locker room. She quickly turned it off so the rest of the restaurant didn't come to hear it, then passed the phone back to Steph.

Kristie: How did you get THAT?!

Steph: Once she started railing, I pulled out my phone and started recording, just in case she said anything that went too far.

Sam: You recorded her entire speech?!

Steph: Not all of it. I didn't get to recording until she started in on Erin and Steph for Wednesday night, but I got the rest of it, which includes the slurs and threats.

Steph gave her phone and her earbuds to Gina to listen to the file. Gina gave one of the buds to Melissa and were dumbfounded to hear their daughters' coach spout such ludicrous nonsense about them and their team.

Gina: I hope she gets severely reprimanded if not out-and-out fired.

Kristie: Marc will be going for the throat since she decided to go after Erin and Steph. I don't know how fast it will happen, but Coach will be dealt with, you can be guaranteed of that.

As dinner wrapped up, the parents discussed the possibility of traveling to Kalamazoo for next Sunday's game against the Hornets. Their daughters were excited about the idea and mentioned the rest of the weekend's festivities (the banquet on Friday night at CUAA along with Saturday's game against the Cardinals) in case they wanted to come to either of those events. After their parents dropped them off on campus, the three Chicagoans went to Katharine to meet the handful of players already there. Steph told them that she had recorded the outburst in the locker room, which Megan said she'd like to attach to the complaint they would file with Gavin. The eight players there (Megan, Jess, Nicole, Erin, Steph Lafleur, Kristie, Sam, and Steph McNamara) sent out texts to check up on the rest of the team and to fill them in on what they were doing. Those gathered agreed to hold a meeting at Katharine tomorrow night so the team could debrief about today and set a course of action for the upcoming week.
A restful Sunday morning and afternoon belied what was to come that evening when the women's lacrosse team gathered at Katharine Hall to talk about the previous day's locker room tirade from their coach. Megan spent a portion of the afternoon typing up a letter of grievance that would be forwarded to Gavin by Marc along with what evidence he had accumulated over the past two months. During the meeting, nearly every player supported the wording but only 17 of the 23 gathered were willing to sign it (Shelley chose not to come to campus, while Andi, Jane, Sofia, Maggie, and Savannah feared retaliation from Lauren if they did sign and Nicole believed that she would indirectly benefit from any decision Gavin or others made regarding Lauren's job status, thus creating a conflict of interest). Following the meeting, Megan attached the 17 players' names to the letter and sent it along with Steph McNamara's recording to Marc.

**********

Knowing that his schedule for the day was heavier than a normal Monday, Marc left for campus around 7:30, hoping to get the lacrosse team's grievance sent to Gavin before his meeting with Sarah at 9:00. Before leaving, he told Danielle what had happened after the game on Saturday and what the team and Sarah were planning to do this morning in response.

Danielle: Is their coach going to be fired as a result of this?

Marc: That's not my decision to make, and knowing what I know about Gavin, he will try to find a way to not do that. I'm not sure he'd even be willing to suspend her for the rest of the season, which would be a fair punishment for what she has said in multiple forums the past two months or so and the various Title IX, ADA, EEOC, and civil rights violations of those comments. My job here is to advise the players and their assistant coach on how to get action and what steps to take if they're dissatisfied with Gavin or HR's response.

Danielle: Remember that, no matter how much more about this stuff you know than the others, you can't just bully them into doing your will. Cajole, use that intelligence of yours to persuade them to your line of thinking.

Marc: There is one trump card I have up my sleeve in case things run off the rails and Lauren tries to duck meaningful punishment by resigning or being dismissed. It's a request for a show-cause order.

Danielle: What would that do?

Marc: It would make her have to serve the penalty she would have received while at Trinity if she were to take another coaching job while it is in effect. What it will more than likely do is bar her from coaching elsewhere until it expires. It's used primarily to keep coaches who commit major violations from escaping the NCAA's punishment for them by leaving for another job. No one has tried to transfer internal discipline, or projected internal discipline, from one institution to another nor has there been an attempt to mete out an "if you stayed" punishment that can be passed along.

Danielle: Don't go off half-cocked with this and run yourself in circles.

Marc: I promise I won't. Get the players' complaint in, help Sarah get hers in to HR, then wait and see what they do with them. I'll be home at a normal hour unless Gavin or Cheryl end up calling a meeting for after-hours, and I'll drop you a note if that's the case.

Danielle: Have a good day. Love you.
Marc: Love you, too.

**********

Upon arriving at his office, Marc pulled up Megan's email and the recording from Steph, then listened to it and jotted some notes as to its content. He then forwarded to Gavin those along with his file of Lauren's statements and actions which supported the players' claim of homophobia and the coach's professed desire to violate the educational and civil rights of some of her players. While waiting for Sarah to arrive, Marc searched the Office of Civil Rights database for exemptions requested by and granted to Concordia-Wisconsin, Carthage, and Trinity Lutheran in the past four years, finding ones related to pay equity, the ban on women in the Pre-Seminary program, and standards related to personnel decisions (all filed for by Concordia). He printed off the exemptions and filed them for future reference. At 9:00, Sarah stopped into Marc's office with her complaint, wishing to have it proofread and beefed-up.

Marc: The personal story of being "closeted" by Lauren's anti-gay rhetoric and actions is thorough and well-supported. The claim of a "hostile work environment" is founded given the cause and effect of her comments and decisions related to you. The only thing that I *think* should be added is your own interpretation of how Lauren's positions and beliefs have affected the team and any biases one way or the other she has shown in the administration of her duties as head women's lacrosse coach.

Sarah nodded and rattled off a few sentences from the top of her head regarding that question, which Marc transcribed and sent to her via email for inclusion in the grievance. After both of them seemed satisfied with the document, Sarah saved the document, then attached it to an email directed to Dr. Baines.

Sarah: Whew. That's done. Thanks for your help. When will I know if action is being taken?

Marc: Hopefully today since you play again tomorrow and sanctions need to be meted out before you leave for Ann Arbor on Friday.

Sarah: If you were them, what would you do?

Marc: Immediate suspension for the CUAA and Kalamazoo games, to give myself a couple of days to work through the complaints and comments with the petitioners before coming to one of several possible outcomes. As of now, I would be looking at a three-part sanction. First would be dismissal, followed by determining an "if you stayed" punishment that would have been served if not for the dismissal, which would then be part of a request for a show-cause order with the NCAA, so that she can't use the release from her contract to circumvent the sanctions should she be hired elsewhere in the near future.

Sarah: I keep wondering whether you are mean, sadistic, or just tough-as-nails. This seems like overkill, but maybe it's not and I've just been sheltered from the negative side of college athletics.

Marc: Sometimes, people need to face the full consequences of their actions, and that's what this three-part sanction would do. She would lose her job and then carry a millstone with her to her next destination. Right now, I would fight for an eighteen month show-cause order, which would be the equivalent of two years since it would run through most of 2020 and I can't see anyone desiring to hire her for the 2021 season knowing that she'd have to sit several games at the start of it. Now, we need to talk about you taking on the reins of women's lacrosse, at least temporarily, since any suspension would put you in charge.

Sarah: I haven't thought that far ahead yet. Just wanted to get the complaint in, support the players in their grievance, and get on with the job at hand.
Marc: You'll need to start thinking about it, because that decision could come as soon as today.

Sarah took a huge breath, then told Marc that she needed to find some quiet space on campus to start working through the potential transition. Marc offered himself as a sounding board if she wanted to talk through some of it. He also suggested she talk to Dani as well as Hope Stevens, who has Division I collegiate playing experience on top of her experience in the residence halls at Concordia/Trinity. Sarah thanked Marc for his input and suggestions, then left his office and went to Rincker Library to do some deep thinking and a bit of planning in case the hammer comes down on Lauren.

**********

Just before Noon, Gavin called Marc to request his presence at a 3pm meeting with him, Cheryl Baines, and Jamie Krueger in the Friends of Concordia Room in Buuck, where they would air out the two grievances filed that morning and come up with a solution to the firestorm that has become the women's lacrosse program. Following his weekly meeting with the peers, Marc went back to his office and typed up a brief list of points he wanted to make before the other three on behalf of the athletes and Sarah. With some time on his hands before needing to go to Buuck, the chaplain went through the Urban Coaching Project module to pull up the lesson plan entitled: You're In Charge, Now What?! hoping that passing it onto Sarah would help her find a starting point to dealing with her (expected) new-found responsibilities. Rather than wait around for 3pm to creep up, Marc left for Buuck around 2:30. On his way to the meeting room, he crossed paths with several members of the lacrosse team, who all seemed a little bit edgy about their upcoming practice. He gave them some words of encouragement and assured them that he was hell-bent on bringing peace and stability back into their program by way of the decision to which he, Cheryl, Gavin, and Jamie would come.

**********

Gavin Winchester: Before we get to parsing through what needs to be done, I would like to catch everyone up on what has happened that forced me to call the four of us together. This morning, Deacon Schmidt, in his role as the athletic department's magistrate, sent me a grievance against head women's lacrosse coach Lauren Heberlein filed with him by seventeen members of the team along with evidence of wrongdoing and inappropriate actions going back to the beginning of the term. Later in the day, Sarah Hawthorne, assistant women's lacrosse coach, filed a grievance with Human Resources against Coach Heberlein, claiming the existence of a hostile work environment on the basis of her sexual orientation. First, I will ask Deacon Schmidt to give a short summary of the claims made by the student-athletes, then have Dr. Baines do the same on behalf of Coach Hawthorne.

Marc Schmidt: Over the course of the past two months or so, the women's lacrosse team has been subjected to frequent instances of sexual harassment by Coach Heberlein through the use of anti-gay rhetoric and slurs and the encouragement of her athletes to make themselves available sexually to the male athletes in their presence. These occurrences have grown more hostile and direct in the past two weeks, with the use of the terms "munchers", "frigging", "spray hitters", "chapsticks", and "lipsticks" in conversation with other members of the athletic department and parents of student-athletes. The most recent of her transgressions was a tirade which occurred in the locker room following the team's game on Saturday afternoon. One of her players recorded it, which I submitted with the grievance this morning. Gavin, can you play it for the two ladies? I should warn you, it is pretty crude.

Gavin played the recording of Lauren's diatribe for Cheryl and Jamie. Both women were shocked by the language she used and its pointedness at specific players.

Cheryl Baines: That lecture makes Coach Hawthorne's filing all the more incriminating. She
mentioned that Coach Heberlein's continued references to gay players being undesirable and how the team should handle their need for physical intimacy had created a hostile work environment for her as a bisexual woman, forcing her to closet herself lest she run afoul of her boss's beliefs and attitudes. She brought up slurs and anti-gay rhetoric Lauren used in conversations with her, which further intimidated her from being out to the team.

Jamie Krueger: As Senior Woman Administrator and the member of the athletic department which oversees the women's lacrosse program, it is my belief that Coach Heberlein has sullied the program to such an extent that the only possible way to restore it to some level of normalcy is by dismissing her and placing Coach Hawthorne in charge for the remainder of the season.

Cheryl: That would also be my determination in handling the HR grievance, that I would recommend a permanent separation of her from Trinity Lutheran University, with cause for dismissal existing.

Gavin: I think the two of you are jumping to a quick resolution and trying to get a pound of flesh from someone who has served the ELCA lacrosse community admirably both at Carthage and now at Trinity. She has always held these beliefs and asked me before taking the job here if she would be allowed to maintain those beliefs, to which I told her yes. As the school's governing bodies have made changes as to the range of thought that is considered acceptable, Lauren has been placed into a bit of a quandary and she would have a valid claim for religious discrimination if I fire her for being anti-LGBTQ. Do I think she should continue to lead the women's lacrosse program given her transgressions? No, I don't. My preference is that she serve out the season with no extension of her current contract following it.

Marc: What would her here-and-now sanction be for the missteps?

Gavin: That I do not know yet.

Jamie: I think we have to consider some form of suspension, just to separate her from the players temporarily and allow the upcoming road trip to Michigan this weekend to not become another forum where she can intimidate those under her direction.

Gavin: I don't trust Sarah to be in charge at this point given her lack of experience.

Marc: Who else on this campus has the knowledge of the sport for you to entrust?

Gavin: No one, but that doesn't mean that I am willing to put her front-and-center and give her the reins of the program after seven games as an assistant.

Marc: Then place someone from the athletic department alongside her to maintain oversight. I had to deal with that my first couple of matches filling in for other coaches. The school sent along teachers to assume liability on its behalf as I wasn't under contract at the time, still being a student. Do that if you're concerned about her handling the gig.

Jamie: Not a bad idea.

Marc: One more thing I'd like to add. If Lauren ends up choosing to resign to avoid serving some form of suspension or other sanctions levied by yourself, Gavin, or if her conduct rises to the level where dismissal is warranted, the school should seek a show-cause order from the NCAA.

Cheryl: I'm unfamiliar with that term. Can you clarify what a show-cause order would do?

Jamie: It would require any university that hires her within a certain length of time of her leaving Trinity to enforce the sanctions which Gavin would have levied on her. It is used most often in
dealing with football and basketball coaches who leave one job for another to avoid sanctions for NCAA violations. The truth is that most schools won't hire someone under a show-cause order and thus it becomes an NCAA-wide suspension for the duration of the order.

Gavin: Again, this is something that seems to go a bit too far in handling the situation at hand. I would like all of us to attend tomorrow’s game against Augsburg, after which I will levy whatever sanctions I deem appropriate. Everyone in?

Marc: I'll be there already because of Erin, so I'm in.

Cheryl: It might be a nice break from the grind of the office to get out and support the team.

Jamie: I'm in, if only because I know that I'll have to inform the team of what will happen after you pass judgment on Lauren.

Gavin called the meeting to a close and the four bigwigs went their separate ways for the evening.
Lauren FINALLY goes too far.

The tension was palpable at the start of training table on Tuesday, with no news having been passed onto either the players or Sarah as to the status of their grievances against Lauren. Some of the players began talking among themselves as to how they would handle future outbursts against them.

Nicole: Lauren has really lost it, and I for one don't want to deal with her. I can probably get away with the most blowback against her since she is very unlikely to pull me from games or bench me and ride Steph and Jane the rest of the season. You've seen how little they've played so far and I don't expect that to change once we get into the conference schedule.

Steph M.: After all the comments and sniping she has done at me since Day One, I've had it. Next time she goes after me, she'll get a response she might not expect. Nothing physical, but a screed that will make her think twice before laying into anyone.

Megan: Anyone know what came of yesterday's meeting between Gavin, Jamie, Marc, and the head of HR? Erin?

Erin: I didn't see him before he left campus, so I don't know what course of action they may have chosen.

Sarah: I'm not sure I should mention this, but when I spoke with Marc yesterday morning before filing my grievance with Dr. Baines, he advised me to prepare for being in charge on this weekend's trip to Ann Arbor and Kalamazoo, as he would recommend a suspension for those two games to give us distance from the turmoil and the administrators more time to come to a long-term decision on her.

A number of cheers went up in the semi-private room where the team was dining, with Nicole and Megan the first to stand up and show their support for Sarah should this potential development come to pass.

Sarah: I have to tell you, I don't know how I will handle things if I'm given the opportunity to lead this collection of exceptional women. With apologies to Jerry Maguire, help me help you. Give me suggestions. Offer feedback, both good AND bad. Allow me to grow into the position. Saying that, if I am put in charge for the weekend, there will be changes from how the last two road trips went and how we've been lined-up on the field. I am also considering the possibility of holding out one of our seniors for each of the matches to assist me on the sidelines.

Nicole heard this and her mind went back to the conversation she had had with Sarah before the game against Carroll when she told her that, were it her decision, she would only play one of the two matches on the trip. Seeing her line of thinking meshing with her words from 10 days ago gave Nicole a level of trust in Sarah being up to the challenge that would come if she were thrust into the head coaching job unexpectedly, which she hoped to share with the rest of the team should it happen.
Near the top of the stands at Niemoller Field, Gavin, Cheryl, Jamie, and Marc watched pregame warm-ups for the Thunder, looking at the general demeanor of the team and its interaction with its coaches. The team's spirit seemed good, but there was a noticeable level of animus on exhibit as Lauren walked around their half of the field talking with several of her players. On the other side of the field, Augsburg's warm-up was crisp, clean, focused, and with a clear sense of joy in the endeavor. Alyssa had arrived early to hold down a row of seats for Kristie and Sam's parents, Cali, Jessie, Liz Edwards, Dani, and Wil. As the others showed up, Alyssa filled them in on what she had seen thus far. Dani asked Alyssa if she had seen Marc yet, since it was odd that he wasn't yet here. Alyssa looked back and pointed him out to her.

Melissa Mueller: Any reason why Deacon Schmidt is sitting up there today? I've liked having him down with us since he seems to know a lot about what's going on with the team.

Dani: He's a former coach and coaches ALWAYS like to watch warm-ups from high up. You see a whole lot more that way and notice things that you can't from further down.

Alyssa: Also look at who's with him. Something must be happening for that group to be together.

Dani: No kidding. After Saturday's locker room meltdown, they must want to get some first-hand perspective on the mess.

Melissa: You mean the tirade that Steph recorded?

Alyssa: You mean the tirade and everything else that had happened last week. Steph recorded it?

Melissa: Yes. She played it for us when we were at dinner after the game. Never heard a coach go off like that on anyone before, and most of it had nothing to do with the game itself. So who are the others with the chaplain?

Dani: The gentleman is Trinity's athletic director, the older woman is the school's VP of Human Resources, and the third is the head volleyball coach and associate athletic director. Bet they're pulling the plug on Lauren after the game.

Bob Mueller: We can only hope so.

Following the national anthem, the starting lineups for today's game were announced. After reciting Augsburg's first XII, Dan Paulson did the same for Trinity Lutheran.


Cali snidely said under her breath, "Not for long", which Dani and Alyssa heard, causing them to nod in tacit agreement. Augsburg won the opening draw and immediately put pressure on Trinity's right side of defense, as an Augie beat Ali and whistled a shot past Nicole. The Thunder made a foray of their own through the tricky ball-handling of Megan, whose too-long through-pass to Christen was scooped up by Augsburg's goalkeeper. The match calmed down considerably after the first several minutes and both teams settled into their standard modes of operation. The two teams
traded tallies for most of the first half, with a wrister from Moe leveling the score at 8 after 20 minutes. The Augies took advantage of Lauren's speed substitutes (Savannah and Sofia in place of Kristie and Lauren, respectively) to play a more physical brand of lacrosse and pull out to a 13-9 halftime lead.

Lauren used her halftime speech to again lay into some of her players, choosing her most recent substitutes as her first victims, which caused Sofia to hyperventilate and Savannah to cower against Morgan Andringa. When she chose to confront Steph McNamara about her lack of physicality against the Augsburg defense, the sophomore forward stood up and unleashed some of her pent-up anger.

Steph M.: Listen here, COACH! I have put up with you degrading my play, making unkind remarks about my friends, even mentally abusing teammates of mine because you won't take responsibility for your own mistakes that have caused on-field problems for our team. I'm GLAD I recorded your post-game tirade on Saturday, and I hope to God that the quartet at the top of the stands today RUNS YOUR ASS OUT OF HERE!

Lauren: Enough! Hit the showers, McNamara, and DON'T be in the locker room when I return after the game.

Steph grabbed her stick and left the field, to the applause of a few of the Thunder faithful in the stands, including the Muellers.

Lauren: Any of you freakish lesbo dykes want to join her?!

Megan and Jess looked at each other and rose. As Megan walked past Lauren, she said to her, "You are done, bitch!", then took Jess's hand and continued on toward Buuck.

The second half began with a slight fire ignited in the Thunder's attack, as goals from Lindsey, Lauren, and Moe had gotten them back within a goal at 14-13. Augsburg quickly extended the lead back to two, which led Lauren to scream at her defenders to "stop acting like a bunch of horned-up friggers and be aggressive for the ball." Nicole gathered her defenders (Ali, Emily, Becca, and Erin) and spelled out what her response to that last insult would be.

Nicole: Fuck it! Remember when I said that I had the greatest ability to defy the coach because she won't pull me. Now is the time to do it. Let Augsburg come at me. We're tossing this one in the trash. Any criticism comes your way, I'll take it on. I have your backs, and I'll be SO happy when we get rid of her and have Sarah in charge.

The four defenders and the goalkeeper let out a small cheer, then returned to their positions. Over the final eighteen minutes, the Augies outscored Trinity, 8-3, to leave Niemoller Field 23-16 winners, raising their record to 5-3 while tacking a sixth straight loss onto the Thunder's resume.

Augsburg 23 Trinity 16 (Steph McNamara 4 goals, Christen Prince 3 goals/1 assist, Lindsey Hoffman 3 goals, Lauren Chandler 2 goals/3 assists, Sam Mueller 2 goals/1 assist, Kristie Mueller 1 goal/4 assists, Julie Jacobsen 1 goal/1 assist, Kelley Ochowicz 3 assists, Morgan Andringa 2 assists, Maggie Dowling 1 assist)

**********

As Gavin left the stands with the others, he confirmed with them what his initial move would be ("giving Lauren the weekend off"). Once outside Niemoller Field, Jamie went straight to the locker room in Buuck, where she was greeted by Megan, Jess, and Steph McNamara. While waiting for the rest of the team to arrive, the four of them talked about what had happened on the sidelines at
Marc and Cheryl talked with Bob and Melissa Mueller, Cody and Stacy Prince, and Dan and Lynelle Ochowicz, filling them in on the current situation. As Lauren exited Niemoller, Gavin intercepted her and the two of them went to the Friends of Concordia room in Buuck.

Gavin: Lauren, seventeen of your players along with your assistant coach have filed grievances against you for sexual harassment, sex discrimination, and violations of the Social Statements on Education and Sexuality and the Draft Statement on Women and Justice. After a meeting with senior administrators and observation of this afternoon's match against Augsburg, I am hereby giving you the weekend off and will have Jamie Krueger oversee the team for the two games in Michigan.

Lauren: You're suspending me, in other words.

Gavin: That is what will be announced tomorrow morning, but it's not an actual suspension. You will still be paid, you will not be denied access to campus, and you will not have my action placed in your personnel file. Things are tense in the program from our perspective and the players need a few days away from you to decompress from some of your actions this past week. Also, this will allow both myself and Dr. Baines a chance to investigate the claims of the complainants and properly determine what if any sanctions will be levied.

Lauren: Will I still have my job come Monday?

Gavin: That is my preference, yes. Whether you'll return to the sidelines this season, however, is up to you.

Lauren: How so?

Gavin: I'd like to place you on medical leave to protect your job and have you away from the players for a couple of weeks.

Lauren: But I don't have a medical problem that would require me to be gone, unless this is just a cover to claim that I have a mental illness that is to blame for the outbursts and anti-gay beliefs I hold.

Gavin: Then you would have to do a "mea culpa" letter of apology or press conference through University Communications, your choice, where you renounce your actions, while also having the opportunity to cast out blame on whoever you feel is responsible for you needing to do this. The other three as well as I know that you could claim religious discrimination if you believe that you were sanctioned because of your beliefs. I'd like that to not happen.

Lauren: So those are the choices? Either go on medical leave or apologize publicly for my comments and actions against LGBT individuals associated with the lacrosse program.

Gavin: It's that, resign, or be fired. The last two options wouldn't necessarily get you off the hook, since two people of the four who are involved in this would like to seek a show-cause order against you so that whatever penalty I would give you follows you if you are hired at another NCAA institution while it is in effect.

Lauren: I'm going to have to think about all of this. The "suspension" for Concordia-Ann Arbor and Kalamazoo is non-negotiable, I take it.

Gavin: Correct. Go home. Have a couple. Relax. Come back to campus tomorrow at 10am and we'll collaborate on a pathway forward.
Lauren left Buuck and went to her car, then drove home. Meanwhile, in the locker room, Jamie was breaking the news to the lacrosse team about Lauren’s suspension and the eventual non-renewal of her contract.

Jamie Krueger: Coach Heberlein is being suspended for the matches against Concordia-Ann Arbor and Kalamazoo. Sarah will be in charge of the team through Monday, and I will be accompanying you to Michigan on behalf of the athletic department. The future of the program will be determined in the next few days, as Gavin, Deacon Schmidt, Dr. Baines from Human Resources, and myself work through resolving the grievances filed. Any questions?

Megan: So Coach will be coming back next Tuesday?

Jamie: Based on Gavin's decision, yes. Of course, things can change between now and then, so don’t take what I'm saying as gospel.

Hearing no other questions for her, Jamie left and Sarah took command of the room.

Sarah: As I said at training table earlier, if I were to be in charge this weekend, I would be making some changes. We will be utilizing a 4-5-2, which takes better advantage of the players on the roster and puts them in their best positions. There will be new roommate assignments, which I hope will meet with everyone's approval. As for the plan to hold out one of the seniors from each of the games to act as my assistant, I will be sitting Nicole for the CUAA game and Megan for the one against Kalamazoo. The past week or two have been extremely stressful for all of us. You have the skill, you have the commitment to go out on Saturday and pull off a win. I plan to loosen the reins a little over the next two days in practice, like the open play scrimmage we did last Monday. You played well enough today to have been in position to win were it not for the last ten minutes of the first half and your seizing up mentally about halfway into the second half. Again, I may make mistakes in managing this upcoming week, but I will always have your best interests in mind. Now get out of here and enjoy the rest of the evening. Thunder on three. One, two, three.

ALL: THUNDER!

Before stripping out of their gear, a number of the players went up to Sarah and gave her words of encouragement along with their verbal support of what she was planning to do while at the helm. Once all the players had departed from Buuck, Sarah left and was greeted by Wil outside the building. She told him what had come to pass, to which he responded by giving her a kiss on the cheek and congratulating her on the temporary promotion. As she was walking to the parking garage, Sarah sent Dani a message with what had happened and told her she'd like to meet up tomorrow morning to get some help in planning out the logistics of the upcoming weekend.
A new era begins on two fronts at Trinity.

Lauren returned to campus on Wednesday morning for her meeting with Gavin. Over the course of forty-five minutes, the two of them went back and forth with threats thrown in both directions about the airing of indiscretions each had committed over the past several months. Rather than risk the possibility of a worse outcome on either side, the pair settled down and negotiated a compromise that appealed to both and would keep the nooses off their necks by way of a non-disclosure agreement. Gavin (on behalf of Trinity Lutheran) and Lauren agreed to part ways "by mutual agreement", with the latter being bought out of her contract ($53,750 covering 15 months), given six months of severance pay at 80% of her salary ($17,200), and $15,000 of bonus compensation in recognition of her three years of above-average work at Carthage. The non-disclosure agreement prevented Gavin from: discussing the financial terms of the separation with anyone outside of the university president and compliance; providing the cause of said separation including anything in Lauren's personnel file (such as the pending grievances); and giving to any third party any information regarding Lauren's disciplinary record concerning her team. As for Lauren, the NDA forbid her from: acknowledging the receipt of a "going-away" package; discussing the reason behind her departure; suing the university on the grounds of wrongful dismissal or religious discrimination; and disclosing any information regarding the athletic department to any outside agency. The two of them put together a joint press release that, at the conclusion of their meeting, was handed to Sports Information Director Elly Dismore for publication on TrinityThunder dot com and distribution to all media outlets in the Greater Milwaukee Area.

As registration for Fall 2019 classes began on Monday, Marc used a portion of his homily to pitch the university's new certificate in Practical Ministry. While listening to the chaplain's plug and the benefits of picking up the courses, associate athletic director Jamie Krueger thought about whether she should consider auditing some of the courses to better acquaint herself with ELCA doctrine (she was raised LCMS and attended Concordia-St. Paul for undergrad). Making a note to bring it up with Marc at Lunch Bunch, she returned her thoughts to the service, which was now at the Prayers of the People. Following the Benediction and Sending, Jamie, Sarah, and Dani went up to the altar and asked Marc if the four of them could meet tomorrow morning after soccer practice to get some advice if not help in plotting out the lacrosse team's upcoming road trip. He gladly offered his assistance and had them pencil in a 10am meeting at his office.

Jamie Krueger (to Marc): I was listening to your pitch about the Practical Ministry certificate and was wondering if the courses would be available to post-graduates as well as undergrads.

Marc: You considering it? I should warn you, they are 100 and 200 level courses, so you won't be able to pick up graduate credit for them.

Jamie: I am aware of that. It's been more than a few years since my undergrad days, so I'm not as sharp on the theology and doctrine as I used to be, plus the changeover here from LCMS to ELCA
means that the interpretation of some of it is different than what I took in my past.

Marc: Where did you do your undergrad?

Jamie: Concordia-St. Paul.

Marc: So Division II athlete before going into coaching. Any stops between there and here?

Jamie: No. Came here as a graduate assistant while I worked on an MA in Sport and Entertainment Management, then a year as a full assistant before moving up to the head job. Became assistant AD four years ago, then moved up to associate after the rest of the staff left for Ann Arbor last summer. This is my third year as SWA. With Gavin having come in, I don't know when the door might open here for me to move up, and I want to do more than just coach and watch over the women's sports programs.

Marc: So getting the certificate and consecration would help you do more within the athletic department and the university as a whole, then. You might be able to pass out of most of the courses based on what you would have taken at CSP. Can you send me a list of your undergraduate religion courses as well as a link to the course catalog? I'll give it a once-over against the Diakonia curriculum and have Tom Sinclair compare it to the four courses for the certificate, then together we'll decide what if anything you would need to take to be eligible for consecration.

Jamie: I'll bring it to you when we meet tomorrow.

Marc: What would you like to do with your knowledge and the designation?

Jamie: Make religion more meaningful within the athletic department.

Marc: I hear you. One of the issues that we discussed when founding the Sectarian Action Committee within United Soccer Coaches was how non-religious players were coming to their schools to play. Another was the conflict between a person's beliefs and those of the institution, which I think we saw in the way things played out with Lauren Heberlein. She believed certain things, which Gavin was OK with when he hired her at Carthage, but the changes we made up here last semester made her feel like she was unable to do her job and stay faithful to her own values. At least that's the way the press release reads.

Jamie: Not sure whether it's true or a cover, but we're not going to be able to fish much out about it until next week probably.

Marc: Something else the two of us can discuss tomorrow. Something about this weekend that you might want to keep in the back of your head. The volleyball coach at K-College, Jeanne Hecker, is also the school's associate chaplain and head of the physical education department. I contacted her a week or so ago about the lacrosse team coming to play the Hornets this weekend and said that I hoped they'd take advantage of the proximity of St. Tom's to their stadium to maybe pay a visit before the match. Sarah and Dani are both Catholic, so it would not be out-of-sorts for them to perhaps want to go to Mass. They have an 8:30 service, which would leave enough time for the team to get to the stadium, change, and warm up before their 11am game.

Jamie: I know Jeanne from around the volleyball circuit, even though our schools haven't played one another recently because most of our non-conference play had been confined to Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, the CIT, and other Lutheran schools. Wasn't aware she had her hand in the religious community at K.

Marc: She is one of the major reasons I'm here now. I interned under her while finishing my Sport
Management degree at Western Michigan and had a chance to see the balance of the spiritual and the athletic in that setting. I was allowed to sit in with their Chapel Chapter, which was a group of religious leaders from the WMU and Kalamazoo church communities, while there. She's a member at St. Tom's and has written a book on the combination of sport and spirituality, called Sportuality.

Jamie: Bring this up tomorrow when we meet, because I think it's a great idea for the three of us on the trip to try and meet with her.

Marc: Anything on your plate the rest of the afternoon?

Jamie: Just dealing with whatever the fall-out might be from Gavin's decision earlier, as I think he's overseeing the men's golf triangular at the River Club between Trinity, Lakeland, and Marian. You?

Marc: SGA's today, but I also want to spend some time with Danielle. She's getting worse with the fatigue and nausea from the chemo and I haven't been home a whole lot recently. That's why I'm not going on the trip this weekend, even though the chaplain at CUAA wanted me to attend the banquet and say a few words on behalf of Trinity.

As the last two in Siebert, Marc and Jamie took their trays up to the conveyor belt and then left the dining hall for their afternoon pursuits.

**********

The first practice with Sarah as interim head coach had the team working on building cohesion across the entirety of the roster, with her mixing together different combinations of players so they would become more comfortable with one another's positioning and skill sets. Steph Lafleur and Jane handled most of the work in goal, allowing Nicole to help Sarah with drilling the squad on transition play and when/how to cover for one another when players advance or retreat on the field. Near the end of the session, Sarah decided to test out the first XII she was considering for the Concordia-Ann Arbor match, one that would utilize some of the reserves so that she would have the team's top players at full strength for their match the next day in Kalamazoo. Satisfied with what that grouping was able to accomplish and show as a unit, she called an end to practice and released the players for the day.
Spring training continued to kick the butts of the women's soccer team at Trinity. Sara had taken the possibility of thinning out her roster to heart and was testing her returning players to see who might be replaceable come preseason camp. Dani wasn't overly fond of overrecruiting, as she had seen too many teammates at the club and college level end up on the outside due to the lustful desire of unscrupulous coaches to place "competition" over team chemistry or morale. After practice, Dani and Cali spoke for a couple of minutes.

Cali: I heard from Erin last night that their first practice under Sarah went extremely well. Most of the players are hopeful about the rest of the season, even though they're sitting 1-6 at the moment.

Dani: Sarah asked me to go on this weekend's trip to help her with some of the interpersonal work concerning the players and a bit of the road trip logistics since I have a full year under me and she wasn't really given much of a chance with Lauren to handle the nuts-and-bolts for either trip so far this season. Jamie Krueger, the volleyball coach and associate AD, is coming as well because Gavin is skittish about Sarah being in charge. The three of us are meeting with Marc in a little while to get his advice and input on how to make this weekend stress-free and fun for the team and how Sarah can transition into being the lead voice in the locker room.

Cali: Do you have an outfit for the banquet on Friday night?

Dani: You saw the dress I picked up when I went shopping with Steph, Erin, and the others a couple of weeks ago, right?

Cali: The pink and black one?

Dani: Yes. I'm going to bring that because I think it's a little less glam than others in my closet and keeping it toned-down is probably a good idea for this interchange with the Missouris.

Cali: I should be getting to class. Only problem with the Tuesday/Thursday practice schedule is it butts up against my 9:30.

Dani hugged her cousin and wished her a good rest of the day. Following that, she went over to Luther for a few minutes of chat time with Marc before Sarah and Jamie were scheduled to arrive.

Marc: Look what the cat dragged in.

Dani: At least I can use makeup to cover my blemishes. There's not much that can help your balding head aside from a toupee.


Dani walked behind Marc's chair and wrapped her arms over his shoulders, then kissed his cheek. "How is my heart's desire doing today?"

Marc: Excited. Nervous. A little scattered. This is my first real input into anything on the athletics side here and I just don't want to give Sarah or you or Jamie bad advice on how to manage this weekend. The scattered part is worrying about Danielle. The doctor said 2-3 weeks of decline before she would start to feel better, and we're at 17 days with the regimen. Haven't seen any uptick yet, so staying hopeful has been a bit difficult. Still about two weeks away from her first follow-up appointment.
Dani: She's a fighter, she's tough, and she's also someone who goes with what happens instead of getting twisted in knots over things for which she doesn't have much control.

Marc: True, bae. So, are you excited to be going with Sarah and Jamie this weekend?

Dani: I don't know if I would call it excited. Being in a situation where I'm not riding in someone's shadow will definitely be different, but I don't think it's something I can't handle.

Sarah and Jamie arrived and the four of them sat down at the table on the far side of Marc's office.

Marc: Since most of this is athletics business, Jamie should lead out with what she wants to discuss, then we can bat around what questions the three of you might have for me.

Jamie: Thank you, Marc. As I haven't been privy to any of the details from the first two trips, I'd like Sarah to give me a bit of background on how they went and what the basic plans for them were.

Sarah gave Jamie a brief overview of the good and bad from the trips and how she tried to interject opportunities for the players to build bonds with each other on the trip down to Raleigh. She laid out how Lauren went about assigning roommates and the rooming conditions.

Jamie: With volleyball, we've NEVER gone four-to-a-room, and rarely has it been three together. Part of that is the nature of our sport, only having 12 players generally on the roster versus 20 for soccer or 24 for lacrosse. Danielle, how did soccer handle road trips this year?

Dani: Well, Sara didn't travel the whole roster, taking only 18. We were three-to-a-room for nearly all our away matches.

Jamie: There's no reason for players to be that jam-packed in the hotel. We will be going three-to-a-room this weekend. I'll contact the hotels in Ann Arbor and Kalamazoo and get the additional rooms booked. With that done, how do you wish to fill them?

Sarah: Some of the combinations from the first two trips are pretty good and I'd like to keep them together. Having two extra rooms and six additional players to fill them means that the foursomes from Raleigh and St. Paul will break up, but keeping three of those four together in some instances would be my preference. We can go into the specifics of who's where when we start asking Marc for feedback, as he has a fairly good pulse of the team by way of his goddaughter, Erin Matheson.

Jamie: OK. Next piece is that Marc suggested we try to meet with Kalamazoo's volleyball coach/associate chaplain at Mass prior to our Sunday game there. I have the information for her and will give her a call this afternoon to set it up.

Dani (to Marc): Is this the same person you told me about when I mentioned their soccer coach wanting to set up a home-and-home with us, to broach the idea of a broader scheduling agreement that included other sports?

Marc: Yes. Jeanne is a tremendous advocate for women's sports, female coaches, and the intersection of sport and spirituality, as I told Jamie yesterday.

Sarah: How will that happen with an 11am game?

Marc: St. Thomas More Catholic Student Parish is located three blocks or so from K-College's outdoor athletic complex, where your game will take place. They have an 8:30am Mass on Sunday mornings, which would fit into your schedule.

Sarah: Another case of outworking the competition?
Marc: I interned at Kalamazoo College while I was a graduate student at Western Michigan, working with their athletic department and their religious leadership team, which Coach Hecker led. I was on friendly terms with Deacon Pat Harris at St. Tom's. His son Adam played hockey at Michigan State and spent several years in the NHL.

Jamie: If I may continue. Our post-game meal on Saturday will be at Buffalo Wild Wings in Ann Arbor. I'll contact them later today with numbers and some semblance of a menu. Sunday's post-game meal will be Jimmy John's subs that we will take with us for the return trip to Mequon, hopefully arriving here by 5pm.

Sarah, Dani, and Marc nodded along, as the planning sounded pretty good.

Jamie: As for Friday, the banquet is scheduled for 6pm at the Ann Arbor Regent Hotel and Suites, which is where the team is booked as well. I would suggest leaving Trinity at 8am. Put in an hour for a lunch stop and we should arrive at the hotel around 3:30pm. No idea what Lauren had in mind with a 9:30am departure. That'd get you there at 4pm with no stops or around 5pm with a stop.

Sarah: I don't think she was considering the interchange event on Friday night a big deal. Sure, it's a banquet and everyone will probably want to dress nicely for it, but it doesn't seem like she factored that in when devising the travel schedule.

Jamie: That's a good guess, Sarah. Are you OK with me taking the lead on the logistical stuff so your main focus of the weekend is the team and giving them the best chance to perform well and be in good spirits?

Sarah: Sure. You've done all of this for several years now, whereas I just got thrust into this spot less than 48 hours ago.

Jamie: I'm going to depart and take care of the phone calls and what-not so everything is a go by the time you practice this afternoon, giving you a chance to announce the schedule and itinerary to the players.

Sarah: Are you planning to stop by practice or just send me something via email that I'll get beforehand?

Jamie: I'll make an appearance at some point, if only to assure the team that all systems are go for the weekend.

Once Jamie departed, Sarah laid out her original roommate plans (based on four-to-a-room), then asked for Marc's input.


Sarah: How do I split off people to create eight rooms of three, and are any of these groupings possibly dangerous?

Marc: First, I want to say that you did a very nice job of putting together good foursomes. None are bad, and you have some combinations that I think have potential. Let's break these down one at a time. In Group A, I'd move out Sofia, since the other three as a unit are quite solid. From B, I'd take out Moe, with the two goalkeepers and Jane's girl making another comfortable threesome. I really like you putting the captains with the malcontent, so Steph Mac is jetted. I'd split up the two doubles you have and use them as the starting point for the extra rooms.
Dani jotted down Marc's suggestions for Sarah, resulting in the following groupings:


Sarah: Who do I split off from F?

Marc: Let's leave that one alone for the moment and get the three free agents placed. Sofia makes good sense going with Christen and Julie, but she could also fit in with Savannah and Maggie if you'd like to get the two wallflowers engaging with each other. Moe can fit anywhere, I think, so save her for the end. Steph Mac....do you want to put her with Kristie and Sam or keep her separated?

Sarah: I'd like to put her with either Lauren or Lindsey so they might bond up a little and have it translate to the field. Let's say I put Sofia with Savannah and Maggie. What do I do with Ali and Morgan?

Marc: This is a little "different", but I'd put Moe with the two of them. Of course, that would mean splitting up one of the three pairs who don't have a third yet to open up that room and fill the other two. Might want to talk to the sisters before deciding on it, because if they're amenable, you'd be able to place one with Christen and Julie and the other with whichever pair doesn't get Steph Mac.

Dani: Can I interject? Were I you, Sarah, I'd get Steph with Lindsey and Emily, then Sam with Lauren and Kelley and Kristie with Julie and Christen.

Sarah: I'm going to do the safe thing here, because I really like the potential threes I can design from what's left.

Sarah drew a few arrows on her pairings list and finalized her choices.


Marc: Looks good to me.

Sarah: I better get to my office and work on today's practice plan. I'm hoping I can announce my starting lineups for the two games after practice, which means making sure that the players I want to use on Saturday will mesh. Thanks for your help, and though I wish you were coming along, I understand the need to stay here with Danielle. Give her my best, Marc.

Marc: Thanks, Sarah.

**********

Marc and Dani watched lacrosse practice from the top of the Niemoller Field bleachers, with the chaplain focusing on how Sarah interacted with the players and the ebb-and-flow of the session. The pair held hands on-and-off, with Dani leaning against Marc now and again. They talked a bit more about their current situation, as well as that of Sarah and Wil. Jamie arrived near 5:00 and filled the players in on the plan for the weekend, getting a few hoots from the team. She then stepped back and let Sarah wrap up practice with her own set of announcements.

Sarah: I hope the last two days of practice have been a bit of a change from the past two months or so. There are a couple of things I want to say before I tell you the starting lineups for the games this
weekend. Under me, everyone will see game time in each match. It might only be a few minutes or it might be the full 60, but everyone will get in at some point. Only exception would be the goalkeepers, and I'm looking into platooning my top two and using the third a bit more than has been done so far. It all comes down to being able to see if you're improving and figuring out how you best help this team, and that can't be done if you're riding pine. The second thing is that, with us going to three-to-a-room on this trip, I had to shuffle around some of the pairings from the last two trips. I will share them with you on the bus tomorrow morning, but rest assured most of you will be rooming with the people you want. If there are any issues with whom you've been paired, please talk to me about it. With that out of the way, onto the first XIs for Saturday and Sunday. Having two games inside 24 hours means that I will be trying to manage minutes of our top players so they don't get overworked and to allow some of the others to show what they can do. Against Concordia-Ann Arbor, Steph will be in goal, behind a defense of Ali, Julie, Becca, and Erin. Megan and the two Morgans will be in the midfield, with a front line of Sofia, Lauren, Christen, and Kelley. For the Kalamazoo match, the lineup will be: Nicole in goal; Ali, Julie, Sam, and Erin in back; Lauren, Jess, and Morgan B. in midfield; and Kelley, Lindsey, Steph Mac, and Kristie in attack. Get your rest tonight. As Jamie said, we leave at 8 tomorrow morning, with or without you.

As the players walked back to Buuck, there was a bit of a bounce to their steps as the last two days have gone well on the field and the news that Sarah and Jamie shared with them pointed to the potential for a better road trip than the spring break one and a more trusting atmosphere on the whole than they experienced under Lauren.
Meeting Up With The Past

The lacrosse team's final overnight road trip of the season began with the team loading up their coach for a five-and-a-half hour ride to Ann Arbor, MI. Their first opponent of the weekend, Concordia University-Ann Arbor, have on their roster three players who transferred from Concordia-Wisconsin when the two schools merged at the conclusion of the 2017-2018 academic year. With a 1pm game time on Saturday, Coach Heberlein had made plans to travel on Friday even before Gavin and Jim Hauser, CUAA's athletic director, developed a long-term scheduling agreement between the schools that would include interchange events involving the two teams. Tonight, a fund-raising banquet would be held at the Ann Arbor Regent Hotel and Suites to re-establish the Luther Promise, a scholarship fund that the two Concordias had put in place prior to its merger.

Once the 27-strong traveling party was seated, Sarah called Marc and asked him to pass on a blessing for the upcoming trip over the phone.

Marc: Lord, may the road rise to meet these ladies, may they find comfort in the company they will be keeping, may strangers become friends, and friends become family, as these warriors take on your charge and make peace with their sisters in Ann Arbor tonight and tomorrow. Quando Omni Flunkus Moritati. Amen.

ALL: Amen.

At the conclusion of the prayer, Steph Lafleur began laughing hysterically, getting a couple of strange looks from those around her. Sam looked a bit puzzled and tried working out what the Latin portion of the prayer meant, while Lindsey attempted to use her prior French education to translate it.

Erin: Steph, why are you laughing?

Steph L.: Do you know what Marc said?!

Sam: It sounded like Latin for "If you always fail, you will die." That seems rather odd to put in a blessing.

Steph L.: You're sort of close, but a bit off. He said, "When all else fails, play dead." It's the motto of the Possum Lodge, part of a Canadian comedy/sketch show called The Red Green Show.

Erin: Ahhhhh. Bet he also has the prayer from Monty Python and the Holy Grail on tap to use at some point.

Calm returned to the bus as it passed through the Mitchell Interchange and headed south on I-94. Erin and Sam were seated together, thinking that some one-on-one time might help with their back line chemistry in the second half of the season.

Erin: Are any of your former teammates on the roster at CUAA?

Sam: Three, including one that I *almost* started seeing last year. It didn't go anywhere because she was transferring and, unlike Steph, we weren't in the same or nearby towns. That's how I stayed with her even though I wasn't totally into the relationship.

Erin: Which I'm sure set the stage a bit for what happened earlier this year between you two and Kristie.

Sam: Yeah. I'm glad that that is now behind us and we can try to be friends again. How are you and
Steph handling Shelley's re-emerging interest?

Erin: It's not bothering me, because I know Steph is mine and that Shelley isn't going to get anywhere with her. Now, others on the team might be taking issue with it, like Megan and Lauren. She mentioned that Marc brought up the possibility of her entrance to candidacy being postponed if she doesn't make it known to her that she's not available.

Sam: He can do that?!

Erin: He can request that her candidacy committee put off admitting her, which he told her he would do based on a perceived inability to handle interpersonal conflict.

Sam nodded her head, then asked Erin for some advice about standing out with the team.

Erin: As one of the presumptive captains for next year's team, you need to take an interest with some of the freshmen that you'll be leading next year. You and Julie seem to get on well on the field, but what about off of it? Becca? Morgan Andringa? Maggie? I know you'd rather lead by doing than have to be front-and-center verbalizing it, but if you don't speak up or make an effort to communicate your leadership, you won't necessarily get people to follow you.

Sam: Kristie has always been the loudmouth of the two of us, so I've gotten used to sitting back and letting others do the talking. Same with being with Steph. If I'm going to be asked to take over from Megan and Jess next year, I need a crash course in doing this.

Erin: Take a few minutes at some point of the weekend and talk to Dani. She is helping Sarah in a way her feet under her as the boss via something in Marc's coaching module, a section titled, "You're In Charge, Now What?!" I believe there is also one that deals with the getting ready to lead part. Pick Julie's brain as well, as he's doing that type of mentoring with her and Ali's boyfriend, Corey, within our peer ministry leadership.

Sam: Thanks, Erin. I'll ask all of them at some point between now and the end of the season.

The bus continued through the Chicago Skyway and into Indiana, where it rejoined I-94 northbound to Michigan. Just before the Indiana-Michigan border lied Michigan City, the last decent-sized community before Kalamazoo. Knowing this, Erin suggested to Sarah that they take their meal stop there and, after a polling of the players, Steak N Shake was the choice.

********

At the hotel, the players and coaches took advantage of an early arrival to do a bit of extra primping and preening before tonight's banquet. In Erin, Steph, and Becca's room, the three freshmen were getting ready, with the goalkeeper finishing up first and asking Erin to look her over.

Erin: I loved the dress when you picked it out at Nordstrom. Going a bit more feminine with the caged sandals, I see.

Steph: Taking some advice from Dani to own my body and present it in a way that makes me feel good. Also doesn't hurt that we have three or four others on this trip close to my height who are sort of the same style as me.

Erin: True. We saw the others' dresses when we went shopping a couple of weeks ago, but I don't know how they might pair it up with hair and shoes.

Becca finished putting herself together and requested the others' opinions.
Steph: Whoa, Becs! Didn't take you to be more on that side of the spectrum.

Becca: Being at Trinity, I don't have to play dress-up like I did in high school. I found that I like looking like a woman without having to go through all the trouble of the traditional female.

Erin: That pairing looks good on you. I can see you and someone like Jessie being a couple. She has a bit of the cute in her, but doesn't flaunt it much.

Becca: Promise you won't tell her, but I have a bit of a thing for her. I know, she doesn't want to get into a relationship right now because of school, but us rooming together doesn't make "seeing" each other that difficult a thing. That's the rationale I have when I think about maybe trying to start something with her when we return in August.

Steph: Rooming together again next year?

Becca: Yep.

Erin ducked into the bathroom to get into her dress and put on a little make-up. She came back out and got the once-over from the other two.

Becca: You know, when you dress up, you look SO CUTE!

Erin blushed. "You really think so?"

Steph: I'll second her remarks. You know how to pull off the flirty look without making it seem like you're begging for attention, and I just adore it, mon amour.

Erin walked over to Steph, then rose up on her toes and pecked her on the lips. "Thank you, love."

Becca: We better get moving before the two of you decide to lock me out of the room and skip dinner for an early helping of dessert.

Steph swatted Becca on the arm before the three of them made one last pass in front of the mirror and left their room to go up to the hotel's ballroom for the banquet.

**********

Dinner had concluded and the speeches were about to commence. With neither President Garrett, Gavin, nor Marc on-hand in Ann Arbor, Jamie was asked to offer a few words on behalf of Trinity Lutheran.

Jim Hauser (CUAA athletic director): As will become tradition at the women's lacrosse pre-game banquet, each school will have one of their players who is a recipient of the Luther Promise scholarship speak about its impact on their ability to be a student-athlete and to attend our institutions. With tonight being the first of these gatherings, we will instead have a member of each school's leadership say a few words about Lutheran education and its importance in a society that is growing more secular. For Trinity Lutheran, may I introduce their associate athletic director, Jamie Krueger.

Jamie: Thank you. As Jim said, my name is Jamie Krueger and I am the head volleyball coach, associate athletic director, and senior woman administrator at Trinity Lutheran. Twelve months ago, I held the first and third titles at Concordia-Wisconsin. Faced with the decision of either following a large portion of the athletic department to Ann Arbor or staying in Mequon, I chose to stay and act as a conduit between the departing athletic administration and the incoming one. I was born-and-raised
LCMS, attended Concordia-St. Paul for undergrad and CUW for my MA in Sport and Entertainment Management. What I have found in my first several months at Trinity Lutheran is that our different brands of Lutheranism aren't that far apart when it comes to educating the next generation in mind, body, and spirit. The re-establishment of the Luther Promise, as a means of encouraging students of Lutheran high schools, members of ELCA, LCMS, and WELS congregations, children of graduates of our two institutions as well as those of our common history, and children of current rostered leaders in our home synods and others with which we have exchange agreements to attend our universities, is something that our two schools can work together on to advance Lutheran education despite our philosophical differences. Thank you, everyone, for making Lutheran education a priority by giving to the Luther Promise scholarship fund. I look forward to our campus hosting this event next year and possibly having a player or two on either team being recipients of tonight's generosity. Thank you for welcoming me back into the fold, even for a brief moment.

The Trinity contingent rose and gave Jamie a standing ovation. Dani stopped the recording of Jamie's speech and posted it to the Urban Coaching Project page on YouTube, with a short clip on her personal Instagram page along with a link to the full video.

Jim Hauser: Thank you, Jamie. Now, we'll hear from Concordia-Ann Arbor's chaplain, the Rev. R. Philip Donovan.

Rev. Donovan walked to the podium to give his remarks.

Phil Donovan: Thank you, Jim. I was chosen as the chaplain at Concordia-Ann Arbor last June because the Board of Regents determined that I could bring a healing presence to a campus that would be receiving a group of students they felt had been scarred in meaningful ways during their time at Concordia-Wisconsin. When Jim asked me if I would be willing to put out a joint press release concerning the Luther Promise with Deacon Marc Schmidt, the chaplain of Trinity Lutheran, I was hesitant because of his reputation of being "unfriendly to those who disagree with him". That opinion changed when we talked and compared notes about how we got to our present posts. We both were brought into our current positions because the bishops of our synods believed we could do the most good in healing the wounds that would be evident at our schools and could best use our skills to move our institutions in the directions desired by them. The Luther Promise scholarship will allow our two universities to offer to future generations of students access to the grace we have dispensed on our current student bodies. Thank you for your attendance this evening and for your recognition of our schools' missions to educate students in the Lutheran tradition, even if we don't come to the same conclusion on some of those points.

**********

Following the formal portion of the banquet, the athletes remained in the ballroom and mingled amongst one another. Sam noticed one of her former teammates from CUW and walked over to her.

Sam: Meredith?

Meredith Spencer: SAM!

The two hugged one another, then looked each other over.

Sam: Dang are you looking GOOD! I hope someone here appreciates it and has worked their way into your heart.

Meredith: Yes, but you know that we can't be "out" here. She's a senior and is on the bowling team. She'll graduate in six weeks, then we plan to get a place together near the U of M, where she's going to be starting dental school in the fall.
Sam: Sounds like the move here has worked out well for you.

Meredith looked behind Sam and saw Steph McNamara and Kristie coming toward them.

Meredith: Hi, Steph.

Steph: Hey, Meredith. The people here treating you well?

Meredith: As well as can be expected for a transfer student.

Sam introduced Meredith to Kristie and explained how she and Steph knew her. Kristie whispered in her sister's ear, "Is she the one that you almost left Steph for?"

Sam: Yes.

Kristie: She is a LOOKAAAAAAAH!

Meredith: A-B conversation between the sisters?

Sam: Sort of. We have to deal with that with our girlfriends from time to time, but they're better at hiding it since they have, like, one brain split into two bodies.

Meredith: Don't tell me you're dating sisters.

Kristie: Worse. Twins.

Meredith: Yeah, that would be worse. Steph, how are you handling this situation?

Steph: Didn't deal with it well at the beginning, but I value these two too much to let it get between us any more.

Kristie: It was nice to meet you, Meredith, and good luck tomorrow. Your team will need it.

Sam: Now, now, Kratch. That's no way to speak to the opposition, especially with the three of us not in the first XII.

Meredith: Best of luck to your team as well. The team here is not nearly as good as the one we had last year in Mequon. We're 1-8 heading into tomorrow's game.

Sam: We're 1-6, have 18 freshmen out of 24 players, and just underwent a coaching change earlier this week, so I'm not sure we're in any better shape than your squad.

Meredith: It looks like our team is heading back to campus. So good seeing you again, Sammy, and I'll see the three of you tomorrow on the field.

Meredith and Sam hugged again, then the Cardinal attacker joined her teammates as they exited the ballroom, with Sam and the other two rejoining the rest of the Thunder.
The stands were filling at Cardinal Stadium for today's non-conference women's lacrosse match between the Trinity Lutheran University Thunder and the Concordia University-Ann Arbor Cardinals. Steph Lafleur's parents, Elliott and Suzanne, made the trip from Kitchener to watch their daughter and her team play for the first time this season.

Suzanne Lafleur: Nice stadium here. We need to get over to Mequon at some point and see her play at home, plus spend time with her and Erin.

Elliott Lafleur: We'll get to do that last part when we attend Irish Fest with them and Jim and Val in August.

Suzanne: Looks like her team is pretty stacked numbers-wise.

Elliott: Doesn't hurt to have some depth at this level, but eighteen of them are freshmen. It will take a year or two for that class to mesh enough that the depth will pay off.

Suzanne: They've got a senior goalkeeper, so I'm presuming she's the starter.

Elliott: Steph seems to be getting most of the work in warm-ups, though, so that fact might be a bit deceiving.

Closer to midfield, Jim and Valerie Matheson were watching warm-ups themselves.

Jim: I really hope this coaching change helps them gain more positive results on the field.

Val: 1-6 for a first-year team isn't that unexpected, and their schedule hasn't been that easy, either. They've been able to hang around and be competitive in all but two of the losses, and had chances to perhaps win one or two of them.

Jim: I know you're right, but I thought they'd be around 3-4 at this point rather than 1-6.

Val: It doesn't really matter what the overall record is. Get to and win the conference tournament and you go to the NCAAs. The NACC is in its first year as a conference due to overall expansion of women's lacrosse in the Midwest. Trinity, Wisconsin Lutheran, and Edgewood are first-year teams, MSOE is second-year, and the only Chicago-area opponent that would be a definite loss is Aurora.

Elliott noticed Jim and Val and proceeded with Suzanne to join them.

Elliott: Looks like both of our girls will be starting today.

Jim: I think you're right. Nicole isn't even dressed for the match, and she's the regular starter. Maybe Sarah is saving her for K-College tomorrow.

Val: Smart choice by her if she is. THAT game is going to be a rough one, especially after playing the day before.

Introductions were done for the two teams, followed by the national anthem. The match got underway and CUAA pressed hard to get the opening score, only to commit too many bodies forward. Kelley used her speed on the left side to take the ball from midfield straight through the Cardinals' defense and rips a shot over the goalkeeper to put the Thunder ahead, 1-0. As the half went on, Christen and Lauren would pick up timely goals to keep Trinity ahead. At the 20-minute
mark, with the Thunder up, 7-4, Sarah inserted Shelley for Julie, Emily for Morgan Andringa, and Andi for Ali. Sarah had Becca play behind the other two central defenders, to provide a slight buffer between Steph and Shelley. The crowd of bodies near the Trinity goal led to a couple of scores where Steph was screened and didn't see the oncoming shots. Steph McNamara was able to score off a pass from Kristie to re-gain the lead for the Thunder, but a missed switch in midfield allowed the Cardinals to score again just seven seconds from halftime to tie the game at 8. With the team in its bench area, Sarah remarked on the first half and how she would send them out to start the second.

Sarah: We are playing pretty well, even though the score is tied. The first twenty minutes, that is the team that I know we can be for long stretches of our matches. The last ten minutes of the first half will be my test period in our games, where I make sure everyone on the bench gets in and I see what kind of adjustments to make for the second half, plus it gives me a chance to provide a few extra minutes of rest to some of the starters. I don't believe we will ever lose a game because of what happens in that period and I also need to show that I trust the ENTIRE team to be able to play at this level. Second half starters: Steph stays in net; Ali, Julie, Sam, and Erin in back; Megan, Jess, and Moe across the middle; Sofia, Christen, Steph Mac, and Kristie up front. Aside from Steph Lafleur, this will most likely be the first XII for the Illinois Tech game on Wednesday. This lineup has the strength and speed to run away with this game, so play all-out, get us out to a decent lead, and I'll be able to save some of your legs for tomorrow by getting you off the field. Thunder on three. One, Two, Three.

ALL: THUNDER!

Steph McNamara won the opening draw of the second thirty and immediately hit Sofia with an outlet pass. A burst of speed got her through the two defenders on the left side and she whistled a shot across the goalkeeper's body to put Trinity in front, 9-8. The back seven for the Thunder made penetration virtually impossible for the Cardinals, which led to turnovers that they were able to convert into goals by use of their solid possession game in the neutral zone and ball movement once around the 12-meter area. With the score 15-10 and Sarah having subbed out Julie, Morgan Brooks, and Sam for Shelley, Becca, and Emily, a new wrinkle was developed following a missed shot by Concordia. Steph passed the ball out to Erin, who brought it up the field, with Emily sliding over to cover the left defense position and Becca stepping forward to partner Shelley in the center. Erin continued to possess the ball until she got even with the two remaining midfielders, Jess and Megan, who slid to their right to accommodate the marauding left defender. Erin passed the ball to Jess, who moved it on to Megan before the senior co-captain sent it forward to Lindsey a couple of yards before the 12-meter area. She passed it back to Jess and the front seven fanned out around the semi-circle. Lindsey and Steph made little excursions into the 8-meter arc, posting up their defenders. After working it to the far right corner where Sofia was located, the ball came back to Jess, whose pass to Megan was quickly sent across to Erin. She took one step forward and unleashed a stunner of a flick that hit nothing but the back of the net, scoring her first collegiate goal. Before the teams restarted at the center, Erin was subbed out for Kelley, allowing Emily to return to center defense and Becca to drop back behind her and Shelley again. The remaining six minutes produced three more goals (two for the Cardinals, with Maggie getting one in between for Trinity) and, upon the final whistle, the Thunder celebrated their first win in 24 days and the end of their six-game losing streak, defeating Concordia, 17-12.

Trinity 17 Concordia 12 (Christen Prince 3 goals, Lindsey Hoffman 2 goals/2 assists, Savannah Johnson 2 goals/1 assist, Steph McNamara 2 goals/1 assist, Lauren Chandler 2 goals, Sofia Hernandez 1 goal/2 assists, Kelley Ochowicz 1 goal/2 assists, Kristie Mueller 1 goal/2 assists, Maggie Dowling 1 goal/1 assist, Morgan Brooks 1 goal/1 assist, Erin Matheson 1 goal, Megan Racicot 2 assists, Jess Fisher 1 assist, Andi Susskind 1 assist, Sam Mueller 1 assist)
Down along the fence separating the stands from the field, the Mathesons, Chandlers, and Lafleurs were chatting with Jamie and her special guest.

Val Matheson (to Jeanne): You look very familiar, like I should know you from somewhere.

Jeanne Hecker: You ever visit St. Tom's in Kalamazoo by chance?

Val: No. We're Lutherans. Jim and I both attended Western Michigan, however.

Jeanne: I teach and coach at K-College, so it could have been random happenstance somewhere on Michigan between the two campuses.

Jim: What sport do you coach?

Jeanne: Women's volleyball.

Jamie: Which is how we know one another, Mr. Matheson.

George Chandler: Lauren wanted to stick with volleyball when she got to high school, but Indiana prep soccer is also in fall, so she had to choose.

Suzanne: Jamie, since it seems like Lauren left of her own accord to some extent, can Trinity do anything to hamstring her going forward should she want to land a job elsewhere?

Jamie: I wish I had a sufficient answer for that, but the speed at which everything happened this past week hasn't allowed either Deacon Schmidt or myself to dig through what actually occurred on Wednesday morning. Our concern was giving Sarah what she needed for this weekend, both logistical and personal support. The plan is to use the beginning of next week to pick apart the agreement and see if there is any course of action available.

Jim, Jeanne, Val, and Elliott: Uh-oh.

Rita Chandler (confused): Why uh-oh?

Val: Knowing Marc, he is going to be seeking a few pounds of flesh if he has any means of doing it.

Jamie: You're right. When he, I, Gavin, and the head of HR met on Monday, he brought up the idea of seeking a show-cause order from the NCAA so that she couldn't escape penalty by walking away or forcing Gavin to sack her.

Jeanne: Mad Dog Marc on the prowl, then?

Jamie: Looks it. Should *I* be worried about that?

Jeanne: His bark is a whole lot worse than his bite, but this might be one time where both are extremely dangerous for the person on the other end.

Erin, Steph, Lauren, and Kelley walked across the field from the locker rooms to meet up with their parents. When they arrived, they were doted upon by their respective loved ones. Erin and Steph greeted Lauren's parents and then the mop top introduced herself to Jeanne.

Erin: Erin Matheson. I've seen you before but don't remember where.

Jeanne: Could have been from a scouting trip. Where did you go to high school?

Erin: Rockford.
Jeanne: It's possible you saw me at a volleyball game last year since I was recruiting one of your classmates to come to K-College.

Erin: OMG! You're HER!

Jeanne: I'm who?

Erin: Marc has told me so much about how you helped him piece together the sport and spiritual so he was totally prepared to step in at Trinity as chaplain and the athletic department's version of Mad Dog McCoy.

Jeanne chuckled. "There's that Mad Dog thing again. Seriously, Marc ISN'T THAT BAD! I hope you haven't come across him due to misconduct on your behalf."

Val: Thank God, No! Marc and his wife are Erin's godparents. How do you know him?

Jeanne: He interned for me at K while finishing up his sport management degree from Western.

Sarah and Dani stopped at the fence to offer their thanks to those who traveled to Ann Arbor for the game. Jamie introduced the two of them to Jeanne, which started a several-minute conversation that the four of them said they would pick up again tomorrow in Kalamazoo.

**********

The Thunder parents' brigade (Jim, Val, Elliott, Suzanne, and George and Rita Chandler) joined the team for dinner at Buffalo Wild Wings. The six of them were seated with their daughters and Kelley. Sarah went around the team's area of the restaurant to give words of congratulations and praise to each of her players. When she stopped by the ten of them, Sarah delivered a bit of a mixed message for those gathered.

Sarah: So....first college goal, first college win, and Kelley proving to me that my predecessor was being silly not using her speed and versatility earlier in the season. As for you, Lauren, another solid performance. Keep it up and you might see some individual hardware at the end of the season. Steph, I'd like to talk with you when we get to the hotel in Kalamazoo. Hope all of you are enjoying yourselves and will join us on the other side of the state tomorrow for the second half of this doubleheader weekend.

Elliott: Wonder what coach wants to talk to you about?

Steph: I know she is changing up some things and mentioned the possibility of a platoon situation in net, so it could be that, or just telling me that I won't play tomorrow and that Jane will relieve Nicole if need be. Or something else entirely.

Elliott: Like the situation involving your teammate not getting the hint and you not wanting to spell things out for her?

Steph: Possible. I have to figure out how I want to handle this if both Sarah AND Marc are going to make decisions based on my reluctance to act.

Dinner wrapped up and the players exited to load onto the bus to travel to Kalamazoo. Before getting on, Steph pulled her dad to the side and asked him about dealing with Shelley.

Elliott: If both Sarah and Marc end up calling you to account about it, then they must consider your inaction serious. I'd try to discuss it with her face-to-face, one-on-one, at a time and place when there isn't really the possibility of sexual tension in the air.
Steph: Gotcha, Dad. Pray for me?

Elliott: Always. Love you.

Steph: Love you too.

Steph boarded the bus and sat down next to Erin, who had queued up 2019's first Lifetime NWSL Game of the Week, which pitted the Philadelphia Hearts against the Chicago Red Stars, last year's league champion. While watching the game, Steph asked Erin about her dilemma.

Steph: You heard me tell my dad that Marc has already called me to task about not getting Shelley to go away. Now Sarah might ask me about it, because her attempt to keep some space between us resulted in a really bad situation defensively on the field. I know you're not me and you have a lot of contempt for Shelley, but how would you let her down easy if you were me?

Erin: Matter-of-fact, I got to you first, the faith connection. Hell, throw Marc under the bus here and say he spurred on the already-existent relationship we had. Whatever you do, do NOT leave the door open for her. If I remember the new code right, to eventually claim harassment, you have to deliberately state your lack of interest. Maybe write her and spell it out. That way, you have a copy of what you said and you can get your thoughts together rather than freeze up if you do it face-to-face.

Steph lied back and nodded off for a few minutes, hoping that her meeting with Sarah was lacrosse-related and not personal in nature. Erin woke her when the bus left I-94 to take Westnedge Ave. north to the Radisson Plaza Hotel in downtown Kalamazoo.
Bringing March To A Close

After the players and coaches had settled into their rooms, Sarah and Dani went over to visit with Steph, Erin, and Becca. Sarah asked Steph to come back to her room with her, while Dani stayed and hung out with the other two. Once seated, the interim head coach opened the conversation she wanted to have with her #2 goalkeeper.

Sarah: I guess I should get right to it instead of soft-shoeing my comments. Steph, I'm considering platooning you and Nicole during the conference season, playing her against Illinois Tech, Aurora, and Wisconsin Lutheran, you against Edgewood, Concordia-Chicago, and MSOE, with the two of you splitting the game against Benedictine. Jane will get her minutes relieving one of you based on how we perform in those matches. That said, I have also stated that all the outfield players will get playing time in each game. Unless something changes, I really cannot do both of these things. I tried this afternoon to come up with a means of having both you and Shelley on the field, and it resulted in the worst stretches of defending in the match, with us surrendering six goals in those 16-17 minutes versus six in the other 43-44. If I am going to be able to play the two of you together, you will have to clear the air with her about you and Erin and how she needs to stop trying to steal you from her. I will give you this upcoming week to handle it, with the start against Edgewood going to Jane if it's not done. Am I clear?

Steph: Yes, and you're not the only one that has told me I need to act and act soon. Marc has said that he will recommend postponement of my entering candidacy if I don't try to bring this to some conclusion.

Sarah: That's the important thing, that you TRY to resolve it. If you make the attempt and she doesn't back off, then she is the one who will face whatever sanctions necessary and appropriate for her actions from me. I don't want to be harpy about it, or look like the bad guy here, but the on-field results of attempting to work around this conflict could cost us a game somewhere in the future.

Steph: I understand, and I will do my best to get it done before Wednesday's game. Is that all?

Sarah: One more thing, Jamie, Dani, and I are planning to go to Mass in the morning at the student parish near K-College. It's not mandatory, but I would like you and Erin to come with us.

Steph: Sure. How are you planning to handle those on the team who don't wish to go?

Sarah: I'll discuss that with Jamie after you leave and come up with something.

Steph stood up and walked to the door, followed by Sarah. They both exited, with Sarah going next door to talk with Jamie and Steph returning to her room. When she got back, Steph flopped down on her and Erin's bed and let out a big sigh.

Erin: How did the talk with Coach go?

Steph: It went. I was right that she wanted to discuss the platoon situation, but she also brought up the trouble of playing Shelley and I together. She said she's planning to start me next Saturday against Edgewood, but that I had to settle the stand-off with Shelley before then for her to do it.

Becca: Wow. That's like a 180 from how Lauren handled things.

Dani: Yes, and it's because Sarah actually CARES about the players and the team as a whole. It may seem like she's being too strict with you about this, but she's looking at a bigger picture and the problems that can come if you don't resolve things with Shelley. Players start taking sides, freezing
out one another, and from there you get dissension in the locker room.

Erin: I take it you've got experience with this.

Dani: Yes. One of my teams had a goalkeeper that was a bit of a bitch. I was friends with her because we went to school together. During one game, she verbally accosted one of our players from her position in net. Others heard it and complained to our club's boss. He and the coach discussed it and suspended her for the first half of our next game. The decision caused some hurt feelings and misunderstandings because it seemed arbitrary and because the coach wasn't the one who would have to enforce it, as she was going to miss the next match for some reason.

Steph: Deuce, how do you get someone to stop chasing you?

Dani: Normally, visual evidence is enough to put the brakes on their pursuit, but I know that isn't the case here. Distance helps, but again we're not dealing with someone who is willing to stop. You will have to actually tell her, "STOP. CHASING. ME.", and then defend your choice of being with Erin.

Erin: As I said earlier, I can't get involved in stopping her until you declare your non-interest. Same goes for Jessie if she sees it and feels it constitutes "meddling" in her relationship with you.

Dani and Becca stayed silent for a few seconds as the information Erin disclosed registered with them.

Steph: She can do that?!

Erin: Yes. Any member of a threesome can file a complaint with the appropriate judicial body if they believe that someone is impinging on their relationship. Same goes with a standard one-on-one relationship.

Steph: Now that both Sarah and Marc have said they will act if I don't, I better find a time and way to do it.

Dani told the others that she was returning to her room and would see them in the morning. Once she left, the three freshmen got ready for bed and turned in.

**********

A significant portion of the lacrosse team joined Sarah, Dani, and Jamie at St. Thomas More for 8:30am Mass. During the opening announcements, Jeanne offered a welcome to the ladies and mentioned their upcoming game against K-College at 11am. After service, Jeanne made sure to get Deacon Pat to stop by and say a few words to the lacrosse players and coaches.

Deacon Pat Harris: I hope you enjoyed Mass. Where is Trinity Lutheran located?

Jamie: Mequon, Wisconsin, just north of Milwaukee. Carthage College in Kenosha moved there over the summer after Concordia-Wisconsin and Concordia-Ann Arbor merged, with the renaming a part of the transition.

Jeanne: Pat, I was told yesterday that you have a mutual acquaintance with one of the Thunder players.

Pat: Oh?

Erin: Sarah and Jeanne told me that you and my godfather, Marc Schmidt, know each other from his time as Western Michigan.
Pat: Marc! I haven't heard of or from him in several years. What's he up to these days?

Erin: He's the chaplain at Trinity Lutheran. Four members of our team are peer ministers under him at TLU. They also said you have a son who played in the NHL.

Pat: I do. Retired from the game in 2017 after a couple of seasons in Switzerland. Played a few games with the Milwaukee Admirals at the start of his pro career. Tell Marc I said hi and to contact me now that he's in the business, and good luck today against the Hornets.

The Trinity contingent left St. Tom's and walked over to the Kalamazoo College Athletic Complex, where they grabbed their gear from the bus and went into the locker room to change before warm-ups.

**********

Prior to the start of the match, the handful of parents who came to Kalamazoo discussed yesterday's game and expectations for today's fixture.

Melissa Mueller: I was so glad to see that the girls won yesterday. Were any of you at the game in Ann Arbor?

Rita Chandler: George and I were, along with Jim and Val. They seemed to be playing with a bit more confidence than I had seen in a couple of the previous matches that we watched online.

Jim Matheson: I think having Lauren gone and a coach who is more hands-on both on and off-the-field helped get the team into the right frame of mind to block out what had happened during the losing streak and see this weekend as an opportunity to change the course of the season.

Gina McNamara: I saw in the box score that Steph didn't start against CUAA. Are any of you aware of why?

Val Matheson: Sarah is trying to spread out the minutes this weekend with the games so close together. Steph Lafleur played in place of Nicole in goal and the backups saw a bit more field time than they will today.

Despite playing with a almost first-choice XI, the Thunder were on the back foot all match against Kalamazoo College, trailing 13-3 at the half. With the score 18-5 after 45 minutes, Sarah decided to spare Nicole the last fifteen minutes, sending on Jane to take on mop-up duty. The final quarter hour was a war of attrition, as the motivation from both sides to attack had been lost due to the scoreline. Even though the 22-7 loss equaled their largest margin of defeat of the season (matching that of the 28-13 loss to Capital), the players came off the field in reasonably good spirits, knowing they had faced the toughest defense on their schedule thus far and that their NACC opener against Illinois Tech in three days would be a more accurate barometer of their ability.

Kalamazoo 22 Trinity 7 (Steph McNamara 2 goals, Sam Mueller 1 goal/1 assist, Lindsey Hoffman 1 goal/1 assist, Christen Prince 1 goal, Morgan Brooks 1 goal, Savannah Johnson 1 goal, Kelley Ochowicz 2 assists, Lauren Chandler 1 assist, Kristie Mueller 1 assist, Jess Fisher 1 assist)

**********

The four-hour trip back to Mequon was very uneventful. An early morning plus the fatigue of the two games in twenty-four hours meant most of the team was sleeping for large stretches of the bus ride home. Once back on campus, Erin and Steph stored their equipment in Buuck before leaving for Marc and Danielle's for dinner and a couple of hours downtime with them. After a meal of ham and scalloped potatoes, Erin and Steph went into the living room with Danielle to watch the NCAA
Division I Women's Basketball championship game between Connecticut and Baylor. Marc was in his office checking through his email in preparation for the upcoming week. During a commercial, the three women chatted about how to stick it to their favorite curmudgeon tomorrow.

Erin (to Danielle): Have you ever tried pulling something on Marc on April Fools' Day?

Danielle: I try every year, but he usually beats me to the punch and his being SO SO wary about everything around him makes him a hard one to trick.

Steph: We know he's going to attempt something tomorrow. Against who or what it will be is, of course, up for grabs.

Danielle: He is going to be looking for it from the two of you. Enlist your least-likely prankster and go with a gag so obvious that he won't suspect it.

Meanwhile, back in the home office, a bellow of immense proportions found its way to the living room.

Marc: Holy Huguenots! Tomorrow is going to suck mightily!

The three of them ran back to the office and inquired of him what had caused his yell.

Marc: Reverend Alexandra Schroeder Bailey, Chief Financial Officer of the ELCA, is coming to Trinity tomorrow to comb through our books and run the rule over our ministry.

Erin: That doesn't sound like too much of an inconvenience.

Marc: This woman can find unpinched pennies dangling from the most pristine of accounts. Carries red and blue pencils as substitutes for eyeliner. Quotes ELCA financial guidelines from memory, especially the ones concerning improper expenses and reimbursement.

Danielle listened as her husband ran off all the negative attributes of the ELCA's Money Maven, even asking him how she could have so much power when there is a Treasurer position that sits just beneath the Presiding Bishop in the table of command.

Marc: The treasurer is an elected position. She has to play nice if she wants another term in the job. The CFO post is a hired one, so Rev. Bailey has no incentive to give anyone the benefit of the doubt. She will be arriving at 9am with plans to scour my office and that of other departments in the morning, then sit in on our peer ministry leadership meeting, before returning to Chicago sometime around 2 or 2:30pm. Erin, I will need you and Alyssa to be around to help make this visit palatable and to help defend some of what we have done thus far, because I am sure that she will see some of Paul and Matt's decisions on our behalf to not be "efficient and effective use of limited resources", her go-to phrase when she wants to claw back money from your ministry.

Steph: How do you know her reputation given that you're only in your first year as a chaplain?

Marc: She and I crossed paths at Western Michigan when I worked there, as she was finishing her MBA and had plans to attend LSTC afterwards for her M.Div. Really not the best person to be around more than a few minutes a day. Smug, arrogant, ladder-climber. She had her eyes on this "financial watchdog" job back then, and I am sort of saddened that no one saw through her ambition to put the breaks on her being hired by Presiding Bishop Ellering after her election. Also, she did the once-over on UWM two years ago and cut about a quarter of their operating grant for the following year because of decisions made by them with the approval of Paul and the previous bishop, Jeff Baldwin.
Erin: I'll be there, and Steph and I will talk to Alyssa when we get back. Any others you think should know about this?

Marc: I'll contact VPs Moncrief and Forbes and President Garrett tonight and warn them about her visit. Just hope they'll have enough time to pull something together that will keep her off a deeper investigation of our income and outgo. On the student side, see if Brad can be available at some point of the morning. It'd probably be a good idea for him to meet the denomination's version of the Bishop's Bulldog.

Erin and Steph departed Marc and Danielle's shortly after the basketball game ended (UConn won 75-62), prepared to get home, handle the warnings for tomorrow, and have a good night's sleep.
Et Tu, Peers?!

Chapter Summary

April Fools' Day on campus

With Rev. Alexandra Schroeder Bailey arriving at 9am, Marc made sure he was on campus by 8:30 so he’d be ready for her. On the way to Luther Hall, he stopped by Augsburg to drop off a pair of gifts for Erin and Emily, leaving them with the front desk receptionist. Erin was getting a package of Oreo cookies filled with toothpaste, while Emily's April 1 gag was a selection of bite-sized vegetables in a Dunkin' Donuts Munchkins box. Just before 9, Erin and Alyssa met Marc outside Luther, with the former slightly miffed at him.

Erin: Very funny, Pops. I thought I could wait until after breakfast to brush my teeth, but clearly someone else felt I needed to do it beforehand. Oh, and Emily is already trying to figure out how to get you back for turning her joy into sorrow when she realized that there were no Munchkins in the box.

Marc: Careful what you wish for. There is still a LOT of day left, and I'm on the top of my game.

Alyssa: Has anyone ever gotten you?

Marc: No one's clever enough to trick me. Save the payback for your fellow students, because you won't be able to pull anything on me.

On cue, Rev. Bailey came walking up the path to Luther and introduced herself to the two peers, then she and Marc squared off.

Marc: Lovely. Full of piss-and-vinegar this morning, are we?

Rev. Bailey: Before leaving Chicago, I was greeted by Saran Wrap over the front door of my house. Seems my two kids and husband thought it'd be funny to see Mommy struggling to leave for work. I've had two hours to mull over how I'm going to take it out on you and your ministry.

Before the four of them went inside, Alyssa was intercepted by Sam with a book that she said Kristie had borrowed from her. As she went to open it, Alyssa found that the first 60 pages had been glued together.

Alyssa: Lovely. We have an exam on this material on Friday and I can't study from it because I can't OPEN it!

Marc: That's a new one. "Professor, I couldn't study for the exam because my girlfriend glued my textbook pages together."

Rev. Bailey: You think that's funny, Deacon? Disgraceful, absolutely disgraceful that someone would attempt to sabotage another person's academic performance like that.

Marc exchanged looks with Erin and Alyssa, then led the other three to his office and the start of the CFO's comprehensive audit. She jotted down notes in her portfolio as she went document-by-document through the chaplain's file cabinets, asking questions of him and the other two as she went.
Rev. Bailey: This trip to North Carolina, were there any chaplaincy services offered to nearby universities or was the sole purpose performing a wedding?

Marc: Just the wedding.

Rev. Bailey: And you needed two additional people to help you do that?

Marc: That is a question best asked of Bishop Emerson, as he was the one that required I take a traveling party.

Later on, she got to the expense report for the Philadelphia trip. After feverishly writing down her opinion of the costs and extravagance of the five days there, Rev. Bailey made a copy of the report for her to study in further detail. Erin and Alyssa left at 9:45 for their 10am classes, leaving the other two in the office. When Rev. Bailey sat down in Marc's chair, a loud noise came out from under it. She looked below the seat and saw that an air horn had been taped to the hydraulic, going off when the seat lowered and pressed down on it.

Alex Bailey: I'm guessing this was meant for you.

Marc: Yep. Told Erin and Alyssa when they arrived this morning that they'd never get me.

Alex: And you sitting on the other side was intentional?

Marc: Only in the sense that it would allow me to watch you rip my file cabinet apart. So Al and the kids decided to make it just a LITTLE too difficult for you to come up here this morning.

Alex: Yeah. I know he put them up to it, but they just laughed and laughed as I attempted to leave. You wouldn't do that, would you?

Marc: That gag, no. Toothpaste filling for Oreos and healthy snacks in a Munchkins box, those are more my speed.

Alex: Promise me not to cross you. I think I've found what I came to find here. I have to stop in elsewhere and wreak havoc on other departments. I will see you at Noon at Siebert with your leadership team.

Rev. Bailey got up and left Marc's office, then walked over to Buuck to give the athletic department's books a thorough search.

**********

The peer ministry leadership meeting was fraught with tension as Rev. Bailey questioned the students on their activities so far this year under Deacon Schmidt. Following around 40 minutes of interrogation, the "Bishop's Bulldog" laid out her findings for the group.

Rev. Bailey: After looking through the ledgers and reports in Deacon Schmidt's office, and questioning the six of you, I will be recommending to Presiding Bishop Ellering and the ELCA Church Council that the Greater Milwaukee Synod be docked $11,500 from next year's operating grant for the Office of the Chaplain to reimburse the ELCA for impermissible expenses stemming from Deacon Schmidt's four out-of-synod weddings. He and those who were part of these extravagant undertakings will be required to reimburse the Greater Milwaukee Synod for those expenses that I will designate as "not in keeping with the efficient and effective use of limited resources".
The six students and Marc looked at each other in shock, as the initial thoughts of where to come up with that level of dollars began ruminating in their heads.

Marc: What is the time frame for us to accomplish this?

Rev. Bailey: January 31st in order for the synod to satisfy its reimbursement to the ELCA as a whole.

Erin: Is this really necessary, Rev. Bailey?

Rev. Bailey: Most definitely. This ministry does not exist so that students of wealth can pilfer off its largesse to fatten their own experience at the expense of the many souls on this campus and in the community who need to hear the Good News.

Marc: Seriously.....everything regarding your decision was approved by the synod office. There was no malfeasance on our part.

Rev. Bailey: Then that is for you to take up with Bishop Emerson. My work here is done.

The stunned looks continued around the table, as the reality of her decision sunk in.

Rev. Bailey: Oh, one more thing.....

Marc and Alex: APRIL FOOLS!

Another set of incredulous looks made their way between the six students.

Marc: Whoever tried to jam up my chair with the equivalent of a whoopie cushion, very nice. You got the wrong person in the end, but good idea. Alex, thanks for playing along and helping me with this. You did a marvelous job being cold and unemotional in front of them.

Erin: This whole investigation was just a prank?

Marc: Not entirely. I contacted Rev. Bailey a couple of weeks ago concerning the funny business that the athletic department was doing and planning to continue through their budget request for the next academic year, wanting her to come up here and give them the once-over. She said her first open date was April 1, and we decided that it would be a riot to pull something on all of you at the same time.

Alyssa: So...how are you two acquainted other than being ELCA rostered leaders?

Alex: Marc and I went to high school together for three years at Riverside and then spent a semester together in college at Drake. It's been, what, 30+ years we've known each other?

Marc: Somewhere around there.

Alex: By the way, there won't be any report coming from me on the weddings. The ELCA doesn't have the authority to overrule expenses approved by the synod's bishops concerning their ministries or employees.

Steph: You got us, you REALLY got us. Promise you won't pull something like this next year, Marc.

Marc: I promise.

Alex: I have Marc's file on the athletic department's shady doings, but do any of you have other
Alyssa: My roommate is one of the more deeply-involved participants in their undercover business, so I can share what I have seen.

Alex: Thanks, Alyssa.

As the eight of them left Siebert, Alex and Marc regaled the others with a couple of anecdotes from their past. All had been forgiven by the time they went their separate ways for the rest of the day.
Having played Sunday (on their traditional off-day) meant that the women's lacrosse team was given Monday off from practice. A free afternoon during the week was a luxury for in-season teams, so most of the players chose to take advantage of it by doing nothing sport-related. Kelley made plans with Lauren to go watch her former team, the WNS Wolfpack (made up of Whitefish Bay, Nicolet, and Shorewood High Schools), play against University School of Milwaukee. When Lauren ran into Steph in Augsburg, she told her about their excursion and inquired if she and Erin wanted to tag along and see their future teammate Emma Preston play. After a quick discussion between the two, Steph told Lauren that they were in. At 3:30, the four of them met up in the Buuck parking lot and left campus for the short trip to University School.

**********

The match between University School and the WNS Wolfpack was played at a fever pitch, with both teams having immense offensive firepower. Sarah was in the stands evaluating Emma and scouting players for future recruiting classes. The four Thunder players moved up to sit with her at halftime and together they watched the second half. The game went into overtime with U-School pulling out a 17-16 victory. After the match, the five from Trinity waited along the rail along with several sets of parents. Emma came to the rail and, after hugging her parents, Ken and Kathy, and her girlfriend Savannah's parents, Ashley and Jane, walked over with Savannah to speak to the visitors from Mequon.

Emma (to Sarah): Thanks for coming to watch us play. Day off for the Thunder?

Sarah: Yes. We played yesterday and with matches Wednesday and Saturday, today became the off-day for the week.

Steph: You did fairly well against a team that looked to be loaded with attacking options.

Emma: It was an OK game for me. I usually can keep teams somewhere in the 10-goal range, but like you said, WNS had a lot of talent that made life difficult back there.

Kelley: Sorry to see my and Coach Hawthorne's former team lose, but also happy that you personally got the win.

Emma introduced Savannah to the players and coach, then asked about the mood in the team since she was on campus for Recruit Day.

Lauren: It is definitely better now that Coach Heberlein is no longer in charge.

Emma (to Sarah): So you're the boss now?

Sarah: Yes, I am. Still have to get used to it. Only been in the job since Wednesday morning.

Savannah: Emma told me that your team had a number of couples playing on it.

Erin: She's correct. You have two of them here in front of you.

Savannah: Cool. And everyone's good with that?

Steph: Well.....the former coach wasn't, but our new one is and even allowed us to room together on this last road trip.
Emma (to Erin): Chaplain still as funny as ever?

Erin: I'd rather not talk about that.

Steph: He left Erin a package of toothpaste-filled Oreo cookies, then had the gall to up the ante by scaring the daylights out of our peer ministry team with a fake audit of his office, making us believe that we had to pay back the synod for the trips Erin, I, and another student took with him to perform weddings.

Savannah: Some of that sounds cruel, but the Oreo thing, that's funny.

Erin: Lucky I didn't try to wash them down with orange juice. THAT would have been a VERY bad taste left in my mouth.

Kathy Preston walked over to the crowd and introduced herself to Sarah and the players. After a couple minutes of conversation, she told her daughter and her partner that they were going to dinner at Zi's Sports Pub, then inquired if the Thunder were interested in joining them. Following a polling of the players, Sarah told Kathy that they would meet them there following her touching base with the coaches from the two teams.

**********

Over dinner at Zi's, the Prestons and Starks asked Sarah and the players about the cultural change on campus since Trinity came to be.

Jane Stark: What's the level of acceptance for LGBT people at the school? I know the rules have been changed and students and faculty are now able to be "out" without fear of retribution, but from the inside, how are they treated?

Steph: In most places, there is complete acceptance, because our campus enforcers won't stand for less. Yeah, there are individuals that don't agree with it, but it's less than last year and over time, we can hope they get shuffled out.

Savannah: Emma said that Erin and you have a bit of an in with the school's higher-ups.

Erin: We do, but don't really use our connection to him except in dire circumstances, like when our former coach suspended us for missing curfew even though there was plenty of evidence to indicate that it wasn't intentional or avoidable.

Ken Preston: Sarah, with you in charge now, what is the chance of Emma getting serious playing time since you will have two returning goalkeepers on next year's roster?

Sarah: Players have to come in and compete for the spots they want. Some are happy riding on everyone's coattails or getting a few minutes a match. Others want to be bigger pieces of the overall puzzle. Unlike other coaches, I don't believe in riding one goalkeeper every minute of every match. Your daughter will have chances to start and play over the course of the season.

Steph: Last weekend, all three goalkeepers got game time between our two matches.

Emma: Do any of your teammates date other female athletes at Trinity, like Savannah and I will be doing once we get there?

Lauren: Does anyone know the full breakdown of our 24?

Erin: We have seven couples in the team, so that's 14. Two players date other female athletes at the
school. Another one dates an athlete at UW-Oshkosh. Two are with regular guys. Another few are out and single, and a couple are just free agents, with no tip-off as to how they swing.

Sarah (to Emma and Savannah): If you're free, come up to campus on Saturday for our game against Edgewood. It's our Pride Game and you'll get to see and feel for yourselves the change in atmosphere surrounding the team along with how we play as a unit.

Kathy Preston: I think we'll take you up on that offer. When is game time?

Sarah: 1pm. We've got a decent-sized parents' group that comes to matches. They've been really supportive of what we've done this past week to turn the page and try to have a positive second half of the season.

The Thunder players excused themselves as Erin needed to return to campus for a meeting with Cali about their portion of the Easter Sunday service. Sarah left shortly after them and stopped at Dani and Michelle's for a bit before heading home.
Lessons Learned

Chapter Summary

Steph Lafleur FINALLY tells Shelley to back off and the Thunder play their first-ever NACC game.

On Tuesday morning, Marc made phone calls to the athletic directors at the Milwaukee School of Engineering and Alverno College and the associate athletic director at UW-Milwaukee to get some framework of how to pursue a show-cause order against Coach Heberlein and what a fair set of sanctions would be for her to serve if she were hired by another college before it expired.

Marc: I'm sure you have read or heard about the women's lacrosse coach here parting ways with the school last week.

Brian Murphy (MSOE AD): I did. The story I read made no mention of what brought it to pass.

Marc: That's because she and our athletic director negotiated a settlement with a non-disclosure agreement that prohibits both sides from revealing certain things. The fact that Gavin fought against the head of HR, his associate AD and SWA, and myself as the athletes' advocate on enforcing any sort of sanction for what had been brought up and then conveniently worked out a way for Coach Heberlein to depart without any airing of her transgressions and with a possible severance package that's hidden from view makes me fairly skeptical of the university or its athletes receiving justice in this case. The reason I am calling is that Jamie Krueger, the associate AD, and myself are looking to request a show-cause order from the NCAA and I wanted to feel out other ADs in the conference and area about a suitable punishment that would be levied if she were to be hired while the order would be in effect.

Brian: What were the actual "sins" committed by the coach?

Marc: Sexual harassment, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and attempting to violate the school's Codes of Conduct through the threat of actions which go against the ELCA's Social Statements on Education and Human Sexuality.

Brian: That is a handful, and all of these are true?

Marc: Wednesday's actions put a pause on the investigations that Dr. Baines, the head of Human Resources, and Gavin were set to do on the claims made to me by almost 3/4 of the team and their assistant coach, in which these were some of the charges.

Brian: Were she here, and sacking were not an option, I'd have suspended her six weeks without pay and required a public apology to be released by our SID. If she chose to walk, that would be the penalty I would tack onto my request for a show-cause order.

Marc: Who is able to bring forth a request?

Brian: Her previous employer, the conference in which she last coached, or a coalition of individuals who were privy to her actions and who would have had reasonable belief in the requested sanctions being enforced were she still employed in her most recent position. Since neither you nor Jamie
necessarily have standing to do it over the objection of Gavin, the conference would have to ask for it. We are allowed to investigate on our own the claims through interviewing players, coaches, and administrators. Your lacrosse team comes here this year, right?

Marc: Yes, April 23rd. I'll be there since my goddaughter and her girlfriend play for the team.

Brian: I'll red-circle that date and make sure you and I have a chance to talk along with my asking the new coach and some of the players about her actions. If I hear enough to warrant action, I will take it when the conference ADs meet next.

Marc: Thanks. I have calls to Heather Padgett at Alverno and Kate Lynch at UWM to make this morning to get their opinions on this so I have a range of opinions to share with Jamie when we meet this afternoon to pick through the non-disclosure agreement and what might be sitting behind the curtain of it.

Brian: Looking forward to seeing you on the 23rd and I'm sure Heather and I will talk about this at some point between now and then.

Marc ended his call with Brian and moved onto the other two he wanted to make. Kate Lynch from UWM told him that her choice of sanctions would be 3 weeks suspension without pay, an additional 3 weeks of salary clawback after she returned from suspension, and the public statement on her past remarks, with a show-cause request if she resigned. Heather Padgett at Alverno took a much tougher stance, going for a six-week suspension without pay, the public apology, sensitivity training that would need to be completed before being allowed back on-campus, and a time limit to do so or have her position be considered abandoned.

After stepping away for lunch, Marc met with Jamie in his office to parse over the non-disclosure agreement and discuss the input he received from the three outside athletic administrators. Together, the pair put together a letter that Jamie planned to send to Greg Lawrence, Commissioner of the Northern Athletics Collegiate Conference, with their request for the conference to seek a show-cause order against Lauren Heberlein. As for the non-disclosure agreement, since Kara Callen, Director of Compliance, was the only member of the athletic department to have access to it aside from Gavin, one of them would need to get her to provide access. Marc thought he could ask Alex when she returned to campus on Friday for the Board of Trustees meeting to request it from her as part of the ELCA's audit of the athletic department. With that completed, Marc packed up and went Bonhoeffer Chapel for a meeting with Alyssa, Stefan, and Karina concerning the Easter Sunday service coming up on the 14th.

**********

Steph Lafleur sat down at her laptop and decided to FINALLY tell Shelley her feelings and request that she stop her unrequited pursuit of her.

Shelley,

As it seems like visual evidence has not been convincing enough, I now will spell it out to you in my own words. Erin and I are together, and we're happy. Whatever you might believe about "not getting a chance" or how you feel you're a better option for me than her is immaterial to the fact that she is my girlfriend and I am hers. Please stop chasing me, or I will be forced to file a grievance against you with Deacon Schmidt under the general heading of harassment, specifically the charge of "meddling in an established relationship following a verbal or written request to cease and desist". Hate me if you want, but know that I do not consider you as much of a PITA as others on the team do. We could be friends, I think, if you weren't such a thorn in Erin's side or if you hadn't harmed one of our teammates by your actions several months ago.
Trinity's weekly worship service was moderately attended, as the slight uptick in temperatures led a number of students to use the free hour for outdoor pursuits. Marc’s homily today was on the subject of grace and how it is what makes Lutheranism stand out from other denominations. He brought up the grace exhibited on both sides of this past weekend's CUAA/Trinity Lutheran interchange by showing videos of Jamie and Rev. Donovan's speeches, followed by an anecdote of Kelley choosing not to seek punishment of Shelley as an example of "Jesus in our midst". He encouraged worshipers to again seek out the good in all those around them and practice grace even when one would rather dispense wrath.

Following Lunch Bunch, Steph Lafleur went directly to Buuck to mentally prepare for the day's match against Illinois Tech, even though she knew that Nicole would be starting in goal. Before worship, Steph had told Marc that she sent Shelley a note the previous evening spelling out her and Erin being in a relationship and requesting that she respect that. Marc told her that he was proud of her and that he would have her back if Shelley kept pursuing. While Steph was doing some mental imaging and breathing exercises, Shelley came into the locker room and went directly to the goalkeeper.

Shelley: WHY are you settling for that six you're with when you can have a ten like yourself?

Steph: First, my girlfriend is no six in my eyes. She's more like an 11.

Shelley: Then you have to be blind.

Steph: You are looking with your eyes, whereas I look with my heart, and in that respect, Erin is perfect.

Lauren, Kelley, Erin, Julie, Christen, and Sofia came into the locker room and saw Shelley and Steph having a heated conversation. Christen and Lauren pulled Steph away and settled her down, with Julie getting Shelley out of harm's way so she could get her side of the story. A few minutes later, Steph walked back into the main portion of the locker room, geared up quickly, then went out to Niemoller Field with Kelley and Sofia to take some additional shots in net from the pair. Erin sent a text to Marc letting him know what had transpired in the locker room for reference should parents inquire about the tension between the two players.

In the stands during warm-ups, Alyssa and Jessie greeted the team's parents as they arrived. Marc showed up with Dani and Cali around 20 minutes before opening draw, with Melissa Mueller waving them over to where the group was located. Dan Ochowicz introduced the chaplain to Peter Zembruski, with the two men shaking hands.

Peter (to Marc): So you're the guy that my daughter says is making her life a bit of a struggle.

Marc: She's doing most of the struggling on her own, not taking obvious evidence as fact or acting as though she can will people to change their opinions and decisions just because she wants something, or someone in this case. I've given her chances to help her own cause, but she seems bull-headed.

Peter: I'm not happy with her attitude about that. I really hope she hasn't been TOO much of a thorn in their sides.
Marc: Steph finally told her to back off, and according to a text I got from the locker room earlier, she didn't take it too well. Depending on what happened, she might have bought herself the remainder of her suspension stemming from the spring break trip.

Peter: I know she was suspended for the second game down there for getting into a fight with one of her teammates. There was more to it than that?

Marc: She was suspended for three additional games, but I stayed the last two of them provided she doesn't have another incident the rest of the season. She served the first one when the team went to Macalester two weeks ago. Were you not aware of that?

Peter: No, I wasn't, and that would explain the odd expenses on her credit card from that day and the day after.

Marc: I heard from Steph that she had tried to follow the team up to St. Paul, but then disappeared around the 90/94/39 split near Portage.

Peter: She's acting out against her mother's desire for her to not be gay, and I'm sorry that Erin and Steph as well as Kelley have gotten caught in the middle of it.

Marc accepted Peter's apology, as did Dan. The teams were introduced and the opening draw went to Trinity, with Megan collecting the ball. The Thunder turned it over, which led to the Scarlet Hawks picking up the opening score. The deeper start for the offense allowed them to effectively move the ball against Illinois Tech, which enabled them to stay with their opponent for most of the first 50 minutes. A 4-0 run by the Scarlet Hawks put them ahead, 18-15, with four minutes left. Kelley found Lindsey open just inside the 8-meter and her goal made it 18-16. Savannah scored off a quick lead pass from Kristie to bring the deficit down to one with two minutes remaining. Trinity turned over Illinois Tech just on their side of midfield, with Jess running the ball forward until she reached the 12-meter, where she passed it to Christen, whose pass to Moe gave her an open shooting lane with 35 seconds to go. The senior hesitated on her shot, then passed to Savannah, who ended up shooting with 16 seconds. Her attempt on goal hit the Illinois Tech goalkeeper, with the ball dying on the ground, where it was scooped up and the clock ran out with the Scarlet Hawks in possession behind their net.

Illinois Tech 18 Trinity 17 (Kelley Ochowicz 1 goal/2 assists, Morgan Brooks 1 goal/2 assists, Lindsey Hoffman 2 goals/1 assist, Steph McNamara 4 goals, Jess Fisher 2 assists, Sofia Hernandez 1 goal/4 assists, Lauren Chandler 1 goal/2 assists, Savannah Johnson 3 goals, Megan Racicot 1 goal/1 assist, Kristie Mueller 3 assists, Christen Prince 3 goals)

**********

Savannah was one of the first players to exit Niemoller Field, wearing a very dejected look on her face. Her parents embraced her and gave her praise for her hat trick, while Marc mentioned that the team wouldn't have been in any position to even tie the game without her work in the comeback effort. When Morgan Andringa and Maggie came out, they gave their roommate and partner a small shower with their water bottles to celebrate her hat trick. After Sarah locked the gate to the field, she turned and spoke with Marc and Dani about the match, looking for some "moral victory" takeaways from the close loss.

Marc: I'm not sure anyone has told you this before, but there is an adage that says you have to lose close games before you can win close ones.

Sarah: No, I haven't. Care to unpack that?
Marc: It's about being in position to win. When you're in that spot for the first time, it can be overwhelming and you don't usually handle it well. Each successive time, you get closer to pulling it off, and eventually you make the right adjustments to hang on and get the result. The William Peace game, you were in position to get the win, but a little bit of bad luck with inexperienced players not making adjustments led to the offside and the counter which gave them the two-goal win. Today, the ability to get that W was there, but a bit of clock mismanagement got the girls stuck. Either Moe had to take that shot when she had the chance, or Savannah needed to hang onto it longer and go for a last-gasp strike to tie the game. Next time you're in that spot, you might have the lead and need to figure out how to hang onto it. Remind your players of that, that as you get closer to pulling out a close win, you learn what NOT to do as much as you do what TO do.

Sarah: You want to give my post-game speech for me?

Marc: I'm sure you'll find the words. These players respect you and believe in you. Take that, be honest about how they're probably feeling after this loss, and tell them to remember that come Saturday afternoon when they take on Edgewood, so there's no chance they'll be in position to feel that again.

Sarah hugged Marc, then Dani. She then followed Megan, Jess, and Nicole to Buuck to address the team.

Sarah: First, I want to say that I am proud of this team. For a first-year squad with eighteen freshmen to come within 15 seconds of forcing overtime against the number two team in our conference in its first-ever league match, I'm not sure anyone could ask for more. I know that you are probably feeling like you didn't finish the job today, that you failed to meet your own goals. I want you to carry that feeling with you into practice tomorrow, and the next day, and onto the field Saturday against Edgewood, and I want you to play angry, not wanting to have that hollow pit in your stomach that exists now walking off the field after that game. Anything anyone wants to add?

Megan: We're good. We just need a little luck to challenge for a playoff spot this year. Let's go out on Saturday and not give Edgewood any chance of hanging with us. Believe in yourselves and in what we as a team can accomplish when we work together.

Sam: This team is further along than I would have expected, even with us inheriting a senior goalkeeper and an all-senior midfield. The other first-year teams in the league should NOT be able to stop us. So we lost by one today. Last time we were in that spot, we lost by two. We hung with Augsburg until the morale in the side got decimated by our former coach. Let's take it to Edgewood and leave nothing to chance.

Sarah: Bring it in. Thunder on three. One, Two, Three.

ALL: THUNDER!
Learning To Trust Others

Practice for the women's soccer team left a bad taste in the mouths of several players, notably Lexi Millen, Amber Bryant, and Allie Lerner, who Sara chose to ride hard in an attempt to test their loyalty to her, the program, and their joint extracurricular pursuits. Dani walked away afterwards pissed off at her boss for focusing so much on those three and not paying much attention to the improvements being made by others on the team, such as Emily Bowman in goal, Cali Farmer in attack, and Cami Leonard at outside back. After grabbing a couple bottles of water for herself and a bottle of Pepsi for Marc, she stopped by his office to vent a bit and to catch up on the week that had been.

Dani: That WOMAN! Ignoring the positive that some of the freshmen are doing in spring training and spending all her attention on her pets. Again, were I in a safer position here, I'd look to get the dirt to make their brothel implode on them.

Marc: You know that you can't do that and expect to be kept on, and after what you've been through with some of them so far this year, sitting on this until they screw up big-time is the better course of action.

Dani: Right. I really like what Sarah has done in her first week or so being in charge of women's lacrosse. Even with the nail-biting loss yesterday and the trouncing they took on Sunday, the players have been upbeat and embracing the emotional change around the team. I think Gavin is letting his protection of Lauren and Sara get the better of his judgment in leading the athletic department.

Marc: He's going to end up on the hot seat on Friday, since the ELCA's Chief Financial Officer was on campus on Monday digging through the athletic department's books in preparation for helping Paul and I call out some of the oddities in their accounting and next year's budget request at tomorrow's Board of Trustees meeting.

Dani: Your high school and college friend who helped you prank Steph, Erin, and Alyssa?

Marc: Yes.

Dani: How's Danielle? We're past the three-week mark, so I'd presume things are improving.

Marc: She turned the corner physically over the weekend. We won't know about the tumor until Tuesday, but she's been able to work every day this week and did her volunteer shift at the Humane Society last night.

After answering the question, Marc retreated into his own head a bit, causing Dani to inquire about his thoughts.

Marc: I'm feeling very conflicted about this development. I should be happy that she's feeling better, but instead I'm feeling "stuck" between the present I have and the future I want, with no ability to reconcile the two. When I'm working, none of this affects me, because I can block it out and be selfish with my time and emotions. Away from here, it does. No sleep problems, thank God, but I keep adding stuff to keep me busy so I don't have to feel anything.

He began getting slightly agitated and his breathing got a bit haggard. Dani asked if he had his Hydroxyzine with him, which he confirmed. He told her that he didn't want to take one because he needed to be at full capacity for the Faculty Senate meeting that afternoon, where the Urban Coaching Institute would be up for approval by the full body.
Dani: Worry about your health, both physical and mental, and not about all the things you feel you SHOULD be doing. Danielle is right about you being unwilling to get out of your own way, but I don't think it's as ego-driven as she does. You don't trust anyone to step in for you, so you run yourself ragged to handle everything that comes across your desk. I know you have delegated a portion of the UCP work to me and the pay and experience have been invaluable, but if you need to miss today's meeting for your own sanity's sake, let me go and speak on your behalf. Come along if you feel like you need to be there, but let ME take on the charge to get the institute approved. If there is to be a future for the two of us, you need to TRUST ME to have your best interests in mind and allow me to show that, the same way I did in North Carolina and in Chicago and at the Chili Cook-Off and on Moving Day and....

Marc: I know you've done it plenty of times in the past, and I'm grateful for it. Trust has been the one thing that I have the hardest time giving, because at times I've been too trusting and others have used it to harm me. I've seen your heart and I know you won't do that to me, but it's not easy giving up control like that.

Dani: You trust your students and they're more likely to make errors in your absence than some of us. Give me a chance, sweetheart.

Marc reached into his desk and pulled out his bottle of Droxies, then took one and washed it down with a swig from his Pepsi. "You win. Can you call Ben Oliphant and see if he can come over so the three of us can discuss what the two of you will say before the Faculty Senate?"

Dani called Ben and they set up a 1:30pm meeting to work out their presentation with Marc. Marc told her he would go with them, but trust her to woo the 45 senators to approve the founding of and initial seed money for the Urban Coaching Institute. Dani recommended that Marc lie down on the couch and rest for a bit. She sat down on one end of it and Marc rested his head in her lap as she massaged his temples and scratched his scalp, whispering comforting words to him. He placed his left hand against her heart, which she placed her right hand over. The two stayed like that for around an hour before Marc got up and started pulling together his materials for his upcoming meeting with her and Ben.

************

Highlights from the Faculty Senate meeting:

* The Urban Coaching Institute was approved by a vote of 41-4, with a temporary space allocated in the basement of Rincker Hall and a starting budget of $5,000 to be matched by $5,000 from new licensing agreements of the Urban Coaching Module between the institute and other organizations.

* The distribution of seats for the 2019-2020 Faculty Senate was disclosed (45 total, with 12 at-large and 33 divided between the university's schools; elections to be held April 18th).

* Senate President Amanda Duckworth announced that she would be leaving Trinity Lutheran at the end of the academic year to become provost at Concordia-New York.

* Professor of Nursing Lydia Wingate submitted the joint School of Health Sciences/School of Nursing/School of Pharmacy list of seminar offerings for the university's new certificate program in Practical Ministry, which was approved by acclamation.
Playing For Pride

The Trinity campus was very lively for a Saturday morning as the women's lacrosse team was holding a youth clinic ahead of their Pride Game against Edgewood College at 2pm (pushed back from 1pm). Sarah along with several of the team's out players (Steph Lafleur, Becca Curtin, Megan Racicot, Lindsey Hoffman, Erin Matheson, and Jess Fisher) ran the 70 or so middle and high schoolers through some advanced drills and a short-sided scrimmage before engaging with them in a question-and-answer session about college life.

Sarah: Before I begin taking questions for the players to answer, I want to address what some of you may have seen or heard in the media about our program. Last Wednesday, the school's head lacrosse coach stepped down because of a difference of opinion with the university over the suitability of lesbian players on her team, which caused her to make decisions in violation of the school's Codes of Conduct. After her departure and my taking over, the team chose to make a concerted effort to exhibit pride in who they were and who they chose to love. That is what caused us to designate today's game against Edgewood as our Pride Game and in changing the initial plans for today's clinic to have it run by a number of our players who identify as lesbian or bisexual. If you're considering Trinity as a place to further your education or your athletic career, know that you will be welcomed as you are and that the administration here takes seriously charges of harassment and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. With that, we will take the first question.

Christina Gilbert (HS sophomore): I still have another year before I will begin thinking about where to attend college. What kind of assistance do athletes get at Trinity in balancing their academic and athletic lives given the finite number of hours in a day and week?

Lindsey: Trinity has an academic adviser housed in the athletic department. She is the person you see when you want to figure out if you can finish a specific major within the time span you desire, to make sure that classes you want or need to take don't conflict with practice, and to override restrictions on course enrollment. Since my major won't officially exist until the fall, I needed to work with her to lay out my first-year schedule so I could take some of my sophomore year courses early since I'll be playing catch-up next year in the French department.

Kendra Rollins (8th grader): My sister Katelyn will be coming to Trinity in the fall. She's been confirmed and I will be so in about a month. Being that Trinity is an ELCA university, how much religious involvement is required on-campus?

Erin: Well, you can do as much or as little as you want. The only required parts of religious life at Trinity are the six credits of religion all students take as part of the core curriculum and there being no other activities or classes on campus between 12 and 1pm on Wednesdays, when worship is held in the chapel. If you're looking for more, there is the Peer Ministry Alliance, headed up by myself, Steph, and one of the players from the women's hockey team. There is also a push within the Student Affairs office to broaden the religious experience here by allowing for other denomination-specific organizations to be founded as well as chapters of parachurch organizations one might see on secular campuses. I do have to say that Steph and I are sort of special cases when it comes to being active, as the chaplain is my godfather and Steph is looking to attend seminary in the future.

Hayley Ramsey (incoming freshman): When I came to Recruit Day in January, Coach Heberlein was in charge and a couple of you said that she had put a bit of a pall on the team with comments concerning your dating lives. With her gone, have things loosened up and are there advantages to being residential and out vs. commuting and out?

Steph Lafleur: I better take this since I probably have the best vantage point to answer it. The biggest
advantage that exists for living on-campus as an out individual is support. You find out somewhat quickly who is part of the tribe and what relationships exist within it. One of our teammates commutes and it put her at a loss with developing connections with other players as well as knowing who was off-limits. I've got a question for you, but I'll save it for the walkover to lunch.

Lindsay Archibald (incoming freshman): I'm going to be attending Trinity in the fall as well, but will play ice hockey instead of lacrosse. How much support is there in the athletic department for women's sports and do the teams commingle or stay to themselves?

Jess: Erin and Steph would be better at answering this one since they're a LOT closer to athletes on other teams than I am being a senior transfer from Carthage, but I'll give it a shot. As the women's lacrosse representative on the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, I get the opportunity to interact with athletes from all 24 teams at Trinity. Some of the teams' representatives get on quite well, but whether it funnels down to the rest of their squads I don't know. Erin, want to help me out?

Erin: There is some overlap between women's soccer and women's lacrosse in terms of players knowing each other and hanging out together. We have a couple coming in this fall where one plays lacrosse and the other field hockey. One of our teammates is dating a member of the women's hockey team, and there are numerous cross-sport roommate situations. As for support for women's sports, our associate athletic director/women's volleyball coach pushed to get us better accommodations for our road trip last weekend and is committed to fighting the AD's desire to grow the football program on the backs of either our team or the women's soccer team's potential move to Division I.

Sarah wrapped up the Q-and-A and the group of athletes moved to the Friends of Concordia Room in Buuck for lunch catered by Papa John's. On the way over, Steph asked Hayley about her and Sam Keller. Hayley told her that they were close friends, but she was hoping that once they got to Trinity it would change into something more. Steph gave Hayley some advice about the ease of doing it with both of them living on-campus versus one or both of them commuting. She also recommended they room together as a step in that direction.

**********

A near-capacity crowd at Niemoller Field, including a fair number of fans of the Edgewood Eagles, were in their seats as the pregame ceremony commenced.

Dan Paulson (PA announcer): Would you please direct your attention to the center of the field where Trinity Lutheran athletic director Gavin Winchester and head lacrosse coach Sarah Hawthorne will begin our pregame activities.

Gavin Winchester: Welcome to Pride Day at Niemoller Field. A resolution passed last semester by the Student Government Association on behalf of the Gay Athletes Association encouraged our school's 24 athletic teams to designate one home match on their schedule to recognize their players and fan base who are LGBT. The theme for the women's lacrosse team's match is "Playing For Pride". With that, I hand over the mic to Coach Hawthorne.

Sarah Hawthorne: Thank you, Gavin. When the team and I chose today's game to be our "Pride Game", we felt that one way to celebrate our fans and players who identify as LGBT would be to play in honor of them. Will the Trinity Lutheran University Thunder women's lacrosse team join me in stating who we are playing for today.

The team came out to the center of the field and stood 12 on either side of Sarah in numerical order. She handed the microphone to Steph Lafleur, who began the list of honorees.
Steph L.: I am Stephanie Lafleur, and today I am playing for future teammate and goalkeeper Emma Preston.

Emma, in the stands with her girlfriend Savannah, her parents Ken and Kathy, and Savannah’s parents Ashley and Jane, was a little dumbstruck by the acknowledgment, but managed to nod her head and give Steph the ASL sign for thank you.


Sam: I’m Samantha Mueller, and today I play for my girlfriend, Amanda Norman.

Becca: I am Rebecca Curtin and I dedicate my play today to my roommate, Jessie Felder.

Megan: Megan Racicot, and my play is in honor of the director of our campus’s LGBT Resource Center, Suzanne Bidwell.

Erin: I’m Erin Matheson and I am honoring future Trinity field hockey player Savannah Stark with my play today.

Savannah squealed slightly, then hugged Emma, which Kevin Nemeth got on film.

Kristie: Kristie Mueller and my game today is for Alyssa Norman.

Sarah: I am coaching today for my best friend, Wil Trainor, and my Trinity colleague Danielle Dillon.

Sarah handed the microphone back to Gavin. "Thank you again for attending and enjoy the game."

**********

The Thunder came out in a 4-2-3-2 in an attempt to solve the gaping hole that had existed in the center of the field in their last couple of matches.

----------Steph L.

Ali-----Julie------Sam------Erin

-----Jess-----------Moe

Megan-------Lauren--------Kristie

-----Christen------Steph M.

The opening draw went the way of Trinity, with Christen passing the ball out to Megan after gaining control of it. Megan hit Lauren with a crisp pass, who then moved it forward to Steph McNamara to put past the Edgewood goalkeeper for the opening score. The better spread of the Thunder’s outfield eleven allowed them to dominate possession and scoring chances against the Eagles, which contributed to an 8-1 lead after 18 minutes. Sarah cleared her bench at that point, leaving only Christen on the field from the starting lineup. Goals from Savannah, Maggie, and Lindsey kept the home team significantly ahead, with them leading 11-5 at halftime. A number of starters returned in the second half, but with the lead continuing to be comfortable, Sarah used her second-string for most of the final thirty, even putting Jane into net for the last 10 minutes of the match. Christen, Lauren, and Steph McNamara each picked up three goals as every player got onto the score sheet in a 23-10 victory for the Thunder, evening their conference record at 1-1.

Trinity 23 Edgewood 10 (Ali Kramer 1 assist, Sam Mueller 1 goal/1 assist, Shelley Zembruski 1
goal, Kelley Ochowicz 1 assist, Morgan Brooks 1 goal/1 assist, Lindsey Hoffman 2 goals/2 assists, Julie Jacobsen 1 goal, Steph McNamara 3 goals, Jess Fisher 1 assist, Sofia Hernandez 1 goal/2 assists, Lauren Chandler 3 goal/2 assists, Becca Curtin 1 goal/1 assist, Savannah Johnson 2 goals/1 assist, Megan Racicot 2 assists, Emily Sommer 1 goal, Erin Matheson 1 assist, Kristie Mueller 3 assists, Andi Susskind 1 assist, Maggie Dowling 2 goals/2 assists, Christen Prince 3 goals, Morgan Andringa 1 goal/1 assist)

**********

NACC Standings

Aurora University 2-0

Illinois Tech 2-0

Concordia-Chicago 1-1

Trinity Lutheran 1-1

Edgewood College 1-1

Milw. School of Engineering 1-1

Wisconsin Lutheran 0-2

Benedictine University 0-2
With the Student Government Association election just eight days away, Trinity’s Office of Student Affairs sponsored two days of open campaigning in Albrecht, Luther, and Stuenkel Halls for at-large and student organization candidates to meet with the student body. Each of the colleges would hold a forum on Monday or Tuesday evening for candidates vying for one of the seats allotted to their school. The first couple of hours of this new endeavor went well, but a small debate and verbal sparring match broke out in Albrecht around the lunch hour between current At-Large Representative Becky Sanderson and current Inter-Fraternity Council president and SGA rep Tom Bridges, started by the latter.

Tom: Ms. Sanderson, is it not true that you intentionally used your position in the SGA this year to advocate for policies that were aimed at curtailing the freedom of men at Trinity and thus denying them the ability to have a equal college experience to that of the women in attendance?

Becky: Tom, you are aware that I am only one of 35 voices in Student Government, and that I alone cannot and did not approve or enact rules that restricted the opportunity for male students to receive a equal education, both in and out of the classroom, to that of female students.

Tom: Did you or did you not bring forth the bill which established the LGBT Resource Center?

Becky: Yes, as it was approved by the committee which I chair.

Tom: Did you not also work with Elizabeth Edwards along with a host of others to first block changes to Trinity's Code of Student Conduct and then bring forward a watered-down version of a bill that I along with Richard Kilbourn and Kevin Dupree had been seeking to pass for the better part of three months?

Becky: The bill which you had placed before the full SGA was terrible in how it sought to allow a segment of the student body to practice indiscriminate "macking". THAT'S why we worked to stop it by any means possible, then pass something which spelled out what was permitted and not permitted within the confines of the present code and the Social Statements which undergird it.

Tom: Do you truly believe that we were out to intentionally harm our fellow students with our proposal? We weren't, but the opportunity to argue our position in front of the full SGA was hijacked by your colleagues who jumped at the presumption that, since we wanted no numeric restrictions on interpersonal relationships, we were seeking to impose our sexual will on them. As you are now running for a second term on SGA and have tossed your hat in the ring for its presidency, clearly this past year was all about ambition and you seeking the limelight so that, once again, this campus could be stolen away from its true upper class.

Becky walked over to Tom and finished her comments for him directly to his face. "And I suppose that your desire to run for an At-Large seat this year has NOTHING to do with the fact that you and a smattering of current representatives would like to seize control of the body to prop up your idea of athletes and frat boys being the rightful rulers of this university." She then left her kiosk and walked out of Albrecht to attend her 1pm class in Loeber Hall.

**********

Following lacrosse practice and a quick dinner in Siebert, a number of the players (Erin, Sam, Emily, Julie, Christen, and Steph Lafleur) went to Bonhoeffer Chapel for Easter Sunday worship rehearsal. Marc would be presiding over the service, with Alyssa, Stefan, and Karina handling the homily and
Steph acting as liturgical assistant. The service began with Danielle playing "Morning Has Broken" on her flute in leading Marc, the three homilists, and Steph to the altar. Next was the opening hymn, "Christ The Lord Is Risen Today", followed by confession and absolution. Steph delivered the first and second readings, along with call portion of the interceding psalm. Marc then moved to the altar to speak forth the Gospel reading, Matthew 28:1-10.

Marc: After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Marc gave his introduction of the trio who would speak on the Resurrection, then had them give the first 45-60 seconds of their remarks. Following that was a run-through of the Prayers of the People, followed by the Passing of the Peace, before rehearsingCommunion with his full allotment of peer ministers. Once that was completed, Marc gave the Post-Communion Blessing, then the Benediction before Sam, Danielle, and Matt played the introduction to the Closing Hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy". Marc cut the song after the first verse and asked everyone to take seats in the first handful of pews on either side of the center aisle.

Marc: For a group that only had a couple of hours to work out the liturgy and select its components, plus impromptu sessions between the peer mentors and their charges, along with the three instrumentalists working in isolation before tonight, I think we're in good shape for Sunday evening. Service will start at 5:00, so please be here by 3:30 so any set-up can be done and we can do some touch-up work on parts that are not as crisp as I'd like or where there is potential for slips, such as the opening where Danielle leads the five co-presiders to the front of the chapel. The music is very well-set, and I'm pleased to see that you didn't cringe too badly with the old-school choices for the opening and closing hymns. Does anyone have questions or suggestions?

Karina: Is there a way to put in a post-sermon hymn so that we're not going straight from my words to the Prayers of the People, which is a pretty awkward drop-off?

Marc: Do you have a song in mind to place there?

Karina: I'd like to add "Crown Him With Many Crowns", but that seems better at the start. In the A.M.E. tradition, both that song and "Christ The Lord Is Risen Today" are ones that can be used in the Easter liturgy. Can we put "Crown Him..." as the opening hymn and "Christ The Lord..." as the post-sermon one?

Marc: I like your thinking, Karina. You sure that isn't too uptight and stuffy?

Karina: I've done that hymn every year on Easter Sunday and if I plan to end up as a preacher, I'm going to do it every year I'm in the pulpit.

Marc: Consider it in. I'd like to have you come in on Thursday afternoon to do a trial run with the two pieces and where each makes the most sense to be placed. Matt and Alyssa, are either of you available on Thursday to help the two of us out? I need a keyboardist since Sam will be at lacrosse practice and I want a second opinion on the two of ours on how the service flows with the two hymns
in different spots.

Alyssa and Matt agreed to meet with Marc and Karina at 3pm on Thursday to help them finalize the hymn placement for Sunday.
Both Marc and Danielle were nervous as they walked into the Froedtert Hospital Cancer Center, where she would have an updated MRI done on her meningioma to see what the first four weeks of treatment had done to its size and position. The images were collected quickly and with no need for Danielle to be sedated. Once the radiologist had enough angles and magnifications of the area where the tumor was located, he told Danielle to relax for a couple of minutes while the machine came to a stop, then to sit up and get dressed for her appointment with Dr. Zawicki.

**********

While waiting in the examination room for Dr. Zawicki, Danielle and Marc talked about how they might deal with the various possible outcomes of today's follow-up.

Danielle: I'm hoping that my feeling better is a sign that the tumor is shrinking.

Marc: I hope so as well, but the two don't necessarily go together. The supplements might be what is causing your health to improve, but the drugs might be having no effect on the tumor. We know it's slow-growing, so the worst you could be facing at the moment is that it will be relatively the same size, that the chemicals stopped the growth but haven't been able to shrink it yet.

Danielle: Right. I feel like something has changed since the original diagnosis. Crossing my fingers it's good and not bad.

There was a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of Dr. Zawicki.

Dr. Nathan Zawicki: Danielle, the MRI images showed a significant reduction in the size and shape of the meningioma. I want to run a couple of tests before we discuss the next step in the process. Can you follow my finger with first your left eye and then your right?

Danielle was able to maintain focus and tracking ability on the first test. Dr. Zawicki then peered into her right eye to look at its health and structural integrity, both of which were solid. He finished his cursory exam with a once-over of her head for a check of bulging or bowing.

Dr. Zawicki: I don't see anything wrong apart from the tumor. As I said, it has shrunk appreciably, to the point where we can discuss a date for surgery to remove it.

Danielle: How soon would I be able to have it done, and what is the standard recovery time?

Dr. Zawicki: We can't schedule anything sooner than four weeks from now, because we'd like you to be able to flush the chemicals out of your system before the operation. Therefore, I plan to up your supplements plus a higher dose of your diuretic to cause more frequent urination. Following the surgery, you should be off work and not take part in any strenuous activity for 6-8 weeks.

Danielle and Marc looked at each other, with both of them running through the calendar of the next several months in their minds.

Danielle: Would early June be too far away? By that point, Trinity's spring semester will be over, including baccalaureate and graduation, Synod Assembly will be over, and I'd be able to compete at Milwaukee Highland Games both individually and with my pipe and drum band.

Marc: I'll be able to help with Danielle's recuperation in that case, since my major duties are over by May 19th and the next big one, Churchwide Assembly, doesn't start until August 5th.
Dr. Zawicki: Let's schedule then for June 4th. I will want to do MRIs every two weeks between now and then so I can monitor the growth or reduction and stay on top of the one concern I have after seeing the ones from today. I noticed a couple of dark spots on the bottom of the tumor, where it looks like there is some separation of portions of it from the tissue under it. One of those spots was clearly defined as the tumor breaking away from the tissue, while the other is still a bit nebulous. Remember that I said at your previous appointment that one of the risks of oral chemo before surgery is that the tumor could become dislodged as it shrinks.

Danielle: June 4th sounds good. Would I be able to postpone the next follow-up to the following Tuesday, which would be the 30th?

Dr. Zawicki: I'd rather you didn't as this tumor looks to be somewhat unpredictable and if it does come loose, I'd want to operate as soon as possible. Give me a few minutes to study the images again in greater detail.

Dr. Zawicki left the room temporarily to review the MRI images, then returned around five minutes later.

Dr. Zawicki: It LOOKS like it's just those two spots where there is separation, making me believe that the tumor won't break away completely in the next three weeks. I'll put in your follow-up for April 30th at 10am, with MRI at 9:15.

Marc and Danielle left the clinic with a bit of optimism and made plans to inform their families and friends of the good news after they both returned home that night.

**********

The second day of campaigning at Trinity was fairly dull, with the only major verbal incident being an exchange between Karina Lester and Eddie Jordan when the former came to relieve Steph Lafleur at the Peer Ministry Alliance table in Luther at 2:30pm.

Karina (to Steph): How have things gone today?

Steph: Pretty tame. Alyssa and Julie didn't have much in the way of interaction, unlike yesterday with Erin, Christen, and Abby. I think our message is being heard, that we want to be the students' voice on matters of faith in the SGA. Whether that will translate into votes next Tuesday, I don't know. The fact that we're on board with Dr. Moncrief's desire to expand the religious offerings at Trinity I hope will be a plus for us when it comes to choosing between the 28 organizations on the ballot.

Eddie Jordan (to Karina): When did you start hanging out with the diva queens of the athletic department?

Karina: If you're referring to women's lacrosse, four of their players as well as I are members of the Peer Ministry Alliance, the outreach arm of the Chaplain’s Office.

Eddie: So you wanna do that God thing again?! I thought when you came up here from Carthage, you'd be done with that.

Karina: I guess someone here saw what I had and believed and thought I needed to embrace it. Besides, you know that I'm looking at seminary and perhaps a career as a preacher.

Eddie: Yeah, a BLACK preacher! Why you advocating for them to get a spot on Student Government over BSU or SAAC?
Karina: I back all of them to be represented, but you know as well as I do that those other two organizations have their own ways of thinking when it comes to how they wish to use their seat, or didn't February's meltdown by Dupes (Kevin Dupree), J. Han (James Hanford), and Tom Bridges show their state of mind?

Eddie: We wanna make sure that we ain't forgotten here at Trinity. At Carthage, we had our spot. Here, we still fighting for one.

Karina: Well, you won't get it if you keep to yourselves and start battles with other parts of the campus community.

Eddie: You selling out on us?! Yeah, you're selling out on us, hooking up with your WHITE supporters to help yourself, forgetting your people and your crew.

Karina attempted to remain calm and not get looped into a racial argument with Eddie. Before she spoke again, Mallory Putnam stopped by the PMA table and asked Karina for more information and what they want to do if they get a seat in the SGA.

Karina: The Peer Ministry Alliance is a group of students who work with Deacon Schmidt to reach out to the student body in their day-to-day faith lives. Our president, Alyssa Norman, puts it like this: "There are 168 hours in the week, only one of which is written in the school's schedule for interaction with the Chaplain. Our job is to meet the students' needs for prayer, pastoral care, and spiritual growth over the other 167 hours."

Mal: Ahhhh. So you're taking the chaplain's little posse and expanding it, right?

Karina: A number of the PMA members live in Augsburg, so I'm sure you know them. I wouldn't call them a posse, per se, like they are looking to round up troublemakers for the Deacon to beat upon.

Mal: You mentioned Alyssa is the head. I'm guessing Erin Matheson and Steph Lafleur are also part of this.

Karina: You're right. In fact, I think one of your Acro teammates is part of it as well. Vanessa DiGregorio.

Mal: Ness! She was so nice to me while I was on campus restriction at the start of this semester, helping me with handling the loneliness that would come because I couldn’t be out on campus after 8, or off-campus at all.

Karina and Mal talked for another couple of minutes, during which Eddie had left the Black Student Union table and was replaced by Jessica Mackey.

**********

An intense practice left Erin and Steph Lafleur quite hungry. After changing, they along with Sam, Kristie, and Steph McNamara went to Siebert for dinner. Alyssa met them there and the six of them went through the line to get their meals. Looking out over the dining hall, Erin saw Mal and Karina and led the rest to sit down with them.

Karina (to Erin, Steph, and Alyssa): God am I GLAD to see the three of you. Steph, remember the guy at the next table in Luther razzing me for hanging out with you? Well, we got into it a bit after you left, and it was sort of nasty. He thinks I'm a sell-out for being part of PMA because it's "white" religion. Also dragged me for being back into the religion thing. How did the three of you handle the initial blow back concerning your faith?
Alyssa: I didn't really get much. Sure, Carli gave me a bit of it when we first met, but her boyfriend was in the game as well, which let me slide. I rode out last year being sort of introverted and focusing on getting the courses taken so I could be in position to pursue candidacy once Trinity took over.

Steph L.: I came in and made an effort to develop friendships on the floor before opening up about what I believed. My dad, who is LGBT coordinator at Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada, told me that if people get to see the real you before your faith is introduced to the equation, once it is, it draws others in rather than pushes them away.

Erin: I had no way around it considering Marc's my godfather. I knew that I would be front-and-center in having it define me to some of the other students here and that I'd have to own it and be comfortable in my own skin about it. Do I have the wide variety of friends of other freshmen here? Probably not, but the ones I DO have accept me, love me, and support me in my faith.

Karina: I need that, a little group that backs me up and encourages me to wear my faith on the outside.

Alyssa: That's our job as the inner circle, to be that support system for you and the other new peers to rely upon as you step out into the campus community and expose what you believe.

Steph L.: I think the three of us can also come to learn a lot from you as well, KK.

Karina: How did you know that was my nickname?

Steph L.: I heard someone yell it at Karaoke Night back in November. Back to my thought. I don't think Alyssa, Erin, or myself really have much if any experience with cross-cultural ministry or what other segments of the Body believe or practice. Take last night as an example. I never would have thought that you'd be into classic hymns.

Karina: I was raised in the African Methodist Episcopal church, which from a liturgical standpoint isn't TOO much different than Lutheran.

Erin: How close is it to the UMC?

Karina: In terms of beliefs, very much the same. The reason we came into existence was because the Methodist church as a whole defended the outside world's beliefs about the races and the value of our people, so we had to split off to find our joy again.

Alyssa: Which is why we don't freak you out too much with our at-times stuffy way of doing worship.

Karina: Heck no, although it WOULD be nice if you loosened up a little.

Erin: I'm sure next year will be a bit looser since Marc will have a year under him and we have a bigger pool of people from whom to pull ideas.

Steph L.: I'd offer to have the four of us sit together tomorrow for worship, but Erin and I have a game at Aurora and the team is leaving at Noon.

Alyssa: Sit with me. We can critique and razz Marc and I can help you understand the assistant parts in the liturgy in preparation for Fall.

Karina: I will, Alyssa. Thanks for the offer.

Alyssa: We sisters have to stick together.
Students, faculty, and staff at Trinity were greeted this morning with the newest edition of the Trinity Times. In the paper today were recaps of Monday and Tuesday's campaign events, a sit-down interview with women's lacrosse coach Sarah Hawthorne, and Morgan Andringa's long-form piece on Deacon Marc Schmidt, ranked by the Times staff as the fourth most-influential person associated with Trinity Lutheran University. Morgan grabbed a few copies from the Times office and slipped them under the doors of Erin, Steph Lafleur, Alyssa, and Christen and Julie. Over breakfast, the several of them discussed Morgan's article and what she focused upon.

Erin: As much as I love Marc and would never criticize him publicly, I think Morgan hit his faults extremely well, reading into what he's accomplished to answer the personal "why" of it.

Steph: She didn't mince words at all in her questions or in how she chose to communicate his answers to them. I know this wasn't a hit piece, because she has no reason to come down on him considering the help he gave us to eventually rid ourselves of Lauren.

Alyssa: I think this is the best part of the article and the most telling about who our fearless leader is when the cameras are off. "Despite being known for his aggressiveness in the boardroom and his lack of patience with behind-the-times administrators and leaders, his true influence on this campus comes from his being as much an idealist as he is a pragmatist, having one foot in the here-and-now and the other in a perfect world that will be brought into existence down the road. The development of peer ministry at Trinity, a concept that is somewhat foreign to ELCA colleges and universities, combined with his belief in preparing the next generation of church leaders through bringing the synod's Diakonia program to campus as an academic certificate in practical ministry has been a significant change in the role of chaplaincy from what students experienced both at Carthage and at Concordia."

Julie: I'm drawn to this sentence from Morgan. "His one-on-one skills with regular students, student-athletes, members of the school's governing bodies, and faculty and staff cannot be underestimated in how he has been able to express both his and Bishop Emerson's long-range plan for Trinity Lutheran and achieve widespread buy-in on it." She probably can't say anything about our team's situation or her interaction with Deacon Schmidt concerning it, but that is another example of how his ability to relate to the various portions of the campus community allows his influence to be spread out.

Alyssa: As I'm the only one of us five that will be at worship later, should I get Corey to make a mention of this in Prayers of the People giving thanks for his being here and what he's done this first year?

Steph: You know he's a bit bashful, but he also doesn't get recognized much for the wide range of things he does, so I'd for sure want to draw attention to his high rank in the eyes of the campus' newspaper staff.

Alyssa texted Corey asking to meet with him sometime before worship began at Noon. The four lacrosse playing peers went over to Buuck to pack their equipment bags and block out the rest of campus before leaving for their trip to Aurora in a little while.

***********

The bus ride from Trinity to Aurora was close to three hours, but the time went by somewhat quickly as the players were focused yet jovial with one another. Sarah's starting lineup, announced just after the team got on I-94 South by Mitchell Airport, would be the same outfield eleven that took on
Edgewood with Nicole starting in goal. The stability brought by the formation change would be tested against the odds-on favorite to win the inaugural NACC women's lacrosse championship, yet the atmosphere surrounding the Thunder was light years from what they experienced prior to the coaching change two weeks ago. As the team got off the bus, Sarah gave each player a fist bump and a word for them to remember. The team got into their locker room at Vago Field and changed quickly, then headed out and began warm-ups. In the stands today were: Rita and George Cheney, up from Indianapolis; Val Matheson, having made the drive from Rockford; Bob and Melissa Mueller along with Gina and Jim McNamara; and Chrystal and Mike Carrington coming south from Kenosha. The parents discussed their daughters' play, the team's evolution in the past two weeks, and expectations for today's game. Melissa and Gina brought up their plan to host the team for dinner after Saturday's game against Concordia-Chicago at the Muellers' house just off the lake in Evanston, which Val and Chrystal said they'd be willing to help with as they would be coming to the game. Following the anthem and introductions, the players returned to their bench areas for a final pep talk from their coaches.

Sarah: I don't have anything really to say, but the 24 of you do. Starting with Nicole, please say the word that I gave you when you got off the bus.

The Thunder players went around the huddle, each saying one word.

Pride; Dedication; Progress; Friendship; Faith; Resolve; Stubbornness; Heart; Respect; Support; Sisterhood; Love; Teamwork; Trust; Confidence; Positivity; Grit; Perseverance; Joyfulness; Wherewithal; Encouragement; Selflessness; Bravery; Community.

Sarah: Remember these things, as this is what defines us as a team. Aurora is good, but we can be just as good if we take advantage of mistakes and don't get into a scoring race with them. Let's do this!

The Trinity starters took up their opening positions on the field and Steph McNamara squared off with Nikki Bellamy of the Spartans for the opening draw, which was won by Aurora. The Thunder hung close with the stronger and more-experienced Spartans for most of the first half, down only 8-6 after 25 minutes. A pair of goals at the end of the first half gave Aurora a 10-6 lead heading into the second stanza. The two teams exchanged goals a handful of times over the first 16 minutes of the second half, with a turnover in midfield giving Trinity a chance to narrow the margin to three at 14-11. Lindsey's shot was blocked by a Spartan defender, who launched the ball over the Thunder's front seven to a hovering Bellamy. Her speed and agility placed both Julie and Sam in poor defensive positions to keep her from delivering a critical strike against Nicole, putting Aurora ahead, 15-10, with 13 minutes remaining. Sarah called time-out after the goal and made a handful of switches to tighten up the back six and placed Morgan Brooks into Lauren's #10 role behind Lindsey and Steph McNamara. The defensive switches worked as the Thunder surrendered just three goals the remainder of the match, but they would only score one more in an 18-11 defeat against the joint conference leaders.

Aurora 18 Trinity 11 (Kelley Ochowicz 2 assists, Morgan Brooks 1 goal/1 assist, Lindsey Hoffman 1 goal/1 assist, Steph McNamara 2 goals, Sophia Hernandez 2 assists, Lauren Chandler 2 goals/2 assists, Savannah Johnson 1 goal, Megan Racicot 1 goal/1 assist, Kristie Mueller 2 assists, Christen Prince 3 goals)

**********

Post-game discussion in the stands and the locker room centered on Sarah's decision to "back off" with the score 15-10 just past the midway point of the second half. The thought among most of the parents was that she had given up on the game and therefore the players, whereas the players were
questioning the notion of five goals being too large a deficit for them to reverse in 13 minutes. Once the players had settled down in the locker room, Sarah addressed them.

Sarah: First, I want to say that we had several chances in the first half to put ourselves in position to challenge Aurora but couldn't get that one goal which would have gotten us tied with them. In the second half, it became the goal-for-goal duel that I mentioned we couldn't get into with them. We showed well and I think made them aware that we're not the same kind of first-year pushover that other teams in the NACC might be. Questions, comments, concerns?

Sam: I think I speak for a number of my teammates when I wonder why you pulled back after their breakaway to make it 15-10.

Sarah: Fair question. As you were pressing their defense for a goal that would have chopped their lead to three, I was sorting out who I wanted to add to the offensive side to chase them down and perhaps force OT if we were lucky. When Lindsey had her shot blocked and they were able to break out so quickly against us, my mind changed to focus on two other things, neither of which I wanted to see happen today. First, we have had five games already where we've given up 20+ goals, including three road losses where we didn't break the 10-goal mark. Second, we have lost four games to date by double digits, three of which were the ones I just mentioned. I felt we deserved to get out of here without adding to either one of those numbers, and thus I made changes to keep that from happening. I didn't think we'd have enough possessions to outscore them by five in the last 13 minutes and the risk of pressing numbers would be giving up cheap goals to them and result in a lopsided loss when the game was relatively close for most of the first 48 minutes. Remember back to pre-game, those words that define us. Pride. Dedication. Trust. Progress. Today was a step forward in progressing to where we can challenge them heads-up over sixty minutes. Next time we play this team, the score will be closer and we'll be playing all-out for the win. The rest of our schedule is sweepable as the four teams we're facing are a combined 3-9 in the league. Tomorrow and Friday, I plan to focus a sizable chunk of practice on midfield defending as we didn't do a great job of that today, content to get our numbers back and mark up. If we are going to be susceptible to the counter, we need to find ways to slow it down through the use of our five-player midfield.

Jess: Ladies, the conference playoffs are still there for us if we win the last four. We have the offense to light those teams up, but do we have the grit, the stubbornness, the perseverance on defense to not get behind and then have to chase the match? I think we do, and hopefully we will show that on Saturday when we come back down here to play Concordia-Chicago.

Nicole: You know I don't speak much, so when I do it's usually worth hearing. I have very few matches left with this team, and the platoon that Sarah is employing means that I will probably only play in two of those as we get Steph minutes and opportunities to develop with next year in mind. There is nothing I'd like more than to see us drub our last four opponents, but we need to remember, this year is a work-in-progress, and there is a process to get to the point where we can eventually impose our will on games and other teams. When Megan, Jess, Moe, and myself arrived at Carthage as freshmen, we were scared witless over how we'd do against college competition or whether we'd break into the starting lineup or even get much playing time. None of us were world-beaters that first year, but we took our lumps and came back as sophomores ready to step into larger roles. I won the starting goalkeeping job coming out of preseason and played almost every minute of that season and the next. Megan found her scoring touch, Jess became better at being a pest to the opposition's main playmaker, and Bean made an impact through the use of her skills in transition and when we would possess the ball in our attacking zone. Our time will come, but we need to trust each other as well as Sarah to get there. By the way, coach, if you're back next year, consider me for the second chair.

Sarah: You're going to get a crash course in that role the next three days, Nicole. Since Steph is going to play against the Cougars on Saturday, I'll have you help me tomorrow and Friday in training
and game prep, then stand alongside me for the game. Team, we've got 25 minutes before the bus will roll out. Our post-game meal will be at Rosati's Pizza just before we get on I-88. Change, shower, meet your parents, whatever, but be on the bus or you'll be hitch-hiking your way back to Mequon. Bring it in. Thunder on three. One, Two, Three.

All: THUNDER!
Saturday arrived and, after a busy two days on the field and in the office, the women's lacrosse team was on its way to River Forest, Illinois to face the Concordia-Chicago Cougars. Both teams were sitting at 1-2 in NACC play and part of a four-way tie for the fourth and final playoff position with MSOE and Wisconsin Lutheran.

Word of Melissa Mueller and Gina McNamara's planned post-game celebration for the team made its way to Sarah on the trip back from Aurora on Wednesday evening, which led her to talk with Jamie on Thursday morning about it. Following a series of phone calls by the associate athletic director to Melissa, TLU Business Services, Matt Sherman at the synod office, and Alex Schroeder Bailey at the ELCA's churchwide offices in Chicago, she informed Sarah that the ELCA would front the expense for the post-match party at the Muellers in Evanston, with Alex requesting to shop with Melissa and Gina on Friday morning so she could use the denomination's accounts to pay for it. Eventually, the women's lacrosse budget would be debited for some portion of the expenses. Jamie also told Sarah that she was planning to charter a fan bus to go to Concordia on Saturday, which would help with transporting everyone from the Milwaukee area to the game and then to the Muellers' home afterwards. Once Sarah left her office, Jamie sent out a campus-wide email blast announcing it and the tentative schedule.

**********

The team departed from the Buuck parking lot at 9am to the cheers and well-wishes of a number of their parents and friends, who would be leaving Trinity at 10am for Concordia, following a mini breakfast reception in the field house's front corridor. Once the bus was loaded and on the road, Jamie and Marc gave some remarks to the nearly-packed coach.

Jamie Krueger: I'd like to thank all of you for coming along today to support your daughters, sisters, nieces, girlfriends, etc. on this final road trip of the 2019 women's lacrosse regular season. For those who may not know me, I am Jamie Krueger, Trinity's associate athletic director. I am also the head women's volleyball coach at the school. When Sarah came to me on Thursday with the news that a number of team parents were planning to put together a big to-do for the squad following today's game, I thought that we as a university should make this trip epic in nature, in part as a cherry on the top of our first year as Trinity Lutheran and in part to show the support that we hope will become customary for each of our 24 intercollegiate teams. Before I call up the resident hype man at TLU, I want to acknowledge the women who are overseeing today's festivities. First, Melissa Mueller and Gina McNamara for coming up with the idea for today's lakefront gathering. Next, Chrystal Carrington and Valerie Matheson, who volunteered to assist those two. Not to be outdone, the associated men probably will have something to say about the grilling portion of the late afternoon and early evening, so hats off to Bob Mueller, Jim McNamara, Mike Carrington, and Jim Matheson. Last, but certainly not least, the ELCA's Chief Financial Officer, who ponied up the bucks to do this, Reverend Alex Schroeder Bailey. Can we get a round of applause for them, even though they aren't with us presently?

Applause rolled throughout the bus for several seconds, after which Jamie handed over the stage to Marc.

Jamie: The next person to speak really needs no introduction. On most days, he is our campus's spiritual leader and the barometer of how we are doing in being light in the dark places. Today, however, he is just one of us, a fan of the team for which his goddaughter plays. The chaplain at Trinity, Deacon Marc Schmidt.
Marc: Thank you, Jamie. Alright, everyone, let's loosen up a little. I know at times parents can be more nervous about the games than the players are, but this shouldn't be a day where that comes into play. The lacrosse team has been making steady progress since the spring break trip, even if the results are still not going in the right direction. Sarah's injection of spirit and accountability since taking the reins has been a positive and will ultimately pay off in the near future. Every day is a chance to get better, to come closer to the ideal that one desires. This group of 24 exceptional women has come a long way since their first official meeting in August, and hopefully they will be rewarded today with a win. And, of course, if all else fails, play dead. Thank you. Tip the bus driver, he ain't getting paid enough to listen to my jokes.

Both Danielle's laughed at Marc's ending, oddly enough, and he sat down next to his wife and across the aisle from his friend and work spouse. Kevin Nemeth from the Trinity Times took a few pictures on the bus as part of a photo essay chronicling the day's events that will be published in Monday's edition of the paper.

**********

The opening draw of the match was won by Trinity, with Megan collecting the ball after it bound free following Christen's battle with the Cougars' Margaret Dolan. Megan ran the ball down the right sideline before cutting in and hitting Christen with a pass that she deposited into the back of Concordia's net for a quick 1-0 lead. Both teams spent the first half working hard for goal-scoring opportunities, using as much of the 90-second shot clock as possible. A missed shot by Concordia with 41 seconds left before halftime resulted in one final possession for the Thunder, who took advantage of its quick end-of-half offensive lineup to pick up a goal from Savannah that gave the visitors an 8-7 lead after the first thirty minutes.

Not much changed in the second half, as the two teams played a game of cat-and-mouse with the ball, extracting every second out of the shot clock. With the Thunder holding a 15-13 lead with just under five minutes remaining, Ali brought the ball up the right side slowly. A Cougar attacker, eager to force a turnover, attempted to pin the Trinity defender against the sideline. As Ali tried to move around her opponent, her left foot came down at an awkward angle, causing her to go to the ground and lose possession. The nearest Concordia player picked up the ball and flipped it out-of-bounds so the trainer could come onto the field and assess the injury. Sarah had Andi warm up so she could be subbed in once Ali was off the field. Jess re-started possession for the Thunder with 4:38 left and the team worked the ball patiently around the 12-meter. Lauren's shot from the top of the semi-circle went wide of the goal and out-of-bounds. Concordia pushed the ball up the field and found a gap on the right side of Trinity's defense, where Jess's 5'1" height and Andi's deep-lying position allowed a Cougar to take a pass and maneuver her way past the two of them before sending a shot over Steph's right shoulder to reduce the deficit to one with 2:45 to go. Another drawn-out possession for Trinity ended up resulting in a turnover with 88 seconds remaining. Instead of holding the ball for the last shot, the Cougars pushed it up quickly in an effort to possibly get two possessions out of the time on the clock. When confronted by the double-pivot of Jess and Sam, a lob pass was sent to a Concordia attacker who had slipped into a gap between the senior midfielder, Andi, and Emily. Her shot was hammered inside the far post to even the game at 15, forcing Sarah to call time-out with 1:07 left in regulation.

Sarah: We were in this spot 10 days ago, and we missed an opportunity to force OT by losing track of the time. Unless you FOR SURE have an open shot and know you can make it, hang onto the ball and play for the last shot. The worst that happens is we go to overtime. Trust. Belief. Together.

The players went back onto the field and Morgan Brooks took possession of the ball off the draw. Following several passes around the arc, the ball was in Lindsey's possession with under ten seconds remaining. She reared back and blistered a shot that, unfortunately, found iron instead of net, sending
the match into sudden death overtime. Sarah subbed Kelley in for Andi and Lauren for Emily, then
returned her first XII to their regular positions.

The extra period started off with both teams having opportunities to win the game, but stout efforts
from the two goalkeepers kept the score level. Following a missed shot by Concordia, Sarah told
Kelley to pinch up on her side and Megan to angle inside once she got into the attacking zone,
seeking to get the winner and end the match on this possession. As the Thunder's front five broke
into the Cougars' defensive zone, followed by Morgan and Kelley, Jess sent the ball to Kristie,
whose pass to Lauren was slightly wide of the mark. In an desperation effort, a Concordia defender
scooped up and flung the ball long toward an open space on the left side of midfield. The ball was
corralled and Dolan raced in on goal. Despite Steph being in great position to stop the shot, the ball
deflected off her left shoulder and went behind her into the net.

Concordia-Chicago 16 Trinity 15, OT (Kelley Ochowicz 2 assists, Lindsey Hoffman 2 goals, Steph
McNamara 4 goals, Sofia Hernandez 1 goal/2 assists, Lauren Chandler 2 goals/3 assists, Becca
Curtin 1 assist, Savannah Johnson 2 goals, Megan Racicot 2 assists, Kristie Mueller 3 assists, Maggie
Dowling 1 assist, Christen Prince 4 goals, Morgan Andringa 1 assist)

**********

Once in the locker room, Sarah told the team to shower and change and that she'd address the match
on the bus ride over to the Muellers'. The fan bus left Concordia about 25 minutes ahead of the team
one, with those on it lamenting the missed opportunity for a win today, but knowing that the team
took another positive step toward being a playoff contender sooner rather than later. Ali was
diagnosed with a sprained ankle and was issued crutches so she could keep weight off it. She will be
evaluated back at Trinity on Monday, with her status for Wednesday's game against Benedictine to
be determined at that time.
All In This Together

Once the team bus began its 35 minute trip from Concordia-Chicago to the Muellers' in Evanston, Sarah spoke to the team.

Sarah: So close! SO. CLOSE! I feel like I let you girls down. I wanted us to win that game so badly that I got tight when they cut the lead to one and then impatient in overtime trying to end the game. I'm going to let YOU give the post-game talk, since I probably need to hear your takes on the match more than you do mine. Who wants to open?

Andi: I want to thank you, Sarah, for having enough faith in my ability to put me out there after Ali turned her ankle. I didn't hold up my part of the bargain and we ended up losing the lead as a result of it.

Megan walked down the aisle and placed an arm around Andi's shoulders. "I'll echo Andi's remarks in saying that I for one am grateful that you DIDN'T use Ali's injury to make some kind of radical defensive change. Now, the jumble about who went where once they got the lead to one, that's on you, coach."

Sarah: Admitted and accepted. Should have left Sam in the back line and brought Becca or Morgan in to provide the height we needed to balance Andi's inclusion.

Christen: We had FIVE possessions to get ONE MORE GOAL. We convert on one of those chances and we win, either in regulation or in sudden death. Us going a little cold up front had as much to do with the result as the injury forcing a change on defense.

Lauren: I knew Kristie's pass was slightly off and that I should have caught it and sent it back to her for a second crack at the one-timer. I think I saw the huge hole their defense and goalkeeper had opened up and felt I should go ahead and rip the shot. Got ahead of myself and, combined with their desperation heave over Julie, we got busted on the break.

Steph L.: I feel like the game-winner was a matter of a bunch of bad luck and a team that had the experience to take advantage of it. Her shot ended up in the only place where it possibly could have gone in. Any lower and it hits me square on the shoulder and deflects away, any higher and it either hits the crossbar or flies over the net.

Sarah: You were in absolutely perfect position to give their attacker nowhere to shoot. Did you flinch on the shot?

Steph L.: No. I dropped my shoulder slightly in order to tease her to go for that sliver in the upper left corner. She did, I raised it back up and caught the ball on the top of it instead of the front, which is how it deflected back into the net.

Sam: We can sit around and point fingers and chalk up the loss to any of a number of things, but remember this: we were up two goals with under five minutes left, a position we had not been in this season. The other two nailbiters had us coming from behind. We're getting closer to a breakthrough win and I for one think we'll take out our frustration on Benedictine on Wednesday in a manner no one in the league would expect.

As the bus rolled up to 6 Milburn Park, a crowd of guests were in front of the house to greet it. Sarah got off first and moved out of the way as the players disembarked, met by their parents, friends, and other well-wishers. The Thunder 24 moved through the crowd, being given an ovation as they
passed them to enter the house. Everyone was directed through to the patio out back, with Lake Michigan not 200 feet away from them. Once all were gathered, Melissa Mueller spoke.

Melissa Mueller: Welcome to our home, Thunder players and faithful. I'm Melissa Mueller and I am Sam and Kristie's mom. Next to me is my best friend and Steph McNamara's mom, Gina. Our husbands are busy on the grills, but you'll get to meet them soon enough. Before I release everyone to start chowing down, I'd like to thank Jamie Krueger for her help in putting together as big a to-do as this became. Next, the assistance that came from Erin's mom, Val, and Jane's mom, Chrystal, in prep and set-up over the past couple of days was invaluable. Of course, most of this wouldn't have come together were it not for the benevolence of Rev. Alex Bailey from the ELCA home office here in Chicago. Pastor Alex, would you like to say a few words?

Alex: Thank you, Melissa. First I'd like to praise the team on a good game. Sorry that it didn't turn out with Trinity getting the W. As a former athlete, I know that losses sometimes can sting, and that you can dwell on what you didn't do right instead of the many positive steps that were taken in pursuit of a win. Take pride in where you as a first-year squad are and continue to press forward in becoming better as players, as teammates, as student-athletes on a daily basis. Please bow your heads for Grace, which will be in two parts. I will open and Chaplain Schmidt will close.

All heads were bowed and Alex began. "Come Lord Jesus, be our guest, and may these gifts to us be blessed."

Marc: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, whoever eats the fastest gets the most. Amen.

Dani cracked up, as did Sarah and a few of the players and parents. Erin and Danielle seemed to be looking for a table to hide under in response to Marc's off-kilter prayer.

**********

The team and guests split up into various groupings after they had gotten their food. Kristie, Sam, and Steph McNamara had corralled a small corner of the deck, where they were joined by their future teammate, Danny Coleman.

Danny: Good game, ladies! Wish you had gotten the win, but we'll get them next year when they come to our place, right?

Steph M.: Better believe it, and we'll have at least one additional sharpshooter in the lineup should we need a late-game goal.

Danny blushed slightly at Steph's reference to her. "Well, that would be for the coach to decide. Speaking of which, how have things been since the coaching change?"

Kristie: We're 2-4 under Sarah, but we've been competitive in all but one of those games. The spirit within the squad is DEFINITELY better, mainly because we don't have the coach sniping at us for things on or off the field. She also commits to using the entire roster every game and giving all three goalkeepers opportunities to play.

Sam: If you had been on the bus with us coming over, you would have seen one of the biggest changes in our dynamic since Sarah took over. She takes feedback from us after games, helping us to not only take ownership of our play but also hold one another accountable for the positives and negatives that happen.

Steph M.: Have you returned your housing contract yet, Danny?

Danny: No, because I wanted to get some suggestions from the three of you on the halls and if any
of you were looking for a roommate for next year.

Sam: Kristie and I are rooming together, which leaves Stephy without one at the moment. As for dorms, we're planning to stay put in Augsburg and merge into her current room.

Steph M.: I've put in a request for a room in Trinity's newest residence hall, Tietjen, asking for a third-floor one as opposed to fifth or sixth. Rooms are doubles, with lounge areas on each floor for more group assembly and a kitchen on the first and third floors.

Danny: I'll have to look into that one. Would you be game rooming with me, Steph?

Steph M.: Maaaaaybe. Could you handle me?

Danny: I think I could. You know I would call you out on your crap, but not in the way Kristie does.

Kristie and Sam looked at each other and wondered if they could help Steph and Danny resolve the unspoken attraction between them, silently agreeing to discuss this after they returned to campus. Elsewhere, Alex was in a conversation with Marc and Jamie.

Alex: I spent Monday and Tuesday working over the numbers from Gavin's proposal to the Board of Trustees and, frankly, they don't add up in a way that will allow him to do what he says he is planning. For one, the "return on investment" is too low for him to use his current fundraising tactic to meet the dollar figures necessary for the upgrades to Niemoller or the first-year scholarship dollars for women's soccer to go to Division I. Also, there are no current plans to sell Carthage by either the ELCA or the Greater Milwaukee Synod. Both Presiding Bishop Ellering and Bishop Emerson are interested in using at least a portion of the campus as a conference center for the surrounding synods, and the remaining property that might be up for sale won't bring in enough to close the gap.

Marc: I'm wondering.....we're hosting Synod Assembly in five weeks, and Churchwide Assembly comes to Milwaukee in August. Could he be thinking of making a plea at one or both of those?

Alex: Synod Assembly I can see, being that Trinity is the only institution of higher education in the synod and there is a bit of an impetus for its congregations to support it. As for Churchwide, I don't think that is the proper venue unless there would be plans for some of the ELCA colleges and universities' administrators to propose a joint athletic and educational venture.

Jamie: Like LCMS would do with the CITs?

Alex: CITs?

Jamie: Concordia Invitational Tournaments. The men's basketball, women's basketball, and women's volleyball teams participated in two-day, four-team tournaments with other schools in the Concordia University System as part of non-conference play. The teams would change from year-to-year as well as the venue for each of the events.

Marc: I know Gavin has been working on a long-term scheduling agreement with Capital, and I'm not doubting that doing ones with Finlandia and Augsburg would also help in bringing dollars to town for him to funnel into the upgrades, etc., etc.

Alex: I'm not sure we will be able to get him on the record discussing any of this, so the best bet for finding out what's happening is to just keep your ears open and document anything that seems "off".

Marc: Dani has said that she'd like to blow the lid off what her head coach and Gavin have been doing, as would I, but getting enough confirmation and corroboration to do it without launching an official investigation is proving to be difficult.
Alex: Is that the "alumni relations" deal, which we know is code to cover a number of enticements that people associated with the school offer others in exchange for something they want or desire?

Marc: Yes, Alex. You know the game. In this case, he could be racking up capital to boost the school's general scholarship budget so some of it can be diverted to athletes unbeknownst to the NCAA. I saw Kalamazoo College got rung up for something like that recently, even though there was no real proof of intent. It was the awarding of financial aid utilizing the school's admissions process that ran afoul of the prohibition on athletic scholarships in Division III. The school could give points to applicants for athletic participation, but couldn't then use that to award the student aid over-and-above what they would naturally receive.

Jamie: If this is something that might be going on, or could go on, I'm glad you're around, Marc, to keep an eye on it and possibly be able to rescue the ship if it crashes with the Committee On Infractions.

Marc: Now you see why Paul thought I'd be a good fit for Trinity.

Alex and Jamie: Yes.

**********

A fun-filled afternoon and evening in Evanston broke up around 9pm when the two buses from Trinity left the Chicago area for Mequon. On the team bus, a number of the players were napping alongside or against their significant others while others were zoning out to their handheld musical devices. The fan bus had a conversation going on between Marc and several of the fathers.

Marc: I haven't had a chance to talk much with some of you, and I'm just curious as to how you feel about your daughters' experience so far at Trinity.

Cody Press: Christen's gotten the balance she wanted when she decided to stay close by for school. She can see Stacy, Channing, Tyler, and I more or less whenever she wants but also has her own space. I'd also say that she got very lucky with her roommate choice, but that came by some clever planning on her part. She asked for an out-of-state lacrosse player, which narrowed it down to Julie, Maggie, and Steph Lafleur.

John Susskind: Andi's frustrated about her lack of playing time, naturally, but she's doing well in the classroom. Sarah's desire to use all of her players has been a positive for her and I'm hoping she sees next season as a fresh opportunity to prove she should be getting more game time.

Marc: What are your thoughts on Jane?

John: Marianna and I adore her. She's good for Andi, someone who's able to light a fire in her when she's being too casual about life.

Mark Johnson: Between Morgan and Maggie, Savannah has been able to climb out of her hermit crab shell. She's also helped Denise and I come to understand that she has a fair bit of social anxiety that we thought was just her being a loner. She's been doing a good job with the team, sometimes scoring a lot, sometimes just spelling Kristie or Steph Mac. If she wants to play through to graduation, she'll have to take a year off from the sport at some point, but that's between her, Sarah, and Casey.

Dan Ochowicz: Marc, you've heard me say this before, but Lauren has been a godsend for Kelley. Having someone like her in my daughter's life has made her do more growing in the past eight months than I'd seen in the five years or so before that, which is more or less when Lynelle became
pregnant with Aaron. So her play on the field is a bit hit-and-miss and she's still a fair bit immature, but having her live on-campus has been fabulous for all of us.

Peter Zembruski: Shelley is, well, Shelley. She has a mind of her own, most of it being used to fight against Mary's plan for her life. I don't think her place on the depth chart is as much a concern to her as it would be to most of the players, and that worries me.

Marc: I'm hoping that changes. Does she have anyone that she can be real with, who knows her struggles and can support her?

Peter: Kelley was one for a while. She knew her best of the players on WNS and I think that her being out-if-not-verbally-so allowed Shelley to verbally work through the standoff between her and Mary.

Mark: When Savannah told us that she thought she might like girls, we asked her to give us some sort of an explanation about how she came to that conclusion. After hearing her out, we were accepting of it but chose to wait and see before saying anything, as we'd never seen her with anyone of EITHER gender to have an opinion. When she brought Maggie home to meet us at the end of October, I saw something in her that seemed to click with my daughter, that suggested that there was a deeper level connection than just friends.

Marc: Sometimes you have to see it to believe it. Even though Steph told her parents about her orientation when she was in Grade 10, it took until the end of her first semester at Trinity for her mom to accept that she wasn't "playing gay", and it was the result of seeing her and Erin together in a picture from a wedding I presided over. Peter, I know your case is a little different in that your wife doesn't want Shelley to be gay as opposed to not believing that she is, but for her sake I hope she can find someone who fills that void she has.

Peter: Thanks, Marc.

As the buses exited I-43, Marc called his sister in the Twin Cities to wish his niece Sam a happy 16th birthday and to update Laurie on Danielle's condition, including the planned date of her surgery. After a few minutes of conversation, Marc hung up and pocketed his phone, then got off the bus. Before he and Danielle left for home, they walked over to Erin and Steph and wished them goodnight. The pair gave their substitute parents their traditional departure affections (hugs and cheek pecks), then grabbed their bags from the bottom of the bus and went into Buuck along with several of their teammates to store them in the locker room.
As the semester started to wind down, a lot of planning for the upcoming academic year began. Organizations commenced with making transitions from their current leadership to those who would take the reins come August, students who would graduate in a few weeks were wrapping up odds-and-ends of their academic and athletic careers, and the Student Government Association and Faculty Senate were holding elections this week to determine their 2019-2020 representatives. In Monday's Trinity Times, the staff gave a thorough detailing of the number of positions available in SGA (51), how they were distributed (12 at-large, 10 for registered student organizations, and 29 split among the university's six schools), and the rules concerning the SGA presidency (separate ballot, but must win election to the body via an at-large or a college-based seat to be eligible). Also, students in the Class of 2023 were making decisions as to where they would attend in the fall and informing those chosen and those not chosen of their plans. Sarah received notice from the school's registrar that one of her team's incoming recruits, Ashley Hampton, would be delaying her matriculation in order to serve a one-year mission with her church. With this news in hand, Sarah called Nicole, as well as Dani and Marc and asked if they could meet on Tuesday morning to give her some assistance as she tried to get a handle on the program with an eye towards next year.

The Peer Ministry Alliance's weekly lunch meeting focused on a review of the previous night's Easter service, the upcoming SGA election, and thoughts about Fall semester.

Marc: Now that we've gotten through our second "Rite In Place", how do you think it went versus the Christmas Eve service in December?

Alyssa: I feel like the widespread participation for the Easter service distracted a bit from the flow and the ultimate message. To do Holden for Christmas Eve, we needed a big group of people to lead. Last night, we could have done a lot better with a smaller contingent up front and found other ways to incorporate the others.

Stefan: Marc, I know that you feel you need to show the university community and Lutheranism as a whole that Trinity has crushed the old ways of Concordia by showcasing the female leadership we have here, but I agree with Alyssa in that we had too many hands involved.

Marc: Points taken. As I look ahead to next year, both of these services will be on the agenda, and the opening service will be a joint effort between the student chaplains and myself. I'm expecting that Alyssa, Karina, and I will be doing most of the initial design, then ask for input from Steph and Erin before finalizing it and doing a run-through with everyone the day before. I'm waiting for Dr. Moncrief to give me a more concrete layout of what Activities Fair will entail and I'm also seeking someone to head up the off-shoot of PMA, which is Lutheran Student Movement. That person or set of people will link the two organizations together and allow the university and the synod to fund its activities, like regional retreats. I plan to talk with Jenn Healey, who heads up Lutheran Campus Ministry at the ELCA offices in Chicago, about a full rebirth of National Gathering for December 2020. After being gone for several years, it was revived recently and has been done on a much smaller scale at LTSC. A lot of the infrastructure from this year's Churchwide Assembly will still be in place and I'd like to see if we can possibly host it.

Brad: Sounds like a lot of work.

Marc: Actually, it isn't as bad as it sounds. The ELCA national office takes on the REALLY big stuff, like location and contracts. The LSM national council will then work with their advisers to develop a theme and the bare-bones scheduling of the event. The regional movement, in this case Central Midwest, does a fair amount of the nuts-and-bolts, using its contacts in other regions to fill in
the blanks for worship, speakers, and workshops. The LSMs at the hosting university or universities do a bit of quality control, as they are the closest and have the greatest ability to troubleshoot on the ground if plans or arrangements made by the other bodies hit snags. In our case, I would propose that we host with support from UWM and Marquette, allowing us to utilize their students and contacts with local congregations. The pastors at both schools, Rachel Belding and Jessica Sherman, would help me with the logistics, and that's where I see you being involved, Brad. The three of us would be the on-site ministers in charge of presiding over worship, with Bishop Emerson lined up to perform the opening service. He and/or Rev. Matt Sherman will be our point of contact back to the ELCA as things come together. Anyways, none of this will be on our plate until we return in August at the earliest, so bank it away for future reference. The last thing I want to bring up today is tomorrow's election. If we should happen to win one of the ten seats designated for student organizations, we will want to have our representative on-hand at Wednesday's special SGA meeting to accept the position. Therefore, we need to decide who should fill the seat on behalf of PMA.

Stefan: Most organizations name their president or someone else within their leadership structure to the position. I would propose that Alyssa has right of first refusal.

Alyssa: With me playing a two-semester sport, the time commitment would be too great for me to take it on.

Marc: If those are the parameters, then that leaves it to Steph, Erin, Julie, or Corey. Any of you interested?

Steph: I feel the same as Alyssa, that juggling lacrosse and the double major probably won't give me enough time to be an effective representative.

Erin: Why does it have to be one of us? We have a sitting member of SGA in our organization. Liz should be our representative.

Liz: I'm running for an at-large position, and it doesn't make really any sense for us to lessen our voice by having me drop that to sit on behalf of PMA.

Stefan: Here's a thought. Liz takes the seat if she doesn't win an at-large one, and Karina takes it if she does. Again, she is our best public speaker and can learn the ins-and-outs from Liz.

Marc: What do you think, Karina?

Karina: Well, I'm honored that any of you would consider me as a viable option to represent the organization in Student Government. I'm willing to do it if that situation comes to pass.

Marc: All in favor of the proposal made by Stefan?

ALL: I!

Marc: I guess it's settled. The SGA meeting is Wednesday night at 7 in Buuck Field House. Because of that, the two on-campus sporting events that day, women's lacrosse and baseball, will have their start times moved up. Lacrosse will play at 3:00, with baseball beginning at 2. If there is nothing else, our meeting is adjourned.

**********

After soccer practice on Tuesday, Dani joined Sarah, Nicole, and Marc in the athletic department's conference room as the new head lacrosse coach wanted to pick their brains regarding the program.

Sarah: I've gotten us together because I need a bit of outside perspective regarding the program and
Marc: I had heard that the redshirts would end up giving her a way to push Andi, Sofia, and Savannah out of the program if she got the three of them to agree to it.

Sarah: Well, I'm not going to go that route. In fact, I plan to expand the roster so we can legitimately carry three goalkeepers AND have backups at every position. After getting the notice about Ashley, I began digging around the office for information regarding the incoming class and who else had inquired about playing here. THAT'S where I need your help the most, forecasting next year's team and what needs to be added.

Sarah jotted down on the whiteboard the list of returning players at their top positions and the incoming freshmen at their projected ones.

G: Steph Lafleur, Jane Carrington, Emma Preston
RD: Ali Kramer, Andi Susskind, Julie Koerner
CD1: Julie Jacobsen, Becca Curtin
CD2: Emily Sommer, Shelley Zembruski
LD: Erin Matheson
CM1: Sam Mueller, Sarah Kilgore
CM2: Morgan Andringa, Danielle Coleman
RAM: Sofia Hernandez, Kelley Ochowicz
CAM: Lauren Chandler, Lindsey Hoffman, Maggie Dowling
LAM: Kristie Mueller, Hayley Ramsey
CA1: Steph McNamara, Sam Keller
CA2: Christen Prince, Savannah Johnson

Nicole: The obvious gap in that list is there being no backup for Erin. Everything else LOOKS OK. Are you really looking at moving Sam Mueller out of the back and into midfield?

Sarah: It's her best position given her vision, height, and stick-handling. Moving her up solves to some extent a problem we've had, which is teams being able to dump over the two center mids into the space in front of the back line. With our starting back four, we could get away with that. With others in there, it's resulted in goals surrendered.

Dani: You DEFINITELY need to go find another left defender. I know Sam can always go into the back line, but the center spots look a little thin right now.

Sarah: Well, Koerner can supposedly play both right and center, but it wouldn't hurt to have another player for whom that is their primary spot.
Marc: You said you had found what I am guessing are recruit questionnaires from this incoming class. That's probably your best place to start if you want to find players to fill the voids, provided they haven't committed elsewhere by now.

Sarah: Right. Beyond the seven that are or were coming, we had had inquiries by 19 others. I don't know if Lauren ever contacted them after settling on who she wanted.

Dani: At this stage, the only ones from that pile that you MIGHT be able to pick up are locals.

Sarah: True, Dani.

Sarah split up her stack of questionnaires with the other three and they read through them. Among the 19, there were three center defenders and one left defender.

Nicole: I've got a left defender in my stack. She plays for a co-op team made up of Milwaukee Lutheran, Greendale Martin Luther, and Lake Country Lutheran high schools. Has a sister who's a junior on the basketball team here.

Sarah: Which of the three schools does she attend?

Nicole: Milwaukee Lutheran.

Sarah: Can you pull up a schedule for them?

Nicole tapped a few buttons on her phone and got their game schedule. "They've got a game next Monday at Cedarburg. That's an off-day for us since classes don't start again until 4 on that day due to Easter, right?"

Sarah: Correct. We should go out and see her play.

Dani: I found a Cedarburg player in my stack. Central defense, 5'10", so a potential replacement to Sam on the back line. Plans to double major in biology and Spanish. At this time, she was also considering University of Chicago and Beloit College.

Sarah: Maybe land both of them with one visit. The two of you want to come with me on Monday, help evaluate?

Dani: Again, I don't know a WHOLE lot about lacrosse, but if the defensive layout isn't much different than soccer, I can give you a fair assessment of their positioning and strengths/weaknesses.

Nicole: I'll be back to campus either very late Sunday night or somewhere early afternoon on Monday. Either way, it will be before the game. In other words, yes.

Sarah: Anything to interject, Marc?

Marc: You've been great at being open with your team about what you're doing and taking feedback from them. The one thing you don't want to have happen is word getting around about picking up players at this date and your team begins wondering if you're looking to replace one or two of them. You and Nicole should address this after training today, so they know your reasons and can go into tomorrow's game against Benedictine and the ensuing Easter break with no worries. Speaking of the game, who do you have replacing Ali?

Sarah: Still debating between Becca and Emily. Plan to test both of them today and see which one holds up best.
Nicole: I'd take Becca's height over Emily's defensive reflexes, but that's just my opinion.

Sarah: And opinion appreciated.

The quartet ended their confab and went off to the rest of their days, with Sarah doing some more "spring cleaning" of her office, Nicole going to her 11am class, and Marc and Dani grabbing lunch at Luther's Landing.
Speaking Up

A plethora of activity was taking place at Trinity this morning. Ballots from yesterday's Student Government Association election were being counted in several spots around campus, with the ones for the 29 school-based seats wrapping up prior to noon. In Bonhoeffer Chapel, Marc was preparing for weekly worship with Alyssa and rehearsing his homily on the stigma placed by the church writ large on people with mental illnesses as anathema to love. The women's lacrosse team had designated today's match against Benedictine as its opportunity to speak out about the struggles that student-athletes have with their psychological and emotional health. Steph Lafleur had been asked by Sarah to share her story concerning depression and anxiety, hoping it would encourage others to step forward and express their own battles. Wil would be on-hand representing Aurora Behavioral Health Services and Marc would say a few words about his near-suicide attempt in December.

**********

Following a sparsely-attended Lunch Bunch, Marc and Dani walked over to Niemoller Field to watch pregame warm-ups and to spend some one-on-one time.

Dani: Today's sermon hit home with me, because I know I had had that kind of attitude toward some of my classmates, especially Michelle when we both went to Nicolet. Being part of the "in" crowd as "the fat friend", I wasn't particularly graceful in relating to her because I hadn't figured out that what I took as her being introverted was more than likely social anxiety. I also didn't contemplate that my own self-esteem issues would end up dissolving into a need for help. Over my last two years at Nicolet and most of the first year at Stritch, I was bulimic, using food to heal myself and then throwing it up because I was so disgusted with myself. The only person that knew about all of it was Angela, with my mom becoming aware of it after catching me send back up two pints of Kopp's I had downed after another bad night out with Kristy, Catrina, and Sara Trevino. She didn't realize that bulimia was a form of self-harm or that eating disorders were classified as mental illnesses, so I didn't get any kind of counseling until I started college.

Marc: Were you binging-and-purging while you played for me?

Dani: In the beginning of the season, yes. I had stopped at the start of spring season because the workouts were making me feel better about myself and because our team doctor through Columbia St. Mary's told me that I wasn't unhealthy at my weight given my build and the outsize portions of my physique. She recommended that I worry more about turning the weight from fat to muscle through exercise, smart dieting, and weight training and less on the number on the scale. Catrina's death caused me to fall back into the self-harm as I tried to patch up the hole she left. I loved her, in a slightly more-than-friends way, and I pined for her while she was away at school that year. Her never coming home hurt me so deeply that I felt like I had to hurt myself even more to come to terms with it. I started up again the weekend before the funeral, stopped a couple of weeks later, then had one last go of it a week before my sister's bridal shower.

Marc: Which if I remember right was the week we played Croatians' first team. I wish I had known, dear.

Dani rested her head on Marc's shoulder. "You're the first person I've told the entire story aside from Angela. Cali knows most of it, but not about how my mom's expectations for me in the wedding played into my slipping back into the old habits. If Cali, Erin, and Steph hadn't come by that night after Sarah went to Wil, I would have probably done one, and I told Angela that when I went to see her the next day."
Marc: Did you get some counseling to deal with the emotional side of your bulimia?

Dani: Yes, and it took that stupid ankle injury to force me to do it. When I thought I might not play again, the feelings of inadequacy came rushing forward and I began to fall into my self-loathing state of mind. Michelle had seen the ups-and-downs my first year at Stritch and, with us rooming together sophomore year, took an interest in making sure that the bum wheel didn't end up messing with my head, even as she battled her own back issues. She encouraged me to see a sports psychologist to deal with the mental side of the injury, which led to me opening up about my love affair with food and the self-harm I'd do in response to it.

Marc: I am going to speak at halftime today about what happened in December and how one small bump in the road can lead to life flailing out of control. I know Wil is coming for the game and will be helping us during the halftime program from the stands. Does he know about this?

Dani: Some, because I sought him out when I was dealing with anxiety while teaching at SIS. A few of the "walking hormone" boys razzed me as well as some of their fellow students about our figures and it nearly drove me back into my illness. It was that, combined with the education and experience I received while taking the coaching module, that led to taking a stab at the open position at Trinity.

Marc held Dani close to him, then squeezed her hand before breaking apart. The two of them then went down into the stands and joined Cali, Alyssa, and the Johnsons.

**********

The Thunder took the opening thirty minutes by storm, rolling out to a 7-1 lead halfway through that was stretched to 13-4 by halftime. Lauren, Christen, and Steph McNamara each collected three goals with Lauren adding two assists to the tally. Steph Lafleur would be inserted for Nicole at the start of the second half, along with a full turnover of the starting lineup with the exception of Becca, who would move from right defense to center midfield in place of Jess, and Erin, who would stay at left defense. While the teams were on the sidelines for the halftime break, Marc and Steph Lafleur went to the center of the field to start the NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Day presentation.

Marc: That was an exhilarating first half for the home team, and I am sure the second thirty minutes will be exciting as well, but I'd like to take a couple of moments to address a major cause for concern in the world of intercollegiate athletics, that being the stigma of mental illness. In the past handful of years, a number of student-athletes have died by suicide, attempting to appear strong while slipping into an abyss that they could not escape except by death. A few months ago, I was in a similar place and nearly chose that same path. I was lucky in that Coach Hawthorne and her friend, a psychology intern with Aurora Behavioral Health Services, came to my rescue before I was able to end my struggle with anxiety and depression through a swan dive onto I-43. Most of you believe I am a bit of a pit bull, but that is only a facade for the deep-seeded struggle I have with the need for admiration, adoration, and respect, all parts of an illness called Narcissistic Personality Disorder. My anxiety and depression that are the main expressions of my illness lead me on an escapade of mania and transferred self-hate. Before I turn over the mic to Steph, let me say that it's OK not to be OK, and we need to stop treating a broken spirit or mind as less important than a broken finger or foot.

Steph L.: You all know me as a take-no-prisoners goalkeeper for the women's lacrosse team, but what you probably don't know is that I have been on anti-anxiety medication since I was 14, following my first-ever panic attack at my school's Homecoming dance. The medication I take has kept me from slipping into a state of mind where hospitalization would be my only means of recovery and is why I can stand here and speak to all of you without fear. The stigma of mental illness coinciding with "being crazy" or "going schizo" or "lacking self-control" needs to be fought daily by those of us who live with it and that is why our team chose to highlight this at one of our
home games. I would like to ask anyone who can identify with what I or Marc has said to either stand up if you're in the bleachers or join us on the field if you're with one of the teams, because knowing you're not alone is the best medicine for handling the struggle that invades your mind.

Several people in the crowd, including Dani, rose from their seats while Marc and Steph were joined by Sofia and Savannah. Wil gave a short blurb about resources available through Aurora, including the psychiatric hospital in Wauwatosa where he works and where Marc and Sofia are patients. Marc wrapped up the presentation and returned to the stands.

Trinity kept their foot on the gas over the first 15 minutes of the second half, extending the lead to 19-7. Lindsey's third goal of the match with twelve minutes remaining gave the Thunder a 20-8 lead, the team's third home match where they have scored 20 or more. Jane was brought on for Steph with ten minutes remaining and, despite giving up three goals in that time span, effectively rode out the rest of Trinity's 22-11 victory, ending their three-game conference losing streak and keeping them mathematically alive for a playoff spot.

Trinity 22 Benedictine 11 (Sam Mueller 1 goal/1 assist, Shelley Zembruski 1 goal, Kelley Ochowicz 1 goal/2 assists, Morgan Brooks 1 goal/1 assist, Lindsey Hoffman 3 goals/1 assist, Julie Jacobsen 1 goal, Steph McNamara 3 goals, Jess Fisher 1 assist, Sofia Hernandez 2 assists, Lauren Chandler 3 goals/2 assists, Becca Curtin 1 assist, Savannah Johnson 1 goal, Megan Racicot 2 assists, Emily Sommer 1 goal, Erin Matheson 2 assists, Kristie Mueller 1 goal/3 assists, Andi Susskind 1 assist, Maggie Dowling 1 goal/2 assists, Christen Prince 3 goals, Morgan Andringa 1 goal/1 assist)

**********

Buuck Field House was packed to the rafters as the election results from yesterday were announced in a special prime-time meeting of the Student Government Association. At 7:00, SGA President Chad Markham called the session to order.

Chad Markham: We will begin tonight by announcing the 29 students who will be representing the six schools and colleges at Trinity Lutheran University.

As Chad read the names, a bit of anticipation was building as two of the eight students on the ballot for SGA President were seeking election through their schools' allocation (Brittany Bridgeman and Alex Burris). Bridgeman was re-elected by the School of Pharmacy, while Burris failed to secure one of eight seats from the School of Arts and Sciences, thus his votes for president would be re-allocated by way of the ballot's preference ranking (top three).


The peer ministers celebrated their victory, then had Karina go forward to claim their seat on SGA. Once all ten representatives had come to the front and been recognized, Haley Kendall announced the twelve students elected to at-large positions. Both Liz Edwards and Becky Sanderson were elected, but two other presidential candidates (Tom Bridges and Bradley Phelps) did not make the cut, leaving just five contenders for the SGA presidency.

Chad Markham: Now that we have announced the 51 individuals who will serve in Student Government for the 2019-2020 academic year, it is time to determine who will be its president. Of the eight students on the ballot, three of them were not elected via their school or at-large. Votes for those three candidates have been re-allocated to their supporters' second or, in some cases, third
preferences. With 62% of the vote, next year's Student Government Association President is Rebecca Sanderson.

Becky had a big smile on her face, combined with a small bit of an "I told you so" look aimed at Tom Bridges and his group from the Inter-Fraternity Council. She took the chair temporarily and gave a short acceptance speech along with a couple of ideas that she planned to advocate for in her term at the helm. Markham called the meeting to a close, announcing that the final SGA meeting of the year would be on May 1st at its regularly-scheduled time (3:30pm).
The extended Easter weekend gave all parts of the Trinity community the ability to see family and friends from near and far. While most students headed home, Maggie spent the holiday weekend with Savannah's family in Fredonia and Julie was with the Princes in Wauwatosa. Nicole chose to drive back to Mequon late on Sunday night so she would be able to spend some time on Monday working on her resume and job searching. As she passed Lake Mills, she noticed two state trooper cars and an ambulance on the side of the road plus a car flipped over in the ditch off the right shoulder. She said a short prayer for the driver and/or passengers as her car went past the accident scene.

**********

University Communications sent out an all-campus email just after 8am on Monday morning stating that Clint Marshall, a member of the Trinity Lutheran University baseball team, was killed in a one-vehicle accident on Sunday night returning to campus from Madison, where he was visiting his uncle's family for the holiday. Marc read through the bulletin and began developing a plan of action for dealing with the baseball team's grief, as well as that of Clint's friends and school family. With the campus still fairly dead (classes would not resume until 4pm on Easter Monday), his ability to pull together a response to the tragedy was swift. He contacted Jamie and mentioned that the athletic department should seek the services of a sports psychologist to help their student-athletes deal with the impact Clint's death might have on them on the field. He also informed her of times he planned to set aside during the week for pastoral counseling of students and athletes if they wished to visit him. Bishop Emerson along with Rev. Sherman were out of the office for the day, recuperating from their Holy Week obligations, which meant that Marc getting approval to use funds from his office's account to assist the athletic department in paying for several hours of therapy time for student-athletes with a counselor would have to wait until Tuesday.

Shortly before 11am, two students came to Marc's office in Luther seeking to talk with him.

Josh Wagner: Deacon Schmidt, can we talk to you for a bit?

Marc: Sure. Come on in. Can't believe I've met either of you before.

Josh: My name is Josh Wagner and I play on the baseball team here. As you have probably heard, one of my teammates was killed in a crash last night coming back to campus from Easter break. Clint Marshall was my best friend, almost like a brother since we grew up in the same area and were saddled with sisters.

Tracey Brooks: I'm Tracey Brooks, and I was Clint's girlfriend.

Marc: My deepest condolences to the two of you. Take your time and tell me whatever you want. I'm sure the shock hasn't come close to wearing off yet and that it won't necessarily feel real for a few days or more.

Josh: I think the first thing that comes to mind is that he was never supposed to be driving back by himself from the Madison area. The original plan for Easter break was for the three of us, Clint, Tracey, and myself, to go to Neenah together. On Thursday afternoon, Clint got a call from his mom saying that his sister, Deanna, was being transported to the hospital at UW-Madison with appendicitis and would be undergoing surgery as soon as possible, meaning that their Easter gathering would move from their home to that of his uncle in Verona. I went home and Tracey ended up going to her parents' place in Burlington.
Tracey: When we're with our families, Clint and I wouldn't usually contact one another, so I didn't think anything was odd when I hadn't heard from him by the time I got back to campus around 10pm. When it got to be midnight or so, I figured he had chosen to come back this morning or afternoon since he wouldn't have classes today. Around 1am, I got a call from his mom telling me about the accident and its outcome. Josh was the first person I called after that, and he had already been told by Pat of his death. Neither of us have slept much since then. I've been moving back and forth between numb, sad, and grief-stricken.

Marc: All of that is natural, Tracey. Like I said at the beginning, it might take some time to grasp the reality of the situation. My father-in-law passed away a few years ago. Even though I had been with him less than twenty-four hours before his death, and even being at the funeral and wake, it wasn't until I returned to my wife's hometown for the celebration of what would have been her parents' 50th wedding anniversary that the lack of his presence seeped in.

Josh: We played together against Rockford on Wednesday, and now to know that I'll never be on the field with him again, or see him again, I'm not sure how I am going to respond at practice tomorrow.

Marc: I have talked with Jamie Krueger, the associate AD, about getting a sports psychologist to come in this week and offer his services to your team as well as other student-athletes that might struggle with on-field performance in the midst of their grief.

Josh: I hadn't thought about that, but that would be a very good thing for my teammates and I to take advantage of.

Marc: I have seen plenty of athletes, from professional to college to high school, attempt to battle against grief by "getting on with it" or by allowing outsiders to dictate how or how long they should mourn for their loved one, and most of the time it creates mental blocks to peak performance AND the onset of depression. One case is Isaiah Thomas from the Denver Nuggets. After his sister was killed in a car accident, he wanted to take some time to appropriately grieve her loss. People inside the game and in the media pushed him to not be so public about it and it harmed his play in the playoffs that year. You had a game on Wednesday at Kapco, so you might have heard the speeches from the women's lacrosse team's halftime presentation over at Niemoller.

Tracey: I ducked out of the stadium to see what was going on. You spoke about the rise in suicides among student-athletes as well as the lack of mental health resources made available within the walls of the university and especially in the athletic department, correct?

Marc: Yes. Being a former coach and coaching educator combined with my living with mental illness gives me a different perspective on the need for students and athletes to acknowledge when they're not OK and seek help before it gets to the point where you shell up or start to self-harm or worse.

Tracey: I also thought it was telling that one of the strongest players on the team confessed that she'd been on meds for anxiety and depression since her freshman year of high school.

Marc: Steph is a warrior. Did you also see those in the stands who stood to give voice to their own battles with mental health? These diseases know no bounds. Anyone can have one, or be susceptible to getting one.

Josh: Do you know when the sports psych person will be at Trinity?

Marc: No, I don't, at least not yet. You might want to go ahead and stop by Coach Krueger's office to get an answer to that question.
Tracey: Can I schedule a formal appointment with you for tomorrow? I am sure that I'll have more I want to talk through following the return to campus of our mutual friends.

Marc: I'll be on campus until 1 tomorrow, then have a meeting with the athletic director at MSOE before the women's lacrosse game there later in the day. Anything in there work for you?

Tracey: I'd like to get at least one class out of the way tomorrow before seeing you, in case I'm unable to shore up the strength to attend them all. 11:00 OK?

Marc: I'll pencil it in. Be good to yourselves today, both of you. Don't try to be superhuman while dealing with this loss. I am sure you will rely on one another over the next several days to manage the various stresses and events that will occur.

Josh and Tracey got up from their seats and followed Marc to the door, where he embraced both of them and said a few comforting words.

**********

Sarah, Dani, and Nicole were at Cedarburg High School for the Bulldogs' lacrosse game against the Milwaukee Lutheran/Greendale Martin Luther/Lake Country Lutheran co-op team. The trio decided to sit with the Lutherans' supporters section for the first half and Cedarburg's for the second. During pre-game, they listened to a handful of parents discuss the season thus far and cued in on who they figured was the mother of the Milwaukee Lutheran player they were scouting.

Karen Elias (to Regina Neville): Brooke's defense has gotten better this year versus last. She's been talking about reconsidering her commitment to Trinity, since their coach hasn't contacted us since we applied to the school in October. Wisconsin Lutheran now has lacrosse and their coach has been to see her play twice this season. I know she REALLY wants to go to Trinity because Nicole is already there and they've been planning to have the one-year overlap since forever, but if she can't get so much as a "thanks, but no thanks" from Coach Heberlein, she'll end up playing for the Warriors.

Sarah: I couldn't help but overhear your conversation. I am Sarah Hawthorne and I'm the new lacrosse coach at Trinity Lutheran. Coach Heberlein was removed from the position about a month ago and I've been spending my time since then just getting caught up on what she didn't inform me of and keeping the season from going belly-up. Last week, I FINALLY found the recruit questionnaires from the fall and started looking through them as I discovered a couple of holes in our roster for next year's team, with left defense being one of them.

Karen extended her hand to Sarah, who shook it and then introduced Dani and Nicole to her.

Sarah: We've been operating without an official assistant coach since Lauren left, so I've been using these two to help me out. Danielle is the assistant soccer coach at Trinity and Nicole is my starting goalkeeper and presumptive assistant coach for next year should I be retained.

Karen: Brooke wants to play in college, and she wants to go to Trinity, but we had nearly given up on that option since no one from the school had contacted us.

Sarah: Well, I'm here in front of you. Any questions?

Karen: What would Brooke's chances be of making the roster?

Sarah: That's why I'm here, to offer her a chance to be part of next year's team. We have a need for another dedicated left defender, and before you think she's just going to be backing up our current starter and might see little if any playing time, my policy is that everyone on the roster gets into every game, aside from the goalkeepers, which I will have on some form of platoon system. The way
we've been beating some of the other first-year teams has meant that our second string at times are playing the entire second half of some games.

Karen: Who else locally do you have on the team?

Sarah: Two from WNS Wolfpack, which is who I played for in high school. Two that were part of the Tosa East/Tosa West co-op, a couple of players coming in from Brookfield Academy, and an incoming goalkeeper from U-School. One player from Ozaukee, and we're looking to add one from Cedarburg.

Karen: That's a pretty good number from right around here. Which Cedarburg player are you considering?

Sarah: Their tall center defender, #24.

At halftime, Sarah, Nicole, and Dani moved over to where the Cedarburg parents were sitting and listened in on their conversation of the first half.

Elaine Kerr (to Claire Nelson): Has Katie decided which offer to take for next year?

Claire: Not yet, and the time to decide is running out. As much as she wants to work with your husband and stay close to home, the scholarship money being offered by University of Chicago would be a great relief to Tom and I. Beloit is the only school of the three where she's been accepted that is offering her a chance to continue playing, so that's another consideration.

Elaine: I know Tom wants Katie to come to Trinity, but if she can get the educational experience she wants elsewhere for undergrad, then she should go that route and then come back for grad school.

Claire: I wish it weren't a matter of having to choose between working with the country's foremost vertebrate paleontologist and playing lacrosse, but that's where we are.

Sarah: What if she didn't have to?

Claire: Trinity's lacrosse coach never responded back when Katie inquired about playing there next year.

Sarah: You must be referring to Lauren Heberlein. She left the school about a month ago. I'm Sarah Hawthorne, the new coach at TLU.

Claire turned around and shook Sarah's hand. "And you're interested in Katie playing for you?"

Sarah: Yes. Let me apologize for my predecessor's lack of follow-through. I've spent most of my time the last four weeks keeping the program running and patching up the damage she inflicted on it. With last week being light, I finally had a chance to dig around the office and start planning for the future. After reading through the recruit questionnaires and seeing what we were lacking going into next season, your daughter was someone that I thought could be an asset. Didn't hurt that we found a player from today's opponent that we also wanted to bring into the mix.

Claire: Which one?

Sarah: #3, Elias. I spoke with her mom during the first half and gave her my pitch of what she could expect if she chose to play for us. Now I'll give it to you. My policy is to have everyone on the roster play in every game, with the only exception being the goalkeepers who I will have in some form of a platoon so they each get a fair amount of game action. Katie's height is a real asset and something that we are needing as one of our center defenders is going to move into the midfield next year since
the three starters this year are all seniors.

Claire: As you heard, she really wants to be at Trinity for educational purposes as she wants to participate in some of Dr. Kerr’s dinosaur digs during her undergraduate years.

Sarah: If she wants to come, we'll be glad to have her, Mrs. Nelson.

The game finished with Cedarburg winning, 21-5. Following the post-match handshakes, Sarah went down to the railing with Claire to talk to Katie while Nicole and Dani re-joined Karen Elias and spent a couple of minutes speaking with Brooke. Sarah told both players that she would email them tomorrow with information about Saturday's game against Wisconsin Lutheran, where she was planning to not only honor the seniors but also welcome next year's incoming freshmen.
Tuesday was going to be a VERY packed day for Deacon Schmidt, as he had a counseling session with Tracey Brooks at 11, then a full afternoon at MSOE between a pre-pre-game meeting involving the lacrosse team, Coach Hawthorne, and their athletic director Brian Murphy and the Thunder's match against the Raiders. As he was preparing to leave the house, Danielle inquired about the upcoming day, wondering why he was leaving so early on his supposed off-day.

Danielle: Tuesdays are always the lightest day of the week for you.

Marc: This week is different. Erin's team is playing this afternoon at MSOE, a quirk in the schedule due to the Easter weekend, and before that I am meeting with the school's athletic director to discuss the show-cause order that the conference might pursue against Coach Heberlein. With the death that happened on Sunday night, I am offering some set-aside time for the student's friends and school family to see me. His girlfriend is coming in at 11.

Danielle: You're good at what you do, hun, because you're dedicated to being everyone's friend and the school's spiritual guru, but I wonder if it's because you truly value them or because they stroke your ego as a result of your actions.

Marc seethed at hearing that, as she hadn't taken a swipe at him since starting the chemo for her tumor. When she went into the kitchen to pack her lunch, he left the house in silence, then went to his car and drove up to Trinity. When he got to the Brown Deer Road exit on I-43, he started developing Premature Ventricular Contractions (PVCs), the result of uncontrolled anxiety. His mind returned to another time where his latent anger resulted in him walking out on the target of his rage without so much as a goodbye, that being the day his father passed away. Once parked on campus, Marc went over to Niemoller Field to seek out Dani following the soccer team's practice. On the way there, he took his fast-acting anti-anxiety medication which hopefully would calm him down so he could divulge to her what had happened and what had caused his attack. He watched her on the field for a few minutes, marveling a bit in her beauty made more so intriguing by the way she looked in her training gear. As the soccer team left the field to go back to Buuck to shower and change, he waved at a few of the players he recognized (Cali Farmer, Cami Leonard, and Amber Bryant) while waiting for Dani to exit. Surprised to see him, she jogged over and asked what had him hanging out.

Marc: It's been a bit of a rough morning already and I was hoping to get a few minutes of Dani time before diving into my responsibilities for the day. Come back to my office with me?

Dani: You're not looking too good, or seeming to be yourself. Let's get to Luther and you can tell me about it.

**********

Marc sat down behind his desk while Dani took a seat on the opposite side. She reached her hand across the desk and placed it on top of his, then rubbed small circles over his knuckles. Once relatively calm, Marc opened up.

Marc: As I was leaving the house to come to campus, Danielle asked why I was coming up here early since Tuesday is my off-day. I gave her a run-down of my schedule and she hit me in the ego, wondering if I was doing all of this for my benefit or for the students and university's benefit. I left without saying goodbye and starting having PVCs when I got past the Brown Deer exit because my mind went trolling back to another time I had done that, the morning that my father passed away. That reaction caused so much guilt in me since I always felt like I never got to say I was sorry for my
insolence.

While trying to maintain some semblance of emotional stability, Marc began to crumble as the thought of this situation being a repeat of 26 years ago overwhelmed him. Dani walked around the desk and went behind Marc's chair, then wrapped her arms over his shoulders and laid her chin on top of his head, nuzzling into his scalp and thinning hair.

Dani: Breathe, baby. In, out, in, out. I'm here and will be here until you're OK. Maybe you should call her and the BOTH of you apologize for the incident earlier.

As if on request. Marc's phone rang. "Deacon Schmidt."

Danielle: Hi, nug. I'm sorry for pissing you off. It was unfair of me to hit you in your sore spot no matter what I might be thinking. I don't know what got into me. I hadn't sniped like that since the trip to Philly. Maybe the tumor is growing again since I have been off the drugs.

Marc: I should apologize as well. I shouldn't have walked out without saying something. Coming up to campus, I had an attack with PVCs since it took my mind back to what I did a number of years ago in a similar situation.

Danielle: Your dad?

Marc: Yeah.

Danielle: Do you want me to come to Erin's game after I get off work?

Marc: If you want. We could go to Bombers afterwards for dinner with some of the parents.

Danielle: Sounds good. See you there, then, and again I'm sorry for what I said. I know you're a big reason why TLU is prospering this first year in existence, but being left in the shadows can be a bit lonely.

Marc: I can understand that, and it's something I'm not good at acknowledging, that my pursuits come at times at the expense of my presence. I promise to do better.

Danielle: Love you.

Marc: Love you too.

Marc hung up the phone and leaned back against Dani. "I needed that. Well, both of those thats. You here to get and keep me calm, and her calling so I could get rid of the potential guilt that would have taken over if something happened to her before I had a chance to apologize."

Dani: What's a work wife for if not to help you when your home one and you have problems?

Marc looked up and sent her an air kiss, which she reciprocated. After a few more minutes of talking, Dani left and went back to Buuck to pack up and leave for the day.

**********

Tracey came in to see Marc at her scheduled time and the two of them talked about her relationship with Clint and some of the milestones and things left undone as a result of his death.

Tracey: He was SO CLOSE to graduating. Just a couple more weeks and he'd have gotten his degree and hopefully a job locally so we could live together off-campus for my last year here. We had signed the lease with a August 1 start date, so now I either have to back us out of it or find one
roommate who can cover what Clint's contribution would have been or two roommates and we split the expenses in thirds.

Marc: With him so close, I am sure that his parents can petition President Garrett to confer him his degree posthumously, with this semester's progress measured and tentative grades given. Also, I need to dispel an urban myth. His roommate does NOT get all A's for the term because of his death. I know, a lot of college students believe it and secretly plot to do in their roommates if they're struggling one semester, but there is no quid pro quo.

Tracey: I guess I will need to inform Josh of that so he doesn't just slack off expecting a 4.0.

Marc: Professors are usually good about providing students reasonable extensions to deal with the missed days and assignments that come due to dealing with the grief and the memorial events for their loved one. You can talk to them directly or I can pen something that you and he can take to your professors.

Tracey: With us both upperclassmen and into our major programs, we've had fairly good rapport with the professors we'd need assistance from, but thank you for the offer.

Marc: Have Clint's parents determined when services will be held?

Tracey: The plan is to hold the visitation on Thursday evening, then the funeral on Friday so everyone has the full weekend to decompress and return to some semblance of reality before tackling life again on Monday.

Marc: Makes good sense. Any idea what the baseball schedule looks like?

Tracey: They're here against Wisconsin Lutheran tomorrow, then Saturday home to Dominican and Sunday at Illinois Tech. I'm not sure what Josh's plan is nor that of the team for handling this.

Marc: If Jamie was able to get someone in here today to meet with them, I hope he or she will do a full assessment of the team's psyche and recommend the possibility of postponements for some of those games. I'll weigh in with her later when she and I meet with MSOE's AD before the women's lacrosse game there. Anything else you want to get into?

Tracey: I do, but I think I'll wait until after we get past this weekend because I don't know if it is or will be an issue at the moment.

Marc: So maybe a visit on Monday to debrief after you've run the gauntlet of the next few days?

Tracey: Sounds good. I'll drop you an email sometime in the next couple of days once Josh and I get our lives sorted out here and have a schedule of the rest of the week and weekend established.

Marc showed Tracey to the door, where she hugged him and thanked him for taking so much time with her and just "being there" to let her ramble.
East Side Raid

Inside the visitors' locker room at Viets Field, MSOE athletic director Brian Murphy was meeting with Trinity's lacrosse team as well as Sarah, Marc, and Jamie to get further information on Lauren Heberlein's actions as head coach and the questionable nature of her departure.

Brian: I have Deacon Schmidt's file of quotes and incidents attributed to your former coach, and it is pretty thick. Are there things that any of you might not have disclosed to the chaplain or Jamie previously?

Morgan A.: Did he comment on the academic sleight-of-hand she was looking to do involving some of our players next year?

Brian: I had read something in the file from early September where she had met with the athletic department's academic adviser and asked about her players' majors, then noted a few of them being in programs that would take longer than four years to finish.

Morgan A.: OK. In the conversation I overheard between her and Coach Manning from women's soccer, she said that she would seek to redshirt three of us next year so she could bring in a larger freshman class and then would try to cycle out those players.

Brian: Not something that I think we in the NACC want our members to be doing, over-recruiting and then using tricks to not have outsiders notice the high turnover rate in those programs. Anything else?

Megan: Her discipline of players in the program this year was VERY haphazard. She'd hand down punishments without investigating the incidents, just in an arbitrary manner, leaving Sarah and Deacon Schmidt to do the heavy lifting of pulling together what had happened, with the chaplain levying the appropriate sanctions. In my opinion, it was this attitude of hers which led to the actions that forced Gavin, Marc, and Dr. Baines in Human Resources to intervene.

Brian asked Megan to elaborate, which prompted her to talk about the problems on the first two road trips, her benching of Erin and Steph Lafleur after Marc overturned her suspensions of them, the foot-in-mouth statements in front of several parents on the Minnesota trip, and the tirade in the locker room following their match against Capital.

Brian: I think I have read and heard enough to go ahead and propose both a conference-wide suspension and a show-cause request from the NCAA. With intercollegiate athletics being a bit cutthroat and every school looking to take advantage of any loophole available to improve their programs, using the system to rein in our own selfish tendencies is sometimes necessary. I will have the proposals on hand and placed on the agenda when the conference's athletic directors meet on May 7th. I'll leave you to get prepared for your game. Good luck, but not TOO much good luck, mind you.

Brian left the locker room, followed by Jamie and Marc. They went up to the field, which was on the roof of one of the school's parking structures, and sat down at the top of the bleachers. Jamie brought up the situation at Trinity involving Clint Marshall's death and how they might be able to get at least one of this week's three doubleheaders postponed.

Brian: Gavin is the conference coordinator for baseball, so he can choose to reschedule them on his own and pass word onto their opponents of it.
Jamie: Forgot about that privilege, actually. We've got Wisconsin Lutheran coming in tomorrow, so I'm presuming he'll keep that on the schedule, but the two weekend doubleheaders probably should be pushed into next week in order to allow the players to attend the visitation and funeral, then use Saturday and Sunday to get themselves back to some sense of normal before tackling the final week of classes and the regular season. I'll check in with Adam Rothschild in a little while and see how his meeting with the team went.

Brian: We host Trinity the last weekend of the season and would be willing to move the games from Saturday to Sunday in order to provide your players a bit of relief with the jammed-together schedule of that week. I'll call Gavin in a few minutes and see if he's amenable.

The Thunder came out to start warm-ups, giving Brian and Jamie the opportunity to step away from the field to handle their administrative duties. Marc stayed where he was and watched the entrances for sightings of the team's burgeoning fan base. The first supporters to arrive were Cali, Alyssa, and Jessie, who have quickly become the team's unofficial cheerleaders. Cody and Stacy Prince walked in with Bob and Melissa Mueller, followed by Chrystal and Mike Carrington, who hoped that Jane would get some playing time today being that Steph would be starting in goal. Peter and Mary Zembruski came in at the close of warm-ups, with Dan Ochowicz arriving during the player introductions.

Trinity's 4-2-3-2 made mincemeat out of MSOE's defensive set-up. Four goals in the opening 6:25 got the Thunder off to a quick start that eventually led to a 15-3 lead at halftime. True to her word, Sarah made a complete lineup change for the second half, with Morgan Brooks being the only starter to remain on the field, moving back to partner Lauren at center midfield from her more-advanced position in the first half. With a less-experienced team on the field, Trinity wasn't able to maintain the high-octane offense or air-tight defense of the first thirty minutes, but still outscored the Raiders, 10-5, to pick up their second straight win and fifth overall, downing their Milwaukee rivals, 25-8.

Trinity 25 MSOE 8 (Ali Kramer 1 assist, Sam Mueller 1 goal, Shelley Zembruski 1 goal, Kelley Ochowicz 1 goal/1 assist, Morgan Brooks 2 goals/3 assists, Lindsey Hoffman 2 goals, Julie Jacobsen 1 goal, Steph McNamara 4 goals/2 assists, Jess Fisher 1 goal, Sofia Hernandez 2 assists, Lauren Chandler 1 goal/1 assist, Becca Curtin 1 goal, Savannah Johnson 3 goals, Megan Racicot 1 goal/2 assists, Emily Sommer 1 assist, Erin Matheson 1 assist, Kristie Mueller 5 assists, Andi Susskind 1 assist, Maggie Dowling 1 goal/3 assists, Christen Prince 4 goals/1 assist, Morgan Andringa 1 goal/1 assist)

**********

Dinner at AJ Bombers was a celebration of a dominating win for Trinity Lutheran. While waiting for their food to arrive, parents started asking about Saturday's game and the scenarios available for the Thunder to make the conference playoffs.

Melissa Mueller: So the team is 3-3 in conference now. Will a win on Saturday get them into the playoffs?

Cody Prince scanned through his phone to get the updated NACC standings, which looked like this:

- Aurora 5-1
- Illinois Tech 5-1
- Edgewood 4-2
- Concordia-Chicago 4-2
- Trinity Lutheran 3-3
- Benedictine 1-5
- MSOE 1-5
Cody: Edgewood and CUC are 4-2, Trinity's 3-3. One of them would have to lose and the Thunder would have to win on Saturday for them to have a chance to make it. If both win, we're out no matter what.

Melissa: That's a bit of a putzy.

Marc: Both can’t win, since Edgewood and CUC play each other on Saturday.

Dan Ochowicz: So one is guaranteed to end up 4-3 and would be tied with Trinity for the fourth spot?

Marc: Right, and because of tiebreakers it matters who wins or loses that match. Give the Thunder the win on Saturday, since they're playing Wisconsin Lutheran who are in the same neighborhood of the standings as MSOE. An Edgewood loss would put them in a tie with TLU, and we beat the Eagles in conference. A Concordia loss would tie them with the Thunder and they beat us in overtime when we played them 10 days ago.

Bob Mueller: So we root for Concordia to win, then?

Marc: Yes.

Peter Zembruski: In high school, when they have Senior Day, the players and their parents are introduced, some jerseys might be commemorated, maybe a few words said by the coach and the players. How is it in college?

Marc: It differs greatly between schools and even different sports at the same school. I don't know exactly what Sarah has in mind, but based on her way of managing the program this last half of the season and the theme being "a work in progress", I'm thinking you might see a small forecast toward 2020 be on display, kind of like how the closing ceremony at the Olympics gives the spectators, athletes, and television viewers a little glimpse of the next games' host.

Stacy Prince: Christen forwarded me an email that she got from Sarah this morning with a layout of Senior Day activities. The game is scheduled for 1:00, but everyone will want to be in the stands by 12:30 because the plan is to do the senior recognition before the game. There is also going to be a formal introduction of the incoming freshman class at that time and a post-game meet-and-greet on the field, since it is for sure going to be the last home game of the season, regardless of whether the Thunder make the playoffs or not.

Marc: I really like that idea, to welcome in the new players at the same time you're saying goodbye to the graduating ones. It marks that "family" feel that I know Sarah is trying to impress upon the squad.

Stacy: The note also said that there would be a "changing of the guard" in the locker room following the on-field festivities. Not sure what she means by that, though.

Mary Zembruski: I haven't had a chance to talk to you, Deacon Schmidt. Why does Shelley think you have it out for her?

Marc: Your daughter has run afoul of some of the school's rules. While none of them have been so egregious as to mandate banishment from campus or a forced withdrawal from the semester's classes, they have required my office to sanction her for them.
Peter: We both know that Lara isn't perfect, but in general she's a good kid who has been acting out because some people aren't willing to let her do what she wants or be who she desires.

Marc: Yes, and the harm done to others as a result of that has been why I've had to step in.

Marc and Peter exchanged a knowing look since they have had this discussion before.

Melissa Mueller: Marc, who you do think captains the team next year, since there are only two returning players who aren't freshmen and neither of them seems to be particularly a leader within the squad?

Marc: I think you'll be a little bit surprised. Both of them have started to be more outspoken over the past few weeks and I have a fair bit of knowledge that at least one of the seniors has been grooming one of them to take on the role next year.

As dinner wrapped up, a couple of the waitstaff came over with a Custard Cookie Monster Sammy for Marc and did a small ditty in celebration of his upcoming birthday. Marc thanked them, then Danielle for making somewhat of a to-do for him.

**********

The Schmidts and Princes drove back up Juneau and Vliet on their way to their homes on Washington Boulevard. As they passed through Washington Park, three shots rang out, causing the drivers to speed over the STH 175 bridge and across 47th Street, where a car heading south was in the center of the intersection. Cody drove over both curbs and the concrete median on 47th Street to get around the back side of the crawling vehicle. By the time Marc got to the intersection, the intersection was JUST clear enough for him to drive straight through onto Washington Blvd., with Danielle riding his bumper attempting to get him to speed back up. The three cars stopped in front of Marc and Danielle's house and the two couples debriefed about the near-crash. Cody and Stacy then continued on westward into Washington Highlands.
Emergency!

Being at MSOE for most of yesterday, Marc and Jamie didn't have a chance to sit down with Adam Rothschild, the sports psychologist brought in by the latter to meet with Trinity's baseball team and other athletes affected by the sudden passing of Clint Marshall. The three of them were meeting in Marc's office when he received a call.

Marc: Deacon Schmidt.

Rachel Belding: Marc, it's Pastor Rachel. Danielle collapsed while we were having coffee. I've called 911 and hopefully the medics will be here shortly.

Marc: Oh my. Can you follow the ambulance to Froedtert? I'll meet you there.

Rachel: Do you need me to take worship for you today?

Marc: We'll talk about that when I see you, but let's plan on that being the case. I'll alert my people on campus before I leave. Hope to be there inside a half-hour. Give Paul a call if you can.

Marc: I have to cut this short. My wife collapsed at home and I have the feeling it might have been from a stroke, a potential side effect of her brain tumor. Nice meeting you, Adam, and I'll check in with you later today after things get settled at the hospital. Jamie, can you walk with me to my car? I need to get some notes and details out to several people on campus before I leave.

The three of them left Marc's office, with Adam returning to Buuck to meet with more student-athletes and the other two going to the parking lot next to Luther.

Jamie: What do you need me to do?

Marc: First thing is I need to get worship covered. Pastor Rachel Belding from UWM's Lutheran Campus Ministry said she'd come to campus to do the service for me. Call Coaches Hawthorne and Dillon and inform them of Danielle's collapse, then ask if they can come to campus and meet Erin and Steph after their 10:00 classes. Get their schedules from Casey in Academic Advising so you can direct them to the right places. I want Dani to bring the two of them to the hospital with her. Let Alyssa Norman know about Rachel coming and that she will need to step in for Erin and Steph in worship this afternoon. Hopefully by the end of worship, I'll have had a chance to talk with Bishop Emerson and been able to work out coverage for the rest of the day on campus and, depending on the severity, the rest of the week.

Jamie: GO, MARC! Everything will work itself out here. You need to get to Danielle's side as soon as possible.

Jamie gave Marc a comforting hug, then pulled out her phone and started knocking out the calls and work that Marc needed done ahead of worship and to have the two coaches meet Erin and Steph after class with the news.

**********

Marc came rushing into the Froedtert Stroke Center where he was met by Pastor Rachel and Bishop Emerson. After alerting the front desk of his presence, Marc told Rachel to square up with Alyssa when she got to the chapel, as she would be assisting today since Erin and Steph would be on their way to the medical complex after their 10:00 classes. Rachel said a prayer with Marc before leaving, then the two men went to sit in the waiting room.
Paul: Marc, don't worry about your duties or anything like that. Focus entirely on being here for Danielle. I know you probably have a million things on your plate today, but none of that matters at the moment. Once the doctors fill you in on her condition and prognosis, THEN I'll let you handle getting your ducks in a row at Trinity for whatever absence you will have or need.

Marc: Thanks, Paul. For some reason, I'm not totally freaking out, mainly because I knew the possibility of a stroke existed as the tumor shrunk. She was supposed to have an updated MRI done yesterday, but pushed it off a week for some reason. Really wish she'd have listened to Dr. Zawicki and his schedule for her updates.

Paul: Do you need to contact family?

Marc: I'll wait until I have an update, then will call the three sisters, those being mine, hers, and her brother's wife. Beyond that, I can have Erin tackle additional ones on her way over with Steph and Dani.

Dr. Zawicki came into the waiting room and approached Marc, then asked him to follow him. When they got back to one of the treatment rooms, the neurologist told Marc what happened and the path forward.

Dr. Nathan Zawicki: Danielle had a stroke, a fairly massive one which started as a blockage of one of the blood vessels in the brain. We put in a stent to get the blood flow returned, but how long that area had been deprived of blood or oxygen is unknown. We're taking her to ICU in the main hospital and will monitor her for the next few hours, after which we will be able to give you more information on her condition and chances for recovery.

Marc: Is she dying?

Dr. Zawicki: Maybe. All we can do right now is get her into ICU and hooked up to machines that will take over her functioning while we give the brain the opportunity to begin restoring itself. Around 3, we should have a better idea of her long-term prognosis. Very little is going to happen until then, so you might want to settle in and contact those you feel should be here.

Marc: Thank you, Doctor.

While Marc and Paul walked over to the hospital, the latter received a call from Rachel asking him to inform Marc that worship was ready to go and that Alyssa would contact him afterwards to get more details on how the rest of the day and week might go. Marc then called his sister, Laurie, and Danielle's sister, Brenda, to tell them of her condition and to implore them to get down here. Brenda contacted her sister-in-law, Julie, and her daughter, Sydney, and said that they should meet at Julie's as soon as possible so they could leave for Milwaukee by noon.

**********

Erin exited her Microeconomics class and saw Dani standing outside the lecture hall. She walked over and saw tears in her eyes.

Erin: What's wrong?

Dani: It's Danielle. She collapsed at her and Marc's place earlier this morning and has been taken to Froedtert. He wanted me to get you and Steph and bring you out there.

Erin wrapped her arms around Dani and bawled. After she had calmed down a little, the two of them started toward the parking garage. On the way, they passed Julie Jacobsen, who offered Erin a hug and told her that Christen's dad had been walking the dogs when he saw an ambulance outside Marc
and Danielle's, then inquired of Pastor Belding as to what happened. She then said that Cody had contacted her with the news since he couldn't get a hold of Christen. Julie walked with the two of them for a few minutes, during which they intercepted Steph and Sarah. Following a quick chat (Sarah said she'd announce at practice about Danielle and cut the day short so those who wanted to go to the hospital could do so), Dani gave Sarah her car keys and asked her to bring her vehicle out to Froedtert after practice. She agreed to do so and would have a member of the lacrosse team drive hers out.

**********

Marc: Erin, I need you to stop by the house and pick up a few things. First is our folder of legal documents, which is in my office in the bottom right drawer of my desk. Next is the Green Book. Finally, go into my computer and print the file named ICE.ods. It's a phone list of people to contact if things came to the point where we are.

Erin: It sounds like you're planning for her to die.

Marc: Dr. Zawicki said that they would have a better idea of her condition around 3:00. It was a fairly massive stroke, according to him, and the neurology team are unsure at the moment of her chances for recovery or how much damage had been done.

Erin: We're on STH 175 now, so a few minutes from the house. I'll let you get to contacting others and we'll see you in a little bit.

Erin hung up and caught the others up on what she had been told. Once they got to Marc and Danielle's, Erin went into Marc's office to get the documents he requested and the Green Book (the familiar name for the Lutheran Book of Worship). Dani and Steph did a quick straightening of the house as it was left a bit strewn from earlier in the day. When Erin came back out to the living room, the other two were waiting for her and they left for Froedtert.

**********

Upon arriving at Froedtert, Erin, Steph, and Dani went immediately to the front desk of the hospital and asked for directions to Danielle Schmidt's room, which they were given. A few minutes later, they were in the Intensive Care Unit and went to her room, where Marc, Bishop Emerson, Danielle's cousin Angela, and her friend Pam were sitting around her bed. The three women all went over and hugged Marc, then gathered around Danielle's bed and spoke to her gently, unaware of whether she could hear them or not. Shortly thereafter, Paul told Marc that he was going to take off since he now had support with him. Once Paul had left, Marc opened up about what he was thinking and feeling, along with work-related things that needed to be passed onto people at Trinity.

Marc: Something told me last night that this might happen. She had been edgy that morning, even sniping at me about my schedule for the day. The near-crash that occurred as we and the Princes were driving home from AJ Bombers, it looked like it affected Danielle a bit strongly and she wasn't her usual "takes forever to wind down" self when we went to bed. As I've mentioned to all of you, she had a somewhat massive stroke and we're sitting on pins-and-needles waiting for the 3:00 update on her. As nothing is going to happen until then, pretty much, I need to get some things squared-away with the athletic department, our peer ministers, and the residence halls possibly.

Angela: Do you need Bryan to bring up any of your and Danielle's financial and legal papers?

Marc: No. I had Erin stop by our house on the way here from Trinity to get them. The folder includes the power of attorney documents, her designated bequeaths, the educational insurance policy, her life insurance policy, and the plot reservation at Wood National.
Pam: Sounds like you're planning for the worst.

Marc: I'm not Hoping for it, just being prepared in case it happens.

Dani remained quiet until Erin asked for her assistance.

Erin: Dani, is Cali planning to come out later?

Dani: I'm not sure, but I hope so.

Erin: If it's OK with you, Steph, I'd like to stay at Marc and Danielle's tonight. Of course, I didn't bother to bring a change of clothes or other essentials. Would Cali be able to get access to my room to grab me some clothes and toiletries?

Marc: I can notify Hope of that desire, then all Cali will need to do is gather up things from the various rooms and bring them out here or to the house itself.

Angela: I'm going down to the cafeteria for some coffee and to contact Colleen about coming over here after school since Danielle's niece is traveling down with her sister and sister-in-law. Care to join me, Pam?

Pam: Sure.

The pair left Danielle's room, leaving the other four to discuss logistics for the rest of the day and tonight. Marc dropped texts to Alyssa, Stefan, and Jamie informing them of needing to cover for him in certain capacities the rest of the day and that he'd give them an update after he knew of Danielle's condition and prognosis.
At 2:45pm, Danielle's nurse and certified nursing assistant came into her room to transport her back to the Stroke Center to perform CT and MRI scans. While she was gone, Marc and the others waited in her room should any of their families or friends come. Just after 3, Wil arrived and was caught up on Danielle's condition and what was being done presently. Pastor Rachel returned from Trinity and gave Marc a few messages from his peer ministers and other students. Around 3:15, Danielle was brought back to her room. Shortly after that, Dr. Zawicki appeared and asked Marc to come with him. Marc said that he would like Erin, Steph, Dani, and Angela to join him, which was amenable to the neurologist. The six of them went into a nearby conference room and sat down.

Dr. Zawicki: During the MRI, we found a dead spot on Danielle's cerebrum. It will continue to grow over time and ultimately result in brain death. Life support equipment can keep her physically alive indefinitely, but she won't regain consciousness. I'll leave you some time to discuss the next step. If you are in need of a chaplain, we can arrange for one to stop by.

Marc: Thanks. Her pastor is in her room at the moment. Could you send her down?

Dr. Zawicki: Sure.

The mood in the room was very solemn until Marc broke down, followed by Erin. Rachel arrived and joined everyone in a couple of minutes of uncontrolled weeping.

Angela: Pastor Rachel, what is the most ethical thing to do in this situation?

Rachel: Let Danielle pass on as swiftly and as naturally as possible. Would there be a reason not to do that?

Marc: I think there is concern that people traveling in won't make it in time if we pull her off now, and my thought is that I don't think we'd want to be here overnight standing vigil and waiting for the inevitable.

Dani: What does that mean not just for Danielle but for us as well?

Marc: Doc said that she will slip into brain death regardless of what is done and that she can be kept alive indefinitely through the machines. I propose, and I hope this meets with everyone's approval or at least is OK with all of you, that we come in early tomorrow morning and have her removed from the machines rather than do it now. Laurie, Brenda, and the others can get here and see her, then have a normal night's sleep after the travel and we can all face the decision together in the morning.

Rachel: I'd consider that to be reasonably ethical. You don't prolong the agony for her, but you also allow for those close to her to pay their final respects and close whatever emotional wounds that might exist.

Erin: Is that like a patient deciding to no longer seek treatment and going into hospice?

Marc: I guess I'd say sort of. You might want to ask Brenda when she gets here about that, since that is what her and Danielle's father decided to do for whatever time he would have left once treatment could no longer keep up with his illness.

Angela: I'm sure the few of you have some things to get handled before facing everyone else. I'll go back to Danielle's room, fill Pam in on her condition as well as what we've decided, and be available should anyone arrive while you're doing what you need to do.
Marc: Thanks, Angela. That would be a great help to me.

Angela left the conference room to return to Danielle's, where she saw Pam and Wil talking. She told the two of them about what had transpired and joined in the conversation the two were having about the onset of grief from sudden death versus gradual death. Dani texted Cali and told her to pick up some clothes and essentials for Erin and Steph from their rooms, then come out to Froedtert. Marc contacted Hope to tell her of Cali's need to access their rooms, then checked with Alyssa as to her scheduled arrival time and who else might be coming with her. Rachel called Noah at Corner House to tell him of the circumstances and that plans for tomorrow evening's worship were in the air depending on what happened with Danielle. With the business portion completed for the time being, Rachel went back to Danielle's room while the other four went down to the first floor and then outside for some fresh air. Erin and Steph sat down on a bench, where Erin cried against Steph and let out what had been stored up over the past five hours. Marc and Dani walked toward a small pond on the south end of the complex, where they sat down. After a few minutes of silence, during which they held hands and avoided one another's eyes, Marc spoke.

Marc: How am I supposed to feel right now? My best friend for almost half my life is lying in a hospital bed, close to death. Her family is coming to town expecting me to be inconsolable and wracked with grief. Yet, that calm, rational, a-to-b-to-c logic in me is in a way content with how this has come to pass and with what has been decided for tomorrow.

Dani: There is no one way to feel. This situation is, in my opinion, a hybrid of the two major deaths you have experienced, the out-of-nowhere sudden one of your father and the gradual departure of your father-in-law. I don't want to ask about what you've told me in the past about us, but is that somewhat a part of why you don't feel more out-of-control emotionally, because of me?

Marc thought on that for a bit as he was unsure of how Dani's presence played into his seemingly lack of outward grief over Danielle's eventual death. "I don't truly know what to think. Acknowledging you in any overt way to our mutual friends or families would be VERY bad, as I would expect my sister-in-law to jump to conclusions if she saw us being any friendlier than work colleagues or platonic friends. I'm expecting tomorrow to be a day of work at the hospital for me, my peers, and Rachel, who will be presiding at her funeral, as we'll be doing nothing but sitting around and waiting otherwise. Depending on when Danielle passes, what the northerners plan to do accommodations-wise, and how soon the funeral is scheduled, I'd like to have you stay with me for the weekend. The company would be welcomed. It sounds like Erin might be considering that as well from what she said earlier today."

Dani: I'm your friend, first and foremost. Asking me to stay with you for a few days to keep you company, I can do that. I have practice tomorrow morning, but will meet you out here afterwards. There is going to be a lot of time between now and tomorrow afternoon for things to come together or play out, so we don't need to settle on everything this minute. Let's go back up and see who else is here, then start planning for tonight and tomorrow.

Marc stood up, then reached his hand down to lift Dani to her feet. The two stood there in one another's arms for a few minutes, soaking up the love from each other, knowing that the potential chaos of the next few days might leave little if no time for them to be together alone.

**********

Marc gathered Erin, Brenda, Laurie, and Julie Wolff in one of the lounges in the ICU for what would be the most difficult talk of his life.

Marc: As you are aware, Danielle is dying. The stroke created a dead spot on her cerebrum that will grow and eventually leave her brain dead. After hearing from her doctor and discussing it with
Angela and Erin, I have decided that we will keep her on the machines overnight and come to the hospital tomorrow morning to have her removed from them.

Brenda: Just like that?! Before even giving her a chance to fight for her life, you're willing to give up on her?!

Marc: Brenda, she is NOT going to regain consciousness and keeping her on life support only prolongs the inevitable. I can have Dr. Zawicki come in and show you the chart of where she was when they did the MRI upon arrival and what had happened in the five hours before the second one. The dead spot eventually will eat away at what brain function she has, at which point it is just the machines that will be keeping her alive.

Laurie: Marc's right, as is the doctor. The stroke Danielle had deprived a section of her brain of blood and oxygen for probably forty-five minutes, and if there was any problem inserting the stent to restore blood flow, the blood vessel could have been punctured.

Julie: I don't know why you made this decision before all of us got here.

Marc: The decision isn't final. That's why I have yet to tell the medical staff what we will plan to do, because I wanted all of you here to see her and get the information before going forward.

Julie: Well, it sounds like it's already been decided and we're being asked to go along with it.

Marc: Let's not turn this into some fight over my wife's life. I have the legal right as her husband to act on her behalf if she is unable to do so, regardless of what any of you think about the decision.

Laurie: Erin, what's your opinion?

Erin: I heard Dr. Zawicki explain what had happened and what the prognosis is, and not being all medically-savvy like you, Laurie, I defer to his knowledge and yours on what the truth is here. Julie, I know I'm not blood-related or maritally-related to Danielle, but I am the closest thing that she and Marc have to a child and that is why the two of them have given me a voice on end-of-life decisions concerning them.

Marc: This is no different than if you were to go ill and Roger asked Sydney to weigh in, no different at all.

Julie decided that engaging in a battle of semantics with her brother-in-law was NOT a good idea given his superior intelligence and firebrand temper.

Laurie: So what's the verdict?

Brenda: Before you inform the medical staff, I think we should let the others in the room know about what's been decided.

Julie: As much as I don't like this, I can't really stop you from doing it. I won't be in the room when you pull the plug, because I can't accept the decision to do so.

As the five of them were returning to Danielle's room, Erin wrapped her arms around Marc's left arm, which he used to pull her into his side. Once they were back, Marc told those gathered (Angela, Colleen, Sydney, Steph, Dani, Cali, Alyssa, Wil, Sarah, and several members of the lacrosse team) Danielle's prognosis and the family's decision to remove her from life support in the morning. Before seeking out the hospitalist for ICU, he asked if anyone would be willing to stay with Danielle overnight in case something were to happen. Pam agreed to do so and to remain with her until the others returned to the ICU tomorrow morning. Marc invited the rest over to the house and asked if
anyone was needing to crash for the evening there, then stated that they should meet at 9am at the hospital. After informing the medical staff of their decision, the group left Froedtert for the Schmidts'.

**********

The living room at Marc and Danielle's was a little cramped as a large segment of those at the hospital came over. With a sense of quiet and distance in place, Marc laid out some plans for tomorrow.

Marc: I'm expecting there to be a number of hours of waiting around once the machines are turned off tomorrow morning. During that time, I'd like to be able to do some planning for what the next few days will entail. Alyssa, I'd like you and Julie to come out to the hospital and help Pastor Rachel and I put together the funeral service and the bare-bones death notice for the Journal/Sentinel. We'll also schedule when to hold it as well as anything else surrounding it. Can you be out at Froedtert at 10?

Julie: I'm planning to stay with Christen at her parents' place tonight, so that will be no problem.

Alyssa: Not an issue with me as well. When I go back to campus tonight, do you need me to pass along the word to anyone about coming with me?

Marc thought for a second. "Put Matt on alert as he'll probably want to be here to help choose music for the service. I need Stefan to handle things on-campus for tomorrow and probably Friday. See if Abby would be willing to come out with you as well as I think it would be a good experience for her to be around the big three and Julie in this setting."

Alyssa: Consider it done. I'll text Matt and Abby now and ask them to meet me at 9:30 at Buuck.

Dani: Cali and I have practice at 7. If everyone is sort of gathering at the hospital at 10, we should be able to do that.

Steph (to Dani): Would I be able to go back to Trinity with you in the morning so I can pack up a few days' worth of clothes and the like for Erin and myself?

Erin: We'll go together. That way, you're not having to wait for one of the others to leave campus.

Marc: Sounds like that is settled.

Sarah: I'm going to ask Jamie if we can utilize Adam on Friday afternoon before training to help our team work through what residual grief will exist from Danielle's death, as Erin and Steph are so close to it and others will be in various stages of assisting you or them with arrangements. Now, I have a question for you on another subject. As you've seen so far this conference season, we have been doing a bang-up job on some of the teams. Since Wisconsin Lutheran is going to be more than likely another lopsided win, how do I keep things from getting too out-of-hand? We don't have a full second string, so I'll have to leave at least one starter on the field, and it's Senior Day, so I'd like to play them into the second half and give them the appropriate farewells from the crowd.

Marc: You've asked about four questions there. I'll answer the big one, which hopefully will give you something by which to answer the others. When it comes to playing vastly inferior opponents, it is my opinion that the better team is responsible for "making the game", because they have the most ability to influence it due to their superiority. You have to think about how you're going to manage the game before you ever get to it and plan for it. In my first year of coaching, our team had really no competition in our conference. Only one of our opponents was able to keep the final score within seven goals and we didn't have a full bench, carrying maybe 17 on the roster. So, for most of those
contests, I would break the game down into 10 or 20 minute segments, then write out different lineups for each portion. Sometimes, it was putting forwards on defense or defenders up top because I couldn't pull every dangerous player off the field and still have 11 playing. That's one way to not rub it in on the opponent, by being obvious about attempting to manage the game from your side of the field.

Sarah: Looks like I'll be doing some work of my own tomorrow in getting Saturday set up. Erin and Steph, do what you think you need to do, be it missing practice, classes, even Saturday's game. The team supports you and I support you. Julie, I know that you'll be down here tomorrow working with the other two and Marc, so don't worry about trying to figure a way back to Trinity in time for practice.

Marc: Nothing is settled until tomorrow when we meet, but my initial thoughts are to have the service on Monday evening and internment at Wood National on Tuesday morning.

Erin: And Tuesday's your birthday, Marc. Talk about bittersweet.

Laurie: I'm going to turn in. If service is Monday, plans will be for me to return home tomorrow or Friday, depending on...you know, then come back with the family on Monday.

Julie: Christen and I are going to go to her place. See most of you tomorrow morning and Erin, try to get some sleep. Love you, future cap.

Erin hugged Julie, then Christen before the pair departed. Sarah and Alyssa took off shortly after them, leaving Marc, Erin, Steph, Dani, and Cali at the house. Erin and Steph took one of the other two guest rooms while Dani and Cali took the remaining one. As sleep attempted to overcome Marc, his mind went to thinking about the future and how he would have many more nights alone in his and Danielle's bed than this first one.
Sleep was very hard in coming for Marc, with him tossing and turning throughout the night. About 4am, he went down to the living room and tried to get a couple of hours of sleep on the couch. Shortly after 4:30, Dani crept downstairs and saw Marc with a pained expression on his face as he tried to rest. She lay down against him and wrapped her arms around his torso, enveloping him into her embrace. He opened his eyes and looked at her, but didn't signal that he was awake. The numb feeling and scrambled thoughts he had made this moment feel very detached and a slight bit cold. When Cali, Erin, and Steph came down and saw the two of them together, they tapped Dani on the shoulder to wake her. She got up and went to change quickly, running into Laurie upstairs. The two of them said good morning to one another and Dani ducked into her and Cali's room to put on her practice gear. After grabbing some granola bars and fruit from the kitchen as an on-the-go breakfast, the three athletes and coach walked toward the front door to depart for campus. Erin hugged Marc tighter than usual and absorbed from him comfort and reassurance about the day to come. She pecked his cheek, then Steph and Dani gave Marc hugs before leaving. Once everyone was gone, Laurie and Marc grabbed breakfast from the kitchen and went into the dining room.

Laurie: How did you sleep?

Marc: More like how DIDN'T I sleep! Tossed and turned in my own bed, then came down to the couch in an attempt to get a couple hours before the girls and Dani would wake up and leave for Trinity.

Laurie: I'd never seen you with Erin before yesterday, but the love the two of you seem to have for each other looks very similar to that of Will and Sarah. If people didn't know the two of you weren't related, they could easily mistake her for your daughter.

Marc: Already had that happened with her as well as with Steph and Dani. At the wedding I did in North Carolina in December, one of the brides' fathers complimented me on my family, believing the three of them were sisters. I had to correct him and explain how each of them fit into my world.

Laurie: Well, Erin's your goddaughter, and Steph is her girlfriend. So where does Dani fit in?

Marc: She is one of the soccer coaches at Trinity and played for me at MUSC while in college. We're friends and I'm doing some informal mentoring of her so she can advance in her career. Unbeknownst to either of us, she took the coaching module that I developed while teaching at Shorewood Intermediate School, which is how she was able to make the jump from U-10 to college assistant on the fly.

Laurie: You sure that's ALL there is to the two of you?

Marc: Sis, what brought that question on?

Laurie: Well, she is a bit of a cutie and I know that you've had problems in the past staying 100 percent mentally and emotionally faithful to Danielle.

Marc: I really don't want to get into that topic at the moment. It is quite complicated and with the way the next few days will transpire, I will have enough drama going on with her family as well as Matty Boy to not need multiple parties trying to decide if we is or if we ain't. I'm quite worried about Matt hitting on anything down here that moves and her sister and/or sister-in-law pinning me to the wall over my seemingly lack of emotion over Danielle's condition and the decision that's been made.
Laurie: Can I ask why you seem to be resigned to letting her die?

Marc: When she was first diagnosed with the tumor, Dr. Zawicki went over the treatment options with us along with the risks associated with them. With the option she chose, the oral chemo, there was an increased incidence of stroke, so I've been somewhat prepared for more than two months that something averse might occur.

Laurie: And Erin?

Marc: It's been a bit of a roller coaster for her. She was REALLY distraught when she first heard the news, even though she had seen the behavioral changes which the tumor initiated in the months prior to her MRI in March. She saw the downhill slide Danielle had taken when she started the drugs and the two of us talked with her about the future and what could happen.

Laurie: Even though we've had our moments, and Danielle and I were never the closest of in-laws, I'll be beside you as things pass and defend your choice to let her peacefully pass on.

Marc hugged Laurie and then cried, as the reality of the next few hours hit him. The pair went upstairs to clean up and change, then left for Froedtert.

**********

Marc and Laurie entered Danielle's room when they arrived at the hospital and saw Pam sitting by her side. Marc thanked her again for staying with Danielle and asked if she wanted to be in the room when the machines would be turned off. Pam said that she would stick around and offered to play something at the funeral if Marc was interested. He told her that himself, Pastor Rachel, and some of his student chaplains would be meeting at 10 to work on the service and other tasks and that he'd send for her when they started planning the musical portion.

Dr. Zawicki came in and spoke with Marc about what their early-morning tests indicated.

Dr. Zawicki: Danielle is declining. Her EEG showed decreased brain conductivity and the MRI showed a larger dead spot. There is no reason to prolong what is already set to occur naturally.

Marc introduced Laurie to Dr. Zawicki and informed him of her background. "My sister is a nurse with a number of years of experience working with elderly populations, so she is probably the person that can be most conversant and persuasive with Danielle's family about her condition. Would you be willing to give her some technical information about her state?"

Dr. Zawicki nodded his head and shared with Laurie more detailed information on Danielle, leading to a couple of questions from her and additional responses from the neurologist.

Laurie (to Dr. Zawicki): Thanks for filling me in. Hopefully, there will be no hesitation to move ahead. Marc has decided to let her go, Erin is with him on it, and I back them fully based on what you've told me.

Erin and Steph walked into the room and saw the Schmidt siblings with Dr. Zawicki. Erin went directly to Marc and bawled against him, with Steph and Laurie looking on. Once she pulled back a little from him, Steph came over and consoled her, then Marc. Laurie offered Erin a hug and gave some motherly (or more precisely, aunt-like) comfort to her.

Marc: Doc, what is your best guesstimate of how long she will live after we remove life support?

Dr. Zawicki: Four hours, give or take a bit, if she doesn't go into immediate arrest or suffer another stroke.
Marc: Are the three of us in agreement that it should be done?

Erin: Danielle wouldn't want this to be how her life comes to an end, being tied to tubes for an indiscriminate period of time because, maybe in some small, small sliver of someone's mind, there is hope that she will stabilize and recover.

Laurie: After what the doctor told me this morning, there's nothing anyone can really do but allow the natural order of things to happen.

When Brenda, Sydney, and the rest of the Wolff-related contingent arrived, Dr. Zawicki engaged them with information from this morning's EEG and MRI. Sydney got a bit choked-up, as did Brenda. Julie pressed him on the subject of possible recovery.

Dr. Zawicki: Her brain function is not going to increase while on the machines and will only deteriorate. If we take her off, and she doesn't lose any additional conductivity or capacity, she will be moderately if not severely disabled. Any additional loss of function will render her comatose and ultimately result in brain death and then physical death.

Julie: So the only way of knowing if she will survive is to allow her to possibly die?

Dr. Zawicki: Sounds backwards, I know, but that's the truth. Right now, she's just hovering in a constant state of limbo, with no real improvement possible.

Julie and Brenda looked at each other, then acknowledged what was to be done.

Julie: Marc, I guess we best get on with it and see what happens.

Marc signed some paperwork for Dr. Zawicki regarding his decision to cease life support for his wife.

Dr. Zawicki: Since she could pass very quickly, you might want to consider offering your final farewells to Danielle before we turn off the machines.

Julie stepped forward first, followed by Sydney, then Angela, Colleen, and Pam. With no others seeking to do so, Dr. Zawicki flipped a couple of switches, allowing Danielle to breathe on her own. There was a small drop in a couple of her vital signs, but they stabilized and she was left to carry on without outside help.

**********

Pastor Rachel and Marc had taken over one of the conference rooms in the ICU to work on Danielle's memorial service. Alyssa, Matt Benning, and Julie Jacobsen were with the pair, while Erin and Steph were with Laurie, Dani, and Cali in one of the lounges.

Rachel Belding: I will be using the Burial of the Dead service that is in the Green Book. There are four spots for music, a place for a homily along with one for a eulogy or set of eulogies, and the Old Testament, New Testament, and Gospel readings. Marc, do you have additions you want to make to this?

Marc: A number of Danielle's pipe band comrades will probably want to perform a piece at the service. I plan to inform them of day and time once we settle on it and have the service finalized. Danielle's friend, Pam Rodgers, offered to fill one of the music spots with something on her viola. I told her that we'd bring her in when we started fleshing out what is going where in the service. Also, Danielle would like the Rev. Kirk Laing from Immaculate Lutheran Church in Rockford, MI to participate in the service as co-presider. He went to Western Michigan with the two of us and Erin's
parents and is now the pastor of their church. I contacted him last night and he has accepted Danielle's long-standing request to be part of the service.

Rachel: I called Paul before I left the house this morning, and he said that the synod will cover any expenses that are undertaken for the service, including the securing of a location and any post-service gathering therein.

Marc: Then let's settle on those things so you can give him an update. My call is to hold the service on Monday evening at Trinity, 7pm start time with 3pm-6:30pm for visitation. I'll discuss with Erin and others how we want to do visitation and post-service reception. I'll leave it to you to pick appropriate scripture in consultation with Alyssa. Matt, can you go down to Danielle's room and ask Pam to join us?

Matt left and went to get Pam. In the meantime, Julie asked Marc questions for the death notice that she would submit to the Journal/Sentinel and then take back to Trinity so Amy Roving at University Communications could put out a release with the information. Marc gave her the facts she needed for the notice, then she left to go to the lounge to write it and visit with Erin and Steph while the rest wrapped up the order of service.

**********

Laurie (to Dani): Marc was a little evasive, if not defensive when I asked him about you this morning before we left the house. He mentioned how you, Erin, and Steph were at a wedding with him and were mistaken for sisters, thus he had to explain to the commenter how each of you were affiliated with him. He said you played for him at MUSC and are now a coach at Trinity. I pressed him about there being more than that and he said it was quite complicated. Care to uncomplicate it?

Dani: He said that he didn't want to have things get more dramatic this weekend than was already possible, so I'd prefer not to get into that.

Laurie: I know he and Danielle have had problems. He moved up to live with our mom when the two of them separated for a while ten or so years ago. I'm also aware that she has been a bit of a topic in some of his sessions with his therapist.

Erin: Laurie, I'm not sure you really want to know the whole truth, and none of us want to stir the pot and cause Marc harm, especially with Danielle's family.

Laurie: OK, I'll back off for now, but I want to say that, should Marc decide to return to the dating game, he could do a lot worse than choosing you. You and him are probably about the same ages as our parents were when they met in 1971. Marc'll be 47 on Tuesday. How old are you?

Dani: I'll be 25 in September.

Laurie: Yeah, pretty close. Dad was 46/47, Mom 23/24.

Dani: So the age gap isn't an issue with you?

Laurie: Not in the least. The range is actually a positive in that you're old enough to not be a potential target of my son. He's...

Dani: Marc with a LOT less experience and a LOT more bravado. He told me about him and how he tried to get him to set him up with Erin. We know how far he got with that.

Erin, Steph, and Laurie: NO WHERE!
Laurie: So let's talk. How do you feel about my brother?

Dani: I love him. I'm IN love with him. I want to be with him when he's ready to be with someone again.

Laurie: You know he's a bit of an asshole, right?

Dani: If you mean his Type-A, workaholic, narcissistic outlook on life, then yes I know he has the potential to be a real dick. He's also sweet and caring and encouraging.

Laurie: He may be all that, but you have to check the motive behind it.

Dani: Oh, I get that he sometimes does the right things for the wrong reasons.

Steph: We're aware of it as well, Laurie. When Danielle was having behavioral changes over the winter, before her tumor was diagnosed, she was clear about him caring a lot about himself, maybe too much, but we also saw the vulnerable side of him who nearly went off a bridge onto I-43 because he couldn't face not being perfect and thus felt he wouldn't be worthy of our love or admiration.

Laurie: I didn't know about that. We'll have time in the future to take this back up. We should head back over to Danielle's room and see what's up.

Erin: I think Steph, Cali, and I should duck into the meeting with Rachel, Marc, and the other peers to find out what's been decided.

The five of them went to their next destinations and were informed of what had transpired in their absence.

**********

At 12:47pm, Danielle was declared by Dr. Zawicki to have 10% brain capacity and he reckoned that it would slip to 0% within the hour. Marc asked those who wished to say their goodbyes to go ahead and do so, then please leave the room so he would have some time alone with her. Dani went first and said some heartfelt words to her, then closed by saying that she would look out for and protect Marc, which Laurie heard. Steph was next and told Danielle that she loved her and thanked her for her role in making Erin the person with whom she wanted to spend eternity. Laurie stepped forward and promised her sister-in-law that she would keep Marc out of trouble and that she would not be forgotten by her or her kids. Following her farewell, the three of them left the room to allow Erin and Marc to say their goodbyes in private.

Erin: I never thought that eight months after coming here because of you and Marc, I would be saying goodbye to you. I have been blessed by your presence in my life and how you provided me a shoulder to lean on, to cry on, and someone who I could turn to when I couldn't talk to my mom. You'll forever be in my heart and always on my nameplate. I am proud that my parents named me after you, and I won't ever forget you.

Erin backed away, then hugged Marc tightly and cried against him. She left and was embraced outside by Steph first, then Dani and Laurie. With it being just Marc and Danielle in the room, he bowed his head and poured out his heart and soul into what was to come out of his mouth.

Marc: Twenty-three years of ups, downs, joys, and sorrows. I've been with you about as long as I had been by my lonesome. I want to thank you, first, for taking a chance on me and putting up with my arrogance, conceit, messiah complex, and just unworthiness. Thank you for not being the first to leave and forgive me for when I did it to you. I don't know how I will get through the next few days.
Probably will be leaning hard on Erin, although she'll be leaning hard on me, and Steph and Laurie and Dani and my peers and Paul. This is not how I expected the last line of our vows to come to fruition, with you lying here. You have gifted me with so many memories and good times, and through your friendship with Jim and Val offered me a chance to become something akin to a parent. Sleep well, fair lady, and I'll see you on the other side.

Marc cried as he finished, which could be heard in the hallway. Erin and Dani came back into the room to see him wracked with grief, then rushed to his side. He took Dani into his arms and let everything out, with Erin wrapping her arms around the pair. Laurie and Steph came in next, followed by the rest of those gathered. Dr. Zawicki stopped by and looked at Danielle's vital signs. Noticing that her EEG had flatlined, he called the hospital's transplant team to have them on-alert to harvest Danielle's major organs once her respiration and heartbeat ceased. After a wait of close to twenty minutes, Danielle Caroline (Wolff) Schmidt took her final breath.

What's Next

Laurie left Froedtert for the Twin Cities, hoping to make it home before it got to be too late. When Marc invited Danielle's family to the house for some debriefing time and for him to lay out what would happen Monday and Tuesday, Steph asked Dani if they could go back to Trinity for a bit so she could inform the team of Danielle's passing and wind down away from Marc and Erin.

Once everyone was seated around the dining room table at Marc and Danielle's, her family discussed with him and Erin about what their sister, aunt, and cousin had gone through in the past few months, as they had just seen her the previous weekend in Osseo and she looked pretty good.

Brenda: How could she have gone from what we saw on Sunday to what happened on Wednesday to her now being dead?

Marc: She was really sick for most of March as the drugs were shrinking the tumor. The last MRI before her stroke showed a major decrease in its size, which allowed for Dr. Zawicki to schedule surgery and for her health to improve as well as her spirit. As Laurie had said, the blockage deprived her brain of blood and oxygen for possibly 45 minutes and where it occurred put her entire ability to recover in the slim category. I'd been sort of prepared for this possibility ever since her diagnosis and choice of treatment, so the decision wasn't something I needed to grapple with. I went through the questioning and bargaining portions of my grief before the first appointment, so when the results of her eye exam and MRI came out, I wasn't alarmed. We also spent some time during my spring break talking about the future and what she wanted to have happen if she didn't beat the tumor.

Angela: I know you and her were set up pretty well to weather the financial storm that a death might heap on the other because the two of you met with Bryan a month ago to shore up your portfolio and documents.

Marc: Yes, and with all of you here together, I'd like to share some of that information with you.

Marc opened up his small attache and pulled out Danielle's living will and trust information.

Marc: As Wisconsin is a community property state, all real and tangible property transfers from joint ownership to sole ownership unless it is specifically mentioned for a different form of bequeath or has been held out via a prenuptial agreement. The probate laws in Wisconsin also guarantee the children a certain percentage of the estate following the property pass-through to the decedent's spouse. There are two bequests that have been designated for particular dispersal. Her car, she chose to leave that to Colleen with a proviso that eventually one would be made available to Zach through the transfer of intermittent vehicles. What she wanted to see happen was that hers would go to Colleen, Colleen would pass her present one onto Sydney, whose current car would go to Zach. Since transfers require some form of sale, Colleen and Sydney would need to agree on a price of sorts, with Sydney and Zach doing the same. The other bequest is her educational insurance policy through Thrivent. She named Erin and Sydney beneficiaries of that policy, which will disburse to each of them approximately $2700 a year for the duration of their undergraduate studies.

Julie: What is in the will about additional bequests?

Marc: With no kids to inherit, the children's portion of the estate is passed on to the next of kin, which in this case would be Brenda and Roger. Her half of our joint portfolio will be split in two, with one part staying with me and the other part sold and the proceeds passed on to the two of them. Angela, can you ask Bryan to send me the paperwork to move that forward?
Angela: I'll have him drop it off here when he brings Colleen over to take possession of Danielle's Taurus.

Marc: Now, onto the other events of the next few days. Tomorrow, I will contact Froedtert about having Danielle's body claimed by Schramka Funeral Home in Thiensville, who will handle the preparation of the body. Sydney and Erin, I'd like the two of you to go upstairs and find something in Danielle's closet that would be suitable for her for the visitation and funeral. I can then drop it off at Schramka tomorrow on the way to campus. Visitation will be 3:00-6:30pm on Monday at Bonhoeffer Chapel at Trinity, with the funeral at 7:00. There will be a post-funeral gathering in Siebert Dining Hall following the service. On Monday morning, two members of TLU Campus Security will go to Schramka and claim the body, then bring it to Trinity where it will lie in repose in the Bonhoeffer atrium until 2:30pm, at which time it will be moved to the front of the sanctuary. Tuesday morning at 10am will be the interment at Wood National Cemetery. Her burial plot is in a section of the grounds designated for employees of the Zablocki VA Medical Center.

Brenda: Will there be pall bearers for the casket?

Marc: Not to carry it, but there will be six named in the program. Those six are: Roger, Todd, Zach, my nephew, my brother-in-law, and Erin's father.

Everyone nodded in acceptance of what Marc had laid out. Sydney and Erin stepped away to search Danielle's closet for an outfit for her. After a few minutes of digging, they found a semi-casual grey suit and thought it made perfect sense for their aunt and godmother. With that completed, the two sat down on Marc and Danielle's bed and chatted for a few minutes.

Erin: Where do you go to school and what year are you?

Sydney: I'm finishing up my second year at Chippewa Valley Technical College in Eau Claire, then will transfer in the fall to UWEC to get my degree in Pre-Professional Heath Sciences and hopefully from there go on to Veterinary School.

Erin: That's a bit different. I'm a freshman at Trinity and my major right now is Management. Don't know if that will be what I stay with or if I'll look at something else.

Sydney: I'm a little shocked that she is leaving me money to pay for a good chunk of my last two years of undergrad.

Erin: When Marc and I talked about their plans, the educational insurance was picked up because it was relatively inexpensive and allowed them to name beneficiaries outside of their own children or grandchildren. My scholarships at Trinity pay for a good portion of my tuition and fees, but the extra money from Danielle means that either my parents won't have to pay as much for room and board, I won't have to work as much over the summer to make up my share, or I'll have additional resources to live with and on while at school.

Sydney: Seeing how you were relating to and with others at the hospital, I have to ask this. Are you.....

Erin cut Sydney off. "Yes, and to answer the follow-up, yes. We've been together more or less since our first day at school in August."

Erin's phone buzzed and she looked to get who had messaged her.

StephLafleur: What are your plans for dinner, staying there or coming up here? Dani and I can get Papa Murphy's and Kopp's and come to you, or I'll wait for you in Augsburg and we can eat at
Erin: The girlfriend wants to know if I'm coming home for dinner. Guess I better give her an answer.

EDMatheson17: Bring the pizza and custard. I'll tell Marc you're coming and maybe exaggerate it a bit so the four of us can crash.

A couple of minutes later, Steph texted her back. "Will do."

Erin: Looks like she is trying to wrangle up some of our teammates to come down here and spend time with the two of us. Guess I should tell Marc about it.

The two went back downstairs and Erin told Marc about Steph's messages. Brenda and Angela decided that this would be a good time to go back out to the latter's house in Pewaukee for the evening. Sydney and Erin exchanged numbers, then Sydney mentioned that she was thinking of staying down here for the weekend and hanging out with Colleen. Erin told her to text her if she does so they can possibly see each other at some point before the visitation.

**********

Thursday night for The Four (Marc, Dani, Erin, and Steph) consisted of decompressing from the emotions of earlier in the day and stuffing their faces with comfort food. Both couples were curled up together on the couch watching "Match Game" on TV. Fatigue quickly overtook them after the show and they went upstairs for the evening. Marc looked at his two gems and felt like he didn't want to be apart from either of them after last night's trouble with sleeping. He asked if the others were interested in sharing his room for the night, which got a raised eyebrow from all three of them. After assuring them that it was a platonic request and not an invitation to a four-way, the three women agreed. Everyone went about changing separately, then met up again on Marc's king-size bed. The four of them started out in the following set-up: Steph(Erin(Marc(Dani. A bit later, Marc and Dani turned over and it became: Steph(Erin(Marc)Dani. Once comfortable, sleep came rather easily for the four of them, in touch with and embraced by those they love.
Marc spent Friday morning with his peers and Matt Sherman in the sacristy at Bonhoeffer Chapel planning out Danielle's visitation and funeral. Morgan Andringa sat in on their meeting to glean additional information from those gathered for the obituary she was planning to write for Monday's edition of the Trinity Times. With Pastors Rachel and Kirk not available until Monday, Alyssa took on the responsibility of laying out the service and those parts which would be inserted. Matt asked Marc and Erin about things they'd like him to procure through the synod's preferred vendors and TLU Dining Services for Monday's events, with Marc giving him a few ideas based on who he expected to have attend the funeral. With the facts-and-figures portion of the meeting completed, Marc called upon Julie to help with program design and seating arrangements for the service.

Marc: On the back of the program, we will re-print the death notice from the Journal/Sentinel, as it gives the basic information of those closest to Danielle. The front will have a picture of her from her consecration service in 2016 and the typical data. Inside front will be the order of service, inside back the participants including honorary pall bearers and guards. An insert page will have any additional information necessary for mourners.

Julie typed away on her laptop and laid things out according to Marc's wishes. She then sent him the file to look over. A couple of edits were made by the chaplain (ever the perfectionist), followed by him sending the program to Matt to be taken to the synod office and printed.

Marc: The last two things we need to organize are the order for the visitation and the first few pews on either side of the main aisle for the funeral. In the line, we will have at a minimum myself, Erin, Brenda, and Roger. Any of you think I should add others?

Steph: I think what you have is pretty compact and in line with how I've seen visitations done that my parents and I have attended.

Marc: At my father-in-law's visitation, if I remember right, it was just my mother-in-law, Danielle, and her sister and brother who greeted well-wishers. The spouses, grandchildren, and other relatives were elsewhere in the parlor conversing with mourners. Think the same should be true here, although I'd LIKE to have some secondary grouping of important individuals that aren't in the line milling about and making acquaintance with visitors. I don't have an exact number or composition for that. Any suggestions?

Erin: Probably matters who you consider the next most important "family" to be for this occasion, and I put family in quotes because it can be achieved family as well as ascribed family.

Marc: My sister, my in-theory daughter-in-law, and she-who-shall-remain-under-wraps. Those to me would be the next layer.

Erin and Steph looked at each other, quickly deciphering who Marc meant.

Erin: To me, those three make the most sense, even if you're going to need to be a little bit cautious to not have them be TOO out in front, lest questions come out. We can discuss this piece at another time before Monday afternoon.

Marc: I'll let Laurie know before she comes back down here so she's prepared. The other two, yeah, I can talk to them some time between now and then and come up with a plan to let them be prominent without getting the tongues wagging. I'm also going to ask Stefan, Wil, and Abby to be available during the visitation in case any guests need their kind of help. It might be overkill, but I
want to have all the possibilities covered.

Julie: I guess that leaves just the seating chart.

Marc: Yes. We have four columns of pews in the sanctuary, with the first five rows of each being sort of individual seats for five people. We'll fill the two middle columns first, then see what kind of numbers and special guests we have to place elsewhere. My family will be to the right of center as you face the altar, her family left.

Row 1 Right: Marc; Erin; Laurie and Will Cochran (Marc's sister/BIL)
Row 1 Left: Brenda and Todd Sawyer (Danielle's sister/BIL); Roger and Julie Wolff (Danielle's brother/SIL)

Row 2 Right: Matt and Sam Olson (Laurie's son/daughter); Michael and Sarah Cochran (Will's son/daughter)
Row 2 Left: Sydney and Zach Sawyer (Danielle's niece/nephew); Angela, Bryan, and Colleen Stewart (Danielle's cousin/husband/daughter)

Row 3 Right: Jim and Valerie Matheson (Erin's parents); Steph Lafleur; Danielle Dillon
Row 3 Left: Jeanette and Alan McPherson (Danielle's aunt/uncle); Richard and Caroline Wolff (Danielle's uncle/aunt); Gordon Burgess (Danielle's uncle)

Row 4 Right: Pam and Greg Rodgers (Danielle's friend/husband); Kurt Belding (Rev. Belding's husband); Susan Laing (Rev. Laing's wife)
Row 4 Left: Tamara, Doug, David and Beth Gavin (Danielle's cousin/husband/son/daughter)

Row 5 Right: TBD
Row 5 Left: Leonard and Joshua Burgess (Danielle's cousin/son)

Marc: On the outside right, I'd like the lacrosse team to take up the first handful of rows, with Sarah first row first seat. On the outside left, the pipers and those from the synod office with Bishop Emerson first row first seat. We'll need a couple of individuals to make sure everyone gets to where they need to be. Corey and Brad, maybe?

Julie: Works, I think. Stefan and Matt have other responsibilities on the day. I'll talk to them later today.

Marc: I think we're good. Get the tasks you need to do today done, then forget about all of this until Monday morning. Our lacrosse players have their regular season finale tomorrow, the soccer team is scrimmaging Cardinal Stritch this afternoon down at Bavarian Soccer Park, and everything is settled that can be settled for the moment. Now GET OUTTA HERE, and thank you immensely for your help.

As the chaplain and his crew were leaving the chapel, Erin got a message from Sydney.

SydneyASawyer: I'm still here. Anything good the rest of the day?

Erin (to Marc): Sydney wants to know what we're up to today.

Marc: Well, I was thinking B-Dubs before the soccer game. Shoot that off to her and Colleen along with directions to Bayshore.

Erin responded to Sydney with the agenda for the day (lunch at Buffalo Wild Wings at Bayshore, then the Trinity/Stritch scrimmage) and told her the invite was for both her and Colleen.
Kickoff of the Trinity Lutheran/Cardinal Stritch scrimmage was nearing and Dani was especially nervous as she would be facing players with whom she played just a couple of years ago. Sara called her team in and laid out the starting lineup. Once the players from both teams had taken up their positions, the referee, Sarah Kerrigan, blew her whistle and the match began. Lexi and Carli quickly teamed up for a bit of magic on the left side of the field, with Lexi toe-poking a pass from Carli between the two right-sided Wolves defenders before firing a left-footed shot past the Stritch goalkeeper for a 1-0 Thunder lead. As the first half continued to play out, Marc took some notes on players from Trinity that he might want to question pertaining to the alumni relations program. He knew that Carli and Lexi were part of it from information he had gotten in the past, but he also heard that there were 5-6 players on the team that were involved. Erin and Steph were entertaining their cousins-of-sorts while Matt was watching Cali's play intently. At the half, Marc got a message from Michelle Pelphrey.

Michelleee: Dawson and I are going mini-golfing with Ben and Megan. Ben wanted to know if you and Dani would be interested in joining us at Prairieville, then a late dinner at Perkins.

DeaconMarc: I'll take it up with her after the game. TLU's up 2-1 at the half.

Marc walked back up into the stands and sat down next to Erin.

Erin (to Marc): If it's OK with you, Steph and I are going to stay on campus tonight and hang out with our teammates. It also will allow us to be there for all the pre-game stuff tomorrow morning.

Marc: That's fine. You need to get away from me just as much as I probably need a break from everyone I've been around the past three days. Dani's roommate Michelle texted me while I was away asking if she and I wanted to meet up with her, Dawson, Ben, and Megan for mini-golf and dinner. And NO, it's not a date. More like two friends filling in a space that the four of them have in their going-out itinerary.

The second half was more entertaining as both teams started to play with higher tempo and more offensive abandon. Cali picked up a score and Cami got an assist on the team's final tally. The Thunder walked away with a 4-2 win to close out a productive spring season.
Trinity's women's lacrosse team just finished their final regular season practice and were now meeting with sports psychologist Adam Rothschild in preparation for tomorrow's match against Wisconsin Lutheran.

Adam Rothschild: Can I get a show of hands as to how many of you were close in some way to Deacon Schmidt's wife?

Julie rose her hand, as did Christen.

Christen: I feel like Julie and I saw her the most of our teammates because of my living close to her and Marc and Julie's role with peer ministry.

Adam: So most of the connection the team had with her was by way of Erin Matheson, your teammate and her goddaughter?

Nearly all the players nodded in response.

Adam: I'll be talking specifically with her and Steph Lafleur a little later, but with you I want to focus on residual grief and its effect on play. Residual or second-hand grief comes from two places. One is the empathy or sympathy you have for your teammate or teammates, while the other is unresolved grief in your past that bubbles up in the midst of another death. Can I get a volunteer or two to share their feelings heading into tomorrow?

Morgan B.: Tomorrow is going to be so bittersweet, no matter how you cut it. We have a chance to make the conference playoffs with a win and the right result in the Edgewood/CUC match, but myself and three others could very well be playing our last collegiate lacrosse match tomorrow. Add on the somber mood on campus over Danielle's death as well as that of a member of the baseball team and it could be a very rough day for us on the field.

Sam: The last three days of practice have been a time for us to build our unity of spirit so we can support Erin and Steph when they return to the squad. Watching my friend and teammate's roller coaster of emotions over the past seven weeks or so has pulled me in a bit deeper to her suffering than I thought would be the case when she first heard about Danielle's tumor. It also helped that my sister and I were able to share with her about our mother's battle with breast cancer, as it allowed the two of us to see the fragility of life through another set of eyes.

Adam: Thank you, Morgan and Sam. Grief comes up in numerous ways and doesn't always pick the easiest time to unveil itself. Sarah, are there any plans to acknowledge her death tomorrow?

Sarah: There will be a moment of silence before opening draw. Anything beyond that will be initiated by either the fans or the players themselves.

Kristie and Sam exchanged a somewhat-telepathic look, which meant that they had an idea to bounce off the other when they would have a chance to talk.

Adam: My advice is to focus on how you can bring joy to Erin and Steph within their grief-filled states, which will help you play unselfishly and show them your support and love.

Sarah: We'll come up with a way to hold them up if they stumble tomorrow. I'm not sure if either has chosen to play. That will probably be decided after they meet with you in a little while.
Adam: Probably. There is no right answer to this. Brett Favre's father passed away the night before a Packers game on Monday Night Football. He chose to play and put up almost 400 yards passing and 4 touchdowns in a romp of the Raiders. On the other side, players push themselves to play when they shouldn't and it ends up causing more trouble for them down the road.

The women's soccer team pulled into the parking lot near Niemoller Field and disembarked from their vans. Marc drove over to the lot by Luther, followed by Erin and Steph. The three of them walked over to Buuck to wait for Dani and were passed by the lacrosse team, who checked in with the goalkeeper, spitfire cherub, and chaplain.

Sam (to Erin): How are you doing?

Erin: Best as can be expected. Parents will be coming sometime on Sunday, I think. Dad 2.0 has been a real comfort even though he's needing some of it as well.

Kristie: I'm going to talk to Hope about Sam and I reserving the third-floor lounge for tonight so we can have space to spread out.

Steph: What for?

Sam: We got an idea while listening to Adam and Sarah talk about what had already been planned for tomorrow. The two of us along with Alyssa are going to Grafton to get some supplies and grab dinner on the way back. Are you two going to be on campus tonight?

Erin: Yes. We want to hang out with the gals and be here for all the pregame stuff tomorrow.

Kristie: Good! See you when we get back.

Kristie and Sam hugged Erin and Steph in turn, then went into Buuck to put away their equipment, shower, and change. Sarah and Adam came walking over to Marc, who introduced Erin and Steph to him. Sarah asked the pair about their plans for tomorrow, being told that they planned at the moment to be available for selection. Sarah disclosed to them her plans for the match (Erin starts and is subbed out in the second half; Steph relieves Nicole at some point, then is lifted for Jane for the final fifteen minutes or so), then went into the athletic center to find Dani. The two of them talked about the scrimmage for a couple of minutes, then parted ways and Dani exited to join Marc, Erin, and Steph for their sit-down with Adam.

Adam: First, let me offer my condolences to the four of you. Now, Marc asked me to meet with you because he had some concerns about tomorrow and Monday. I'll start with the two athletes, then move onto the others. Erin, what are your feelings and thoughts now heading into the weekend and the start of next week?

Erin: I'm ready to get sort of back to the reality of campus life and the team. I'm planning to play tomorrow and to give my all in memory of my namesake and second mom. Monday is going to be a different story, I think. I don't know how being so front-and-center with Marc and Danielle's brother and sister will turn out, especially since I am sure a number of guests won't necessarily know about me.

Adam: All of that is completely normal. There is only so long you can put your life on hold before wanting to shake out the cobwebs and be back in what you called "the real world". Steph?

Steph: I've been spending the last three days more or less supporting Erin and Marc. Although I am a bit sad about Danielle's passing, it's not to the depth of either of them and yeah, like Erin, I am looking forward to tonight back here in my own bed and getting on the field tomorrow. As for
Monday, I'll play the good girlfriend for Erin and be there to hold her up if she happens to fall.

Adam: Sounds like you're in good shape, Marc. I know that you're REALLY worried about the potential tongue-wagging on Monday. Tell me about it and I'll see if I can walk you through a game plan to handle it.

Marc: Danielle's family wasn't really supportive of me ending life support so quickly nor how I didn't seem to be wrestling with the decision or the emotional aspect of making it. Erin already laid-out how the visitation line will be, but that leaves a lot of room for other relatives of hers to join forces and create a false narrative of her condition and my actions. On the other side, I'm planning to deploy my sister, Steph, and Dani as my second line of relatives.

Steph and Erin took Marc's comment as confirmation of what he had said in the morning. Dani looked a bit nervous about this possibility and chimed in for Adam.

Dani: I am feeling both honored and also scared by Marc's idea. I know that I am the closest person to him aside from Erin, Steph, and Laurie, but being OUT THERE in that kind of role, and possibly looked upon as an infiltrator by her relatives and their mutual friends, I don't know how I can or will manage.

Marc: Deuce, we've been in this situation before, sort of. The wedding in December, when you were with me, Erin, and Steph, you said you didn't know how you'd react to being a stand-in for Danielle or how to be supportive without signaling a vibe of me "stepping out" on her with you. You got through that very well, and I think you'll do the same on Monday. In order to keep the vultures from aiming at either you or Steph, I have designated you to be in the third row with Erin's parents rather than further up. It makes everything look on the up-and-up and gives you the respect and place you deserve.

Adam: With all the cards down, here is what I think the four of you will need to do on Monday. It sounds like you are aiming for some form of detente with Danielle's family and friends. You need to find a way to bridge the gap between the two sides. Are there any individuals who are in some way tied to both?

While Marc was thinking, Steph opined about a means of co-existence.

Steph: Danielle's niece and cousin's daughter were with Marc, Erin, and I at the Trinity/Stritch women's soccer scrimmage this afternoon. I THINK they like us, or at least don't hate us. If Sydney and Colleen hang about during the visitation, maybe it will open the door for the two sides to intermingle in the spirit of sending Danielle off properly and wishing Marc well going forward.

Adam: That sounds like a pretty good plan. Do you plan to see either of them before Monday afternoon?

Erin: They know Steph and I have a game here tomorrow, so I am hoping they'll come up to watch us. Maybe I should pop Sydney a message and find out.

Marc: Sounds good to me, and Steph, you're right about them being the best means of getting Erin and you over with her relatives. As for Dani, I think having Wil around will help since it gives her an additional person to lean upon. If we get some of the faculty or staff coming through, that's another avenue where she's not outside her element since most of campus knows she and I are friends and that she works for me with the Urban Coaching Project.

Adam: I feel like you're set to take on the challenge of what's to come. Any questions?
Dani: How should I respond if people ask how I rate to be so close to Marc?

Adam: Biggest fear I am sure is others thinking you and him are something and that he's moving quickly to replace his wife with someone else, or maybe had you on the side already. Best answer is honest, direct, and factual. You own your friendship and working relationship with Marc and let the Yentes gossip if that's what they choose to do.

Marc thanked Adam for meeting with the four of them and said that he'd contact him if he needed another session on Monday morning to shore him up.

**********

After most of the last three days together, Erin, Steph, Marc, and Dani went their separate ways for the evening. In Augsburg, a good portion of the lacrosse team (Erin, Steph, Becca, Julie, Christen, Kristie, Sam, Lindsey, Emily, and Moe) along with Jessie and Alyssa were in the third-floor lounge designing armbands for tomorrow's game. Kristie was using a hand-held sewing machine to first attach a bit of elastic to the back of the gray fabric stenciled with a blue D and green S, then binding it into a circle. Once 40 were made, the armbands were put aside and the team started up a game of cutthroat "Never Have I Ever", which Kristie ended up winning.

Out in Waukesha, Marc and Dani were out with Ben and Megan Oliphant, his son Dawson, and Dani's roommate/Dawson's girlfriend Michelle, starting the night with mini-golf at Prairieville Park. Marc, ever the competitor, got out to a bit of a lead on the other two men, while Michelle was slightly ahead of Dani and Megan at the turn. The chaplain's cockiness almost got the better of him, but he was able to hang on and defeat Dawson by two strokes. Dawson and Michelle, however, claimed a moral victory for the lowest couple score. From there, the six went to Perkins for dinner and conversation.

Ben (to Marc): Have you hit your "turn off this alternate reality" wall yet?

Marc: Almost. Between being at the hospital and our house with guests Wednesday and Thursday, I was GLAD to have today to go up to campus and do some work stuff. Lunch with my two girls and Danielle's niece and her second cousin plus the soccer game brought some of my normal life back into the equation. Hopefully I won't have to go back to that suspension of normalcy until Monday afternoon, then can return to business as usual on Wednesday with the final weekly service of the year.

Dani: What's the theme of your homily, or haven't you written it yet?

Marc: It's pretty basic. Everywhere I've been, the final service has been used to acknowledge in a positive way those who won't be returning the next time the community gathers. With us being a new school, we only have one student of note graduating, that being Stefan, so he'll be recognized. I also plan to say a little something about Dr. Baines on her retirement and make note of Danielle's departure. I don't have that last part written yet, but I've worked on the other two over the past couple of weeks.

Dawson: Dad, Megan, thanks for joining Michelle and I tonight. I want to make more of an effort to be involved in the run-up to my brother or sister's arrival and not be like Lily and ignore the whole thing. Megan, you're not THAT much older than me, and why we've not tried to be friends or something, I don't know.

Megan: It's OK. At least your girlfriend and I get along pretty well, and I'm looking forward to the possibility of Dani becoming part of our little gaggle, if what I think will be the case ends up being the case.
Ben: Megs, it's way too soon for you to be thinking Dani and Marc are going to hook up officially. You know how long it took me to move on from Natalie to even THINK of entering the dating pool, and you're already throwing the pair together not 36 hours after Danielle passed away.

Marc: It's OK, Ben. The reason why I leapt at the opportunity to join the four of you tonight is that, besides Sarah and Wil, you're the safest set of people for the two of us to be around in public, in that you already know about us and I feel comfortable being a couple with Dani in your presence.

Dani leaned against Marc's shoulder for a second and pecked his cheek. "We haven't talked about the future at all yet. His sister seems to think that I'd be someone he could choose to be with when he's ready to do so. We have to get through Monday and possibly Tuesday before anything of the sort can be discussed."

Following a round of desserts, the three couples left for home. On the drive back to Washington Heights, Marc and Dani talked and touched one another's hands and thighs. At home, the pair settled in for the last hour of "Live P.D." before turning in. Outside the guest room that Dani is using, the pair said goodnight to one another, followed by a tight embrace.

Marc: See you in the morning, Deuce.

Dani: You too, hubs.

Marc smiled at her, then leaned down slightly and pecked her on the lips, which she returned with equal tenderness.
A Celebration Of Sisterhood

Senior Day for the women's lacrosse team started with a 9am pre-game meal in Siebert Dining Hall. All 24 players plus seven of the eight incoming freshmen were in attendance (Julie Koerner was unable to come up from St. Louis for the event). The five which visited campus at the end of January worked their way into conversation with the other players. Seeing that the two newcomers were hanging back, Sam Mueller drew them in.

Sam M. (to Brooke): Coach told me that you have an older sister at Trinity. Are you two planning to room together?

Brooke: I don't think so. She's been with her current roommate for two years now and they're both basketball players. Makes more sense for Nicole to stay with Kelsey than for me to join her and then have to find another roommate the following year.

Erin: Let's throw the question open. Do any of you have roommates chosen or are you looking specifically for one?

Emma: As you know, Erin, Savannah and I are going to room together. We're also going to try to bring some of my stuff early since she is in a fall sport and will move in on August 12th as opposed to the 22rd for the rest of the freshmen.

Sam K.: Still debating with my parents on commuting versus staying in the dorms.

Shelley: Commuting can be a real b****! You miss out on a lot by not being here 24/7.

Hayley: I've convinced my mom to let me live on-campus. Sam, want me to help you sway your 'rents on the idea and we can pair up?

Sam K.: Might not be a bad idea.

Sarah K.: Nothing yet on that front. Thinking that I'll go through summer orientation and see if I hit it off with someone.

Danny: Steph McNamara and I are going to room together since Sam is moving in with Kristie.

Katie: Still need to tell Trinity that I'm coming since I had two other schools in the hopper before Sarah came out to my team's game on Monday and told me she wanted me to come here and play. Haven't even begun thinking about which hall to live in or who I might want for a roommate.

Morgan A.: Let's take a poll of who's with who and who's looking. See if any of the newbies want to hook on with any of us.

As the conversation went around the series of tables, the players disclosed their plans for the 2019/2020 year.

Kristie/Sam M.; Lauren/Kelley; Lindsey/Emily; Christen/Julie J.; Savannah J./Maggie; Morgan A./open; Steph M./Danny; Ali/open; Steph L./open; Erin/Cali; Emma/Savannah Stark(gf); Becca/Jessie; Sarah K./open; Andi/Jane; Sam K./Hayley(proposed); Brooke/open; Katie/open; Sofia/Vanessa.

Katie: Brooke, want to room together?
Brooke: Could be worse. Maybe trial run at orientation, then decide, OK?

Katie: I can do that.

Morgan and Sarah, both being from the Madison area, agreed to join together and to use the upcoming summer to get to know each other better. As breakfast wrapped up, Coach Hawthorne laid out her plan for today's game.

Sarah H.: Normal starting lineup. I'm expecting to do a full turnover of the team aside from Jess and Nicole once we get a decent lead and to pull Nicole late in the first half so she can get the love from the crowd. Second half is going to start with the original first XII aside from Steph in goal, then I'll pull players one by one, starting with the seniors, with Jane going in goal around the 45th minute, at which time I'll make the rest of the subs. As I have it listed, Kristie will be the only starter that will go the entire second half. Any questions?

Megan: So each of the seniors will come off individually, I presume so they get some kind of acknowledgment from our supporter section. Who gets the armbands once you pull Jess and I?

Sarah H.: That is totally up to you. After the last subs, Kristie will end up with one of them. As for the other, that will be determined by the player with it.

Megan and Jess looked at one another and knew they should discuss this as they also were going have a hand in determining next year's captains during the post-game meeting in the locker room.

Sarah H.: I expect everyone to be in the locker room by 10:45 since I want to start warm-ups at 11:30 due to the pre-game ceremony starting at 12:30.

The team returned their trays to the conveyor belt and left Siebert. A large portion of them went directly to Buuck, with the seniors and incoming freshmen going to Niemoller for a walk-around in relative quiet. The soon-to-be-graduates gave the others some advice on life at Trinity and recollections from this past season.

**********

Dan Paulson (PA announcer): Welcome to Niemoller Field for today's NACC women's lacrosse match between the Trinity Lutheran University Thunder and the Wisconsin Lutheran College Warriors. Today will be the final home match for four members of this year's team and we want to highlight them on this momentous day.

Dan announced Nicole first, followed by Morgan Brooks. Jess was called next, then Megan. Each of them walked out to the center of the field accompanied by their families, with Megan walking out alongside Jess and her parents. The pair walked back and then joined Megan's family for her special moment.

Dan Paulson: In addition to saying farewell to our seniors, the program is also giving a rousing welcome to the Class of 2023 players that have committed to Trinity and will be part of next year's team. Please give a round of applause for the newest members of the Trinity family. Emma Preston. Samantha Keller. Hayley Ramsey. Danielle Coleman. Sarah Kilgore. Brooke Elias. Katie Nelson. An eighth player, Julie Koerner, was unable to join us today.

In the stands, Marc, Dani, Cali, Sydney, and Colleen were sitting together behind the Princes, Johnsons, and Ochowiczes. After the crowd quieted down, Dan went on to the final part of the pre-game festivities.

Dan Paulson: Thursday afternoon, Danielle Schmidt, wife of Trinity Lutheran University chaplain
Deacon Marc Schmidt, passed away due to damage suffered from a stroke. The Thunder players, Coach Hawthorne, and incoming freshmen are wearing armbands in memory of her, with her goddaughter, Erin Matheson, wearing a grey ribbon in honor of Brain Tumor Awareness. Will all stand as a moment of silence is observed for Danielle.

The two teams’ starting lineups gathered around the center circle, arms over one another's shoulders. The reserves and coaches stood along the sideline, hands linked. In the stands, Marc and Dani held hands with their fingers interlaced. Once the referee blew her whistle, silence was kept for close to a minute, at which time the referee blew her whistle again. A round of applause from the stands ensued, after which the teams took up their positions for the start of the match.

The battle between the 3-3 Thunder and 1-5 Warriors started off with Christen and Steph McNamara scoring five goals between them as Trinity got themselves out to a 7-0 lead after ten minutes. Lauren, Jess, and Morgan Brooks added to the tally and, following Christen's fourth goal of the half, Sarah sent in her full array of reserves with the score 11-0 after eighteen minutes. Three minutes later, Nicole was subbed out for Steph Lafleur, receiving a standing ovation after her 21-minute, 2 save performance. Savannah, Lindsey, Julie, Maggie, and Morgan Andringa chipped in goals to stake Trinity to a 16-1 lead after the first half.

With Sarah's plan for the second half being to lift players one at a time, she used the stoppages after each of the first six goals scored by the Thunder to bring out Morgan Brooks, then Jess (passing her armband onto Sam), Megan (Erin inheriting hers), Steph McNamara, Christen upon the scoring of her 50th goal of the season, and Erin (giving it to Morgan Andringa). After the next goal, which brought the score to 23-2, Steph was replaced by Jane. Four minutes following that, Sarah sent on Andi, Shelley, Sofia, and Maggie for Ali, Julie, Lauren, and Sam respectively. Sam passed the armband onto Kristie for the remaining fifteen minutes. As the game was coming to an end, Megan, Erin, and Steph McNamara went behind the team's bench area and condensed the team's two Gatorade buckets. Nicole and Jess were standing on either side of Sarah along the sideline to keep her slightly distracted. Once Dan made the one-minute-to-go announcement, the three imps came out from their hiding place and proceeded to pour the bucket's contents over Sarah's head and back. After a small bit of a shock, she was then embraced by the five players near her. Once the clock hit triple zeroes, all the Thunder players charged the goal area to celebrate their third straight win, a 27-4 lambasting of Wisconsin Lutheran, and a provisional spot in the NACC women's lacrosse tournament pending the outcome of Edgewood's match with Concordia-Chicago.

Trinity 27 Wisconsin Lutheran 4 (Ali Kramer 1 assist, Sam Mueller 1 goal/1 assist, Shelley Zembruski 1 goal, Kelley Ochowicz 3 assists, Morgan Brooks 1 goal, Lindsey Hoffman 2 goals, Julie Jacobsen 1 goal, Steph McNamara 4 goals, Jess Fisher 1 goal/1 assist, Sofia Hernandez 1 goal/2 assists, Lauren Chandler 2 goals/4 assists, Becca Curtin 1 assist, Savannah Johnson 3 goals, Megan Racicot 2 assists, Emily Sommer 1 assist, Erin Matheson 1 goal, Kristie Mueller 8 assists, Andi Susskind 1 assist, Maggie Dowling 2 goals, Christen Prince 6 goals, Morgan Andringa 1 goal/2 assists)

**********

The team meet-and-greet on the field lasted about twenty minutes, during which the incoming freshmen pulled off a prank on some of the current players, pretending to be awestruck fans seeking autographs from them. The players' families were mingling with the squad and the team couples were standing together, proud of their relationships. Cody Prince, combined with Marc and Dan Ochowicz, compiled the Thunder's stats for the season and were given an opportunity to share some of them with the team.

Cody Prince: Despite the overall 6-10 record, there was some DANG GOOD lacrosse played by
you. Over the sixteen games, you amassed 264 goals, with five players scoring at least 20. Six players picked up at least 20 assists and six totaled at least 60 points. With all the substitutions in the second half, I know that Dan Paulson wasn't able to highlight individual accomplishments, so I'll have Kelley's dad spell those out.

Dan Ochowicz: In the team race for scoring champ, Christen edged out Steph McNamara, 50 goals to 47 and 104 points to 97. Kristie was the team's biggest helper, supplying 51 assists, with Sofia and Megan tying for second at 26. Lauren was one goal short of being a 25/25 player and Lindsey and Savannah's combined 61 goals from the bench is proof that this team doesn't revolve around just one or two scorers. Deacon, would you like to wrap up the numbers crunch?

Marc: Sure. Christen had hat tricks in all but TWO games this season. Steph McNamara picked up hat tricks in 10 games. Kristie's 8-assist performance today breaks Concordia's record for assists in a game. Three times this season, the Thunder surpassed the Concordia record of 24 goals in a game. Kristie's 51 assists on the season smashes the old mark here of 41. Christen would rank 11th on Concordia's CAREER goal-scoring list with her 50 from this season. As for the Carthage record book, Christen would be fifth for goals in a season and Steph Mac tied for seventh, Kristie would hold the record for assists in a season and assists in a game, the team's 264 goals would be second, and they would hold the top three spots for goals in a game.

Sarah H.: I'll talk to Elly about how we can get this season meshed together with seasons past of the two previous schools so there is a record of comparison between what we did in 2019 and what they did in their time. Ladies, we have a bit of business to attend to in the locker room, so let's get it done, then you can celebrate with your families, friends, and other loved ones.

The team exited Niemoller, followed by the others on the field. Sarah locked up and then caught up with her athletes heading into Buuck. Once everyone was in the locker room, Sarah opened up the post-game meeting.

Sarah H.: You heard so much good news on the field earlier and played the kind of game that I hope will keep you stoked for 2020 and beyond.

Megan: I take it we didn't get the help we needed.

Sarah H.: Sadly, no. Edgewood won, 13-11, which means they take the final spot in the field. Rightfully, I should be to blame for that. If we had beat Concordia-Chicago, we'd be traveling to Aurora on Friday to play Illinois Tech in the semis.

Sam: Coach, after starting the season 1-6, to be THATCLOSE to making the conference playoffs, and go 5-4 the rest of the way, closing out the season by winning three games in a row by a combined 74-23...

Megan: Yes, Sam! After that tirade following the Capital match, I honestly didn't know how some of us would press forward, not knowing if we'd be rid of her or have to muscle through the rest of the season with her while the spirit in the squad began to unravel. Gavin needs to bring Sarah back as head coach and I'd like to invite you to join me at the Board of Trustees meeting on the 10th if you can so we can make our voices heard.

Sarah H.: Now that you've given me more praise than I think I deserve for my part in the turnaround, it's time for Megan and Jess to do the honors of passing on the baton of team leadership to those who will assume the mantle next season.

Megan: When Jess and I came to Trinity at the start of the year, we had already been tapped by Lauren to captain the team this season. We also knew that we'd have to help find new leaders within
the squad to carry on after we graduated. For the first half of the season, no one really stood out as a 
person who I could see leading this team in 2020. Over the past couple of weeks, that changed. Sam 
Mueller, will you accept my armband and be one of next year's captains?

Sam stood up and walked over to Megan, who placed the band around her arm and hugged her.

Sam: Wow. This is an honor that I really wasn't expecting. The seniors told me around mid-season that I needed to make my voice heard with the freshmen because I'd be one of two juniors on next 
year's team and they'd be looking to me for leadership. I promise to be the best captain that I can and to lead with the heart. Thank you.

Jess: My turn. I spent a lot of time studying this year's freshmen in practice, on the bus, on the sidelines, in the games when I wasn't playing, trying to determine which of them would be capable of stepping up next year to help guide this team onto greater heights. One player showed all the characteristics that I felt were important in this role, and it doesn't hurt that she can light a fire under someone's tush now and again. Erin, will you come up and take my band?

Erin came forward and, before taking Jess' armband from her, spoke to the team and Sarah. "As much as I appreciate your faith in me and would love to partner with Sam in leading these women assembled, I have to decline. My plate is already more-than-full for next year with the Peer Ministry Alliance and the change in my role vis-a-vis Marc following Danielle's passing. If I may, I recommend that Lauren be co-captain with Sam, and I hope that come next April or May, I would be willing to take on the role should it be offered to me."

Sarah H.: I think you just proved why this team as a whole loves you and looks up to you in some ways. You already have made a choice to be heavily involved on campus with the chaplain's office and the PMA, and taking on the captaincy of an intercollegiate athletic team on top of that would be stretching yourself too thin. I also think that you made a good selection for who else could stand beside Sam at the front of the team. Lauren, will you be our other captain next year?

Lauren: I'd be honored, Coach.

Jess came over to Lauren and placed the band on her, then gave her a few words of encouragement.

Sarah H.: We have one thing left to do, and that is determine uniform numbers for next year. If you look at the whiteboard, I have written out this year's roster, the roster we will have heading into preseason in January, and a column for you to write in what number you wish to have. The order will be: captains; upperclassmen; goalkeepers. Following them, I will ask you one at a time to put your name beside the number you wish. The one rule in all of this is that you can either keep your present number or choose one that is open. No stealing. With that, Sam, you're up first.

Sam went to the whiteboard and chose to keep her current number (3). Lauren was next and stayed with 12. Steph McNamara also kept her present number (9). Steph Lafleur, as the top goalkeeper in the depth chart, had preference over Jane and Emma and kept the number 1 jersey that she chose for the 2019 season. Jane changed from 22 to 18, followed by Emma selecting 30.

The remainder of the choices were as follows: Erin, 17; Christen, 23; Julie, 8; Lindsey, 7; Kristie, 19; Ali, 2->22; Sofia 11->10 (Ali nabs 11); Kelley, 5; Savannah, 14; Morgan, 25; Becca, 13; Emily, 16; Maggie, 21->28; Andi, 20->6; Shelley, 4; Sam Keller, 20; Danny Coleman, 24; Sarah Kilgore, 15; Hayley Ramsey, 21; Brooke Elias, 2; Katie Nelson, 22.

**********

The team decided to exit Buuck as one large group as opposed to the one and two-at-a-time that was
the norm. Erin told Marc that she had been chosen as one of next year's captains but turned it down because of her commitments to peer ministry, which after a couple of minutes of discussion and explanation he came to understand. Christen and Julie convened with Cody and Stacy, who congratulated their daughter on her first season and all she did on the field. Kelley and Lauren met up with their parents (George and Rita's appearance was a surprise for Lauren) and they left campus for an early dinner at Highland House. When Sarah came out, she made her way to Marc, Dani, and their group of people. The two of them said that she had done enough to have earned the job permanently and that they would speak to Jamie once things returned to normal about it. Colleen suggested that they go to BD's for dinner, which sounded good to the rest of them, and they went to the parking garage to get their vehicles and leave Trinity for the evening.
Requiem For A Saint

After being gone from his office for most of the past five days, Marc was eager to get this final week of Spring semester off to a good start and catch up on work in the three hours he's given himself before leaving for home with Erin and Steph to prepare for Danielle's visitation and funeral (Dani stayed at the house to welcome any morning or noontime arrivals of family or friends). He went through the pile of email in his inbox, responding to those which were the most urgent (Brian Murphy's concerning his plans for the NACC Athletic Directors meeting on May 7th, Jamie Krueger's on Gavin's desire to block his and Rev. Bailey's attempts to further investigate the athletic department's finances, and Cheryl Baines's inquiring about Marc's opinion of Ashley Sasser, an applicant for the soon-to-be-vacant Director of Human Resources position who listed him as a reference). He then flagged emails from Ali Krieger and Emily Sonnett regarding his availability in the time prior to their weddings (Ali and Steph Labbe's is on December 31st in Vancouver, while Emily and Lindsey will be wed in a candlelit evening ceremony on February 14, 2020 in Atlanta), with notes to reply to them on Wednesday morning as three of the four brides would be joining their national teams for pre-World Cup training camp on Sunday (Steph as the #1 goalkeeper for Canada, Lindsey and Emily as part of the 23 for the United States). Following that, he flipped through this morning's edition of the Trinity Times, which had the obituary for Danielle written by Morgan Andringa. A somber mood came over him as he read it, as recollections from his marriage were stirred up. After a second reading of it, he penned an email to the author with his thoughts ahead of today's events, which Morgan would be covering for the paper.

Morgan,

Thank you for your eloquent and touching recap of Danielle's life that was printed in today's Trinity Times. I feel as though you gave voice to how she was a large part of how I came to my position here and was an equal partner in the almost 22 years of our marriage. Despite a large portion of campus not coming in contact with her, I am confident that your telling of her journey from born-and-raised Lutheran to accomplished academic to inquisitive scientist and synodical deacon resonated with them. If you have any needs or requests for your coverage of today's events, don't hesitate to contact Julie Jacobsen, who will be handling the logistics for them on behalf of the chaplain's office.

Marc Schmidt

Before leaving campus, Marc, Dani, Steph, and Erin went to Bonhoeffer Chapel, where Danielle was lying in repose in the atrium, guarded by Justin Walker and Brian Culpepper of TLU Campus Security. The three of them looked over the coffin and the intricate touches the funeral home did to bring her life into public view, shedding a couple of tears in the process. Marc thanked the two men for their role in today's proceedings, which would include loading the casket into the hearse tomorrow morning for the trip to Wood National Cemetery for her interment. As they walked away, Tom Sinclair, Ben and Megan Oliphant, and Amanda Duckworth entered to pay their respects. Ben and Megan went to Marc and told him that they would be coming to the visitation later and that Dawson and Michelle would be joining them at the funeral. Megan spent a couple of minutes consoling Erin and Steph, then she and Ben went over to the coffin and Marc and the two women left.

********************

During the three hour break away from campus, Marc, Dani, Steph, and Erin prepared mentally and physically for the rest of the day. Lunch for the four of them was a lasagna brought over on Sunday by Linda and Tom Williams, members of Lake Park Lutheran Church and UWM's Lutheran
After lunch, each of them went to their rooms to change into more somber and respectful attire. Being the least-fussy about her appearance or style, Steph was the first one to be ready. Next to be ready was Marc, who went all-black (mock turtleneck, jacket, pants) but mixing pieces from his standard wedding outfit and his university event outfit. Erin and Dani worked on one another's hair before getting into their dresses, which were pretty conservative compared to what they usually wear for formal events, but also in keeping with their personal styles. Following a quick once-over of each of them by the others, they departed and traveled back to Trinity for what will feel like a very long evening when all is done.

When Marc and Danielle's families arrived around 2:45, they saw that her casket had been moved to the front of the sanctuary and that the first handful of rows had been cordoned off. Marc and Julie Jacobsen spoke briefly about the processional involving the three bagpipers, the officiants and liturgical assistant, and those seated in the first row (Marc, Erin, Laurie, Will; Brenda, Todd, Roger, Julie). Julie said that Corey and Brad would be coming at 6:00 and would be handling who is seated in the roped-off area. She also told Marc that the peer ministers and lacrosse team would line the path going from Bonhoeffer to Siebert so that all guests know where the post-service reception is being held. Marc thanked her again for her work the past few days and being self-initiated on a couple of things that hadn't come to his mind on Thursday or Friday.

Laurie, Steph, and Dani had been reaching out to welcome mourners from Marc's circle of friends and family following their pass through the line of him, Erin, Brenda, and Roger. Some questions were asked, which the three of them did their best in answering truthfully if not completely. Steph noticed that Matt was scoping out some of the young women that had come to offer their condolences, leading her to bring up her concerns to the other two.

Steph: Matt is going to get his first taste of "no dice, son" if he tries approaching some of the students he has been looking over.

Laurie: I take it the two of you have a pretty good idea of who's with who and how certain people swing.

Steph: I know plenty, and I can tell you he is NOT going to get anywhere with some of them. The two women with Marc and Erin right now, they're incoming freshmen athletes and friends of Erin and I. They're also a couple. One of them will be one of our teammates, while the other will be playing field hockey here.

Laurie: Dani, what about your cousin?

Dani: She's seeing a Matt of her own. You met him at the hospital, I think.

Laurie: The music guy?

Dani: Yep.

Steph: Laurie, did I tell you that 14 of our 24 players are hitched to one another?

Laurie: No. So seven couples on the team?

Steph: Yeah. He'll have little luck if he tries to make a play for one of our teammates since few of them are actually available.

Cali joined the three of them in conversation, which was interrupted after a couple of minutes by Julie, who needed to talk to her fellow peer ministers about an idea for filling in some of the open
spaces in the reserved rows. After getting agreement from Cali and Steph, she went back to her post at the entrance to the sanctuary.

At 5:00, Pastors Rachel Belding and Kirk Laing, along with their spouses Kurt and Susan, arrived at the chapel. A couple of minutes later, Alyssa and Matt Benning came in. The two pastors and two peer ministers went up to the front of the sanctuary and began a run-through of the service. Feeling good about how things were laid out, Rachel, Kirk, and Alyssa went into the sacristy to vest up while Matt went back into the atrium and joined Cali and the others. Stacy Gilbert, Denise Kearney, and Kent Brackett from the Lady Elgin Memorial Pipes and Drums entered Bonhoeffer just after 6 and went inside the sanctuary to spend a few moments with Danielle before tuning up. Brad and Corey checked in with Julie when they arrived and were given a list of the special guests that would be seated in the first five rows, including the placement of the non-participating peer ministers in Row 5 and Cali in Row 3 with Dani, Steph, and Jim and Val Matheson.

**********

On the stroke of 7pm, the three bagpipers stepped off with Kent in front and Stacy and Denise flanked behind him a couple of steps. As "Danny Boy" was being played, Pastors Rachel and Kirk followed with Alyssa carrying the cross before them. Behind the officiants, the immediate families of Danielle walked in two-by-two. When they reached the front, the pipers peeled off to the left, Rachel, Kirk, and Alyssa did a partial kneel in front of Danielle's casket, and the families stood in front of it for a number of seconds before taking their seats in the front row.

Rachel Belding: In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Congregation: Amen.

Rachel: This evening, we are here to celebrate the life of our friend, our sister, Danielle Schmidt. Born on July 6, 1967 to Patricia and Franklin Wolff, Danielle Caroline Wolff would graduate first from Osseo High School in 1985 before embarking on an academic career that would see her receive degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee along with graduate work at Western Michigan University. She married Marc Schmidt on July 26, 1997 and they remained together until her untimely death on April 25, 2019. She is survived by her husband, Marc; her sister, Brenda (Todd) Sawyer; her brother, Roger (Julie) Wolff; her sister-in-law, Laurie (William) Cochran; nieces Sydney Sawyer, Samantha Olson, and Sarah Cochran; nephews Zachary Sawyer, Matthew Olson, and Michael Cochran; goddaughter Erin Matheson; and other family and friends. At this time, I would like to ask those who wish to share memories of Danielle to step forward.

Brenda, Angela, Erin, and Pam made their way to the lectern and told a couple of stories from their time with Danielle. Following their remembrances, Pam stayed up front and played "The Magnificat" from Holden Evening Service, a fitting tribute for a woman who sought to serve God in all she did. Alyssa read the passages of the Old and New Testaments chosen for the service, with Kirk proclaiming the Gospel passage, Matthew 5:3-10. From there, Kirk gave a touching message about Danielle's life from his perspective as a friend of her and Marc's for nearly 20 years. He recalled her humbleness and sincerity while they were both part of Western Michigan's Lutheran Campus Ministry, and her encouragement of him as he struggled following the death of his father. After Kirk's homily, Alyssa spoke for a couple of minutes on behalf of the students at Trinity Lutheran in remembering Danielle and her quiet role in supporting Marc as chaplain and being a role model for those seeking entrance to ministry as well as those might be alongside those called to the pulpit. Rachel gave the Benediction, then the pipers rose and played "Amazing Grace" as they led Rachel, Kirk, and Alyssa out of the sanctuary.
The reception in Siebert following the service was well-attended, with additional storytelling the order of the day. Val and Jim asked Erin and she and Steph could join them after the reception for a late dinner and to talk over the moving of Erin's stuff back to Rockford after finals next week. Erin told Marc that she was leaving with Steph and her parents but would see him back at the house afterwards. The reception broke up around 9:00, with Marc, Dani, and Laurie and her family being the last ones remaining.

Not long after arriving home, Marc had joined Dani in the room where she had been staying. He lied down on the bed, mentally and emotionally exhausted from the day. After removing her pumps, Dani lied down next to Marc, with her head against his heart, speaking loving and comforting affirmations to it. She untucked the front of his mock turtleneck and ran her hand under it, lightly touching his abdomen and chest. Her other hand was working itself around him to release the rest of his shirt's hem from underneath his belt and pants' waistband. After pushing it up about halfway, she started to softly kiss his exposed skin. After a bit of that, she removed his shirt and kissed her way up his chest, then licked and kissed each of his nipples before placing her lips against the underside of his jaw. Marc lied there content with how Dani was being affectionate with him, willing to let her do what he wished. She pressed her lips against his and tenderly pecked them and suckled slightly on his lower one. She reached behind herself and unzipped her dress, then unhooked her bra and pulled both off her shoulders, then down over her hips where she grabbed the waistband of her panties and slid them off with the rest of her attire. Now completely bare, Dani wasted no time in removing the lower half of Marc's clothing and straddling him. She rubbed her pubic area over his semi-flaccid member in an attempt to get him stiff without the use of her hands or mouth. Marc's penis started to become erect and, after a bit of movement by Dani, was enveloped by her. She sunk down on it, then slowly rose and sank back down upon him. Once it was at full hardness, Dani squeezed her vaginal muscles around his wand and deliberately moved up and down on it, touching every inch of it with the fullness of her inner core. She pinned Marc's hands on either side of his head and interlocked her fingers with his, then kissed him with love and devotion as she worked to bring him to an orgasm. As he neared climax, Marc wrapped his arms around Dani's waist and placed his hands just on the top of her rear. After a couple of desperate thrusts from underneath, he unloaded himself inside her, then pulled her upper half down onto him and held her tight.

When Erin and Steph had returned to Marc's, they went to their room and Erin clutched tightly onto her girlfriend, shedding a few tears. Knowing that Erin needed her comfort above all else, Steph talked to her in hushed tones and shared the depth of her love for the woman through caresses and sensual touching. Once they had both been stripped of their funeral attire, Steph placed her lips against Erin's left breast and took the nipple into her mouth. Following that, she kissed her way down her body and placed her lips against those of Erin's vagina, kissing and licking them for several minutes before moving up to her button. Steph's soft sucking motion on her clit made Erin squirm a bit, then resulted in a tortuously slow rise to a full-body quake of an orgasm. The pair spooned and shared a few touching words with one another before each drifted off to sleep.
Tuesday's committal service at Wood National Cemetery was solemn and short, with Denise Parker and Trent Brackett from Lady Elgin Memorial playing "Taps" at its conclusion. As the mourners walked toward their vehicles, Dani and Steph discussed stopping at Target and Cermak on their way back to Marc's place to pick up some things to hold a small birthday celebration for him. Dani went to Marc and informed him of their splintering off for a bit so he and Erin could say farewell to the others before heading back to the house. Marc nodded and gave her hand a light squeeze before moving on with the rest of those congregated. Laurie asked Will to hang about with Marc and Erin for a few minutes as she wanted to say some things to the other two before they left the cemetery. Laurie caught up to Dani and Steph and the three of them hung back from the rest of the group across from the parking lot.

Laurie: This part of the cemetery used to have a soccer field on it. Marc's U12 team played here for one season, I think. I think he always found it odd playing in this environment, especially the halves when they'd be heading toward the Old Soldiers Home with its tall spire. Anyways, that's not why I asked the two of you to hang back. As one of the few people who will probably still be in Marc's life three or six months from now, I wanted to thank the two of you for your role this past week, especially this weekend when most of us were back home. Steph, you have been a great support to Erin from what I've seen and can tell, which I know is probably underappreciated by most, but I am glad to have you as part of their life going forward. Don't forget to invite Aunt Laurie and the rest to the eventual wedding.

Steph: Thank you. Your acceptance of Erin's place in Marc's life and the two of us as a couple are blessings. So, how far does this aunt thing go? Can I help Marc bash some sense into your son when he arrives in August?

Laurie: Yes, please do!

Laurie and Steph hugged for a few seconds, then Dani threw the latter her car keys knowing that Laurie probably wanted to talk to her one-on-one. Once Steph had crossed the road toward the parking lot, Laurie began.

Laurie: We've talked a couple of times the past few days, but not like this, alone. Marc is vulnerable right now, even though he looks like a pillar of strength. That strength he is showing is in no small part due to you. The way he seeks you out visually, he never did that with Danielle. In part, that's because he felt she could stand up for herself and that he didn't have a need to defend her or protect her in a crowd. I can see in your eyes that you are taken by my brother and that you wouldn't do anything to hurt him intentionally. Give him some time to grieve Danielle's passing and emotionally separate himself from that chapter before starting yours with him. I hope to see you again soon and take good care of Marc.

Dani: My biggest worry about him is the "forbidden fruit" thing.

Laurie: Are you saying that there is/was something going on between the two of you?

Dani: I guess I am. We've been sort of together in an underground way for about seven months now. He told me on several occasions that he was in love with me, but that he couldn't see himself leaving Danielle, especially after she got sick. I've been biding my time and hoping that the possibility of us becoming partners would come to pass. Now that it can happen, I'm concerned that he might not want to because the excitement from our trysts won't be there and that he might go searching for someone who can be a "normal" complement to him.
Laurie: And knowing my brother, I bet he is thinking the exact same thing about you. That you won’t want to be with him now that you actually can be, that his place in life or age might now be seen as a negative by you when it used to be a positive. Again, give him time. He always shows his true colors, and he usually does it in a non-committal way.

Dani nodded. "Like how he takes 30 seconds to build up to telling you what he's thinking?"

Laurie: Precisely. He hates criticism or bad news or to be unliked, so he puts up all of these barriers to protect himself and then lobbs comments from inside that bunker like grenades.

Dani and Laurie shared an embrace, then Laurie whispered to Dani, "I really hope you ARE the next chapter for Marc."

Dani: I hope so, too.

**********

Back at the house, Marc and Erin were saying goodbye to his and Danielle's families. Sydney told him that she was going to stay an extra day with Colleen and her parents since she would have her new car to get home. Marc handed her the keys to the Taurus and told her to take it with her back to Pewaukee, where she and her second cousin can work out the trade and that he'd bring Angela the title for it once he had a copy of the death certificate. He then invited her to come to worship at Trinity tomorrow afternoon, as he'd like her to be present for her aunt's placement in the chapel's Ring of Honor and to accept the award on her behalf.

When Dani and Steph returned to the house, Marc and Erin were lounging on the couch, glad to be done with all the people and events of the past week. The two of them set up lunch from Dickey's Barbecue in the dining room, then called the others to the table.

Steph: On Wednesday night, when the four of us were sitting around along with Laurie and Cali, Erin mentioned that today was your birthday as well as being the planned day for Danielle's internment, so Dani and I decided that we should celebrate it after the morning events were done, just the four of us. Happy birthday, Marc.

Erin and Steph went to each side of Marc and were embraced by him, then kissed him on the cheeks. Dani stepped in front of him and pecked him on the lips.

Marc: Thank you for remembering. I wasn't planning to make mention of it with everything else going on. I know that people say you shouldn't plan out your future at a time like this or make any major decisions, but I hope that in three years, when I turn 50, this is the scene in front of me on that morning. My goddaughter on one side, her future wife on the other (no pressure to get engaged before then), and the person with whom I hope to be spending that next chapter in front of me.

The three women sang "Happy Birthday" to Marc, then they got onto eating. After a couple of hours unwinding and getting mentally back to reality, Erin and Steph left to return to Trinity. Dani did a bit of her laundry before leaving for home, allowing her and Marc to spend some time together without the eyes of the world upon them. After Dani left, Marc went into his office and did some thinking about the next chapter that was about to unfold for him and what he wanted to do with it.

Marc (internal monologue): It's just me, now. What do I WANT to do with the rest of my life, now that I'm not forced to consider others in making those choices? Well, since I won't have any Independence Day obligations, maybe this is the year I make the pilgrimage to Boston for Pops Goes The Fourth! It comes at a pretty dead spot in my calendar. I'd have to be back here no later than the 6th since Matt and Laurie will be coming to town on the 7th for his Summer Orientation session.
Eventually, I'll probably move to the east side so the commute to Trinity is shorter and I'm closer to a lot of things and people I enjoy. I was serious when I told the three girls that I hoped they'd still be here and playing important roles in my life when I turn 50. Erin, she's the best daughter-by-choice that I could have. Steph and her together are great and I really hope the love they share is enough to keep her from letting her eyes or loins wander and thus breaking Erin's heart. Dani.....I know she's the next one, but now that I'm free, will she still want me? Maybe, to quote B.B. King, "The thrill is gone" and she'll either try to double down on Sarah or look for another woman. I guess the only way to find out if this future picture can be made real is to show them what I'm thinking and feeling, then ask them to join me on the journey.

Marc searched Expedia for flights to Boston for the itinerary he desired (leaving June 30th, returning July 5th) and purchased two round-trip tickets. Next, he booked a five-night stay at the Courtyard Boston Copley Square. With the easiest one handled, he thought about how he wanted to show his appreciation and love to the other two. He knew that he would need to get some suggestions from Val and Elliott, along with asking them about their plans for moving Erin and Steph out of the dorms for the summer. Since he had little else he could do that evening, Marc made up invitations for Erin, Steph, and Dani for dinner on Saturday night, when he would divulge his thoughts about the next chapter and give them symbols of their roles in it.
Changing Of The Guard

Upon arrival at his office in Luther on Wednesday morning, Marc was greeted by balloons and streamers in it and an 18x24 birthday card signed by most of the women's lacrosse team along with faculty, staff, and other students. Before going to her 10am class, Cali stopped in to see Marc, allowing him to pick her brain a little.

Marc: I am taking Erin, Steph, and Dani out for dinner on Saturday night, sort of a "family" gathering. I want to make the night very special, which is where I need a little help from you. I'm getting corsages for them and wanted to know what Dani's favorite flower is.

Cali: You keep this up and I might need to send Matt to you for a couple of lessons in courtship. To answer your question, she's always wanted someone to get her an orchid corsage. She went to Homecoming her last two years with "the girls" and skipped Prom both years because no one asked her. Do that and you'll make her melt.

Marc: Thanks. Now, about the gift that I've gotten her. A five-day trip to Boston during Independence Day week. Only hang-up is that she'd be stuck with me the whole time.

Cali: Any specific reason you chose Boston?

Marc: Seeing the Boston Pops Orchestra's July 4th concert on the Esplanade has been on my bucket list for close to 30 years and this just feels like the right year to cross it off and have it coincide with Dani and I's first sort of official non-work-related vacation.

Cali: She's going to be floored. I'll keep everything a secret from her. What are you doing for the other two?

Marc: I'm going to talk to Erin's mom and Steph's dad about that since I need some input. For Erin, I'm going to overhaul one of the extra bedrooms so she has a room of her own at the house for when she wants to escape campus for a night. Steph's is trickier because it involves three parts, one pretty blah, one more heartfelt, and one that is truly sentimental and involves another person.

Cali hugged Marc before she left for class. A couple of minutes later, he called Val to broach a couple of subjects.

Val: Marc! What has you calling me? I just saw you a couple of days ago.

Marc: Well, we didn't get a chance to talk at all. What are your and Jim's plans for Erin's moving out of the dorms for the summer?

Val: We're planning to come to Milwaukee after he gets off work next Friday, then pack her stuff into our minivan and her car on Saturday and driving back after that.

Marc: She can store some of her bigger or school-related stuff at my place so it's not being lugged back to Rockford only to come back here in three months. I have the space, with three extra bedrooms that aren't used 95% of the time. In fact, I'm thinking of re-doing one of them so Erin has her own space in the house versus randomly crashing here occasionally. That's another reason I'm calling, to get some decorating suggestions from you.

Val: You know she LOVES blue and being near the lake. Did she tell you that her and Steph stopped at South Haven on their way here for Fall break?
Marc: No, but that makes sense as the lake shore at dusk can be quite romantic. So a nautical theme with some girly touches. Maybe a bit of lacrosse mixed in. That fly?

Val: Sounds good to me. This a summer project that she'll see when she returns in August?

Marc: No. I want it done by Saturday afternoon as I am taking her and Steph out to dinner that night and want to surprise her with it. Speaking of that, what is Erin's favorite flower?

Val: Daisies. Jim usually gets her a dozen for her birthday, but with her now there and not here, we didn't think of trying to get them this year.

Marc: OK. Consider that resolved. Won't be a dozen, but I'll make it happen for Saturday. Her and I will talk about moving over what she won't need for the summer after chapel today, for which I need to get ready. We'll talk next week and lock down more specifics.

Val: Whatever this is you have up your sleeve, I'm sure she will love it, like she does you. Talk to you soon.

Marc hung up with Val and then left his office for Bonhoeffer Chapel for the final weekly worship service of the school year.

**********

After Stefan read the day's lectionary passages (Isaiah 6:1-8 and Acts 13:1-5) and Marc proclaimed the Gospel (Matthew 28:16-20), the chaplain began his homily.

Marc: Here we are, the final time this congregation will gather in its present form. As I hope will become tradition under my chaplaincy, the final homily of the year is a time to recognize saints in our midst that, when we reconvene in late August, will not be with us. These individuals will become part of the Bonhoeffer Chapel Wall of Honor, which will encircle the atrium outside the sanctuary. Today, three will be inducted as the first class of honorees at Trinity Lutheran University. The first one arrived on this campus in Fall of 2015, when the school was Concordia University-Wisconsin and before the decision had been made to relocate its programs to the campus in Ann Arbor. In his four years here, he has seen the fall of an institution, a two-year purgatory, and the rise of a new university. During that time, he faithfully advanced in his studies and sought candidacy for rostered leadership in the ELCA. He has been a major help to me as I have attempted to turn the page from how Concordia worshiped under the guise of the LCMS to how Trinity would practice worship as an ELCA university. He will be departing us next Saturday as a graduate of TLU and taking his talent and heart to Luther Seminary in St. Paul MN. I chose him to be the assisting minister for his final service on this campus and now am proud to make him the first member of Bonhoeffer's Wall of Honor. Stefan Fraiser.

Stefan acknowledged the applause from the pews with a slight dip of his head. When things had quieted down, Marc started again.

Marc: Our second inductee has been involved with this university and its predecessor since before it was located in Mequon. She began her career at Concordia College in 1977, when the school was located on 33rd and State Streets in Milwaukee, three blocks away from my childhood home. Her husband, the Rev. Robert Baines, had been named pastor at Hope Lutheran Church and she got a job as a secretary in the Office of Human Resources. Over time, she rose the ranks in the department to eventually be named Vice President of Human Resources, a position she has held for 19 years. June 30th will be her final day as VP of HR and she will head into a well-earned retirement. Dr. Cheryl Baines.
Dr. Baines stood up in her pew and received a round of applause from the congregation.

Marc: The third person I have chosen for this honor is not with us, but she served this university well in an unofficial capacity since its founding last July 1st. She was a role model to a number of the students who will be peer ministers next year as well as a friend and colleague to my fellow ministers at UW-Milwaukee and Marquette. She took her role as a synodical deacon seriously and led worship at the VA Medical Center for its patients and staff. Having achieved so much in academia during her time at UW-Madison, UW-Eau Claire, and Western Michigan University, she sought out a way to serve God, heading on a path that would lead to initial disappointment and a dream deferred for a decade. This past Thursday, our third honoree left this Earth as the result of a massive stroke. She was my best friend for almost half my life and my wife for 21 years. Danielle Schmidt.

Marc wiped his eyes, as did several people in the pews. Following a period of time for remembrance, he began the closing portion of his message.

Marc: Will Stefan, Cheryl, and Danielle's niece, Sydney Sawyer, come forward and accept the honor which you have been given, as well as a blessing as you go forth into the next stage of your lives.

The three inductees came to the front of the sanctuary, where they stood in front of Marc. He placed a medallion on each of them, representing their enshrinement to the Wall of Honor, then anointed each of them. "Father, keep these individuals safe in your presence as they move on from Trinity and start a new chapter in their lives. Amen."

At the conclusion of worship, several students and staff came up to the altar to express their condolences to Deacon Schmidt. Erin, Steph, and Dani joined him and Stefan in the sacristy to finish off the remaining Communion elements, at which time Marc gave the three women invitations to Saturday night dinner at the Cheesecake Factory, with dress code instructions (semi-formal) and a request to come to the house around 3pm with plans to stay the night.

**********

The final Student Government Association meeting of the year was led off with the passing of an omnibus "Bill of Bills" that would be taken up in toto by the Board of Trustees at their May 10th meeting. With legislative matters completed, current SGA President Chad Markham called Becky Sanderson to the chair and handed over the gavel, installing her as next year's President. Becky appointed Elizabeth Edwards as Legislative Chair and Brittany Bridgeman as Parliamentarian for the 2019/2020 academic year, then acknowledged those senators who would not be returning to the body for its next session (due either to graduation or not winning a seat in the April 16th election). Following that, she adjourned the meeting, bringing to an end the 2018/2019 session of the SGA.

**********

Before leaving the house on Thursday morning, Marc called Elliott Lafleur to get some information on Steph and to ask about their moving arrangements.

Marc: Elliott, it's Marc Schmidt.

Elliott: Marc. I'd ask how's it going, but I'm sure it's not going as well as you would like. Suzanne and I would have liked to have been there on Monday for the visitation and funeral, but with plans to come next week to move Steph home for the summer, the time wasn't there for either of us to come. How are you handling the loss?

Marc: Probably better than expected, because I had been somewhat prepared for this possibility for a couple of months as her doctor stressed that her course of treatment for the brain tumor made her
more susceptible to a stroke. I'm calling for a couple of reasons. First, what are your plans for Steph and her stuff?

Elliott: She doesn't have a whole lot with her there, mainly because she flew to school from here and had all but what she could carry shipped to Trinity. We're planning to drive there on Friday, pack her up on Saturday, then stop somewhere on the way back to spend the night before finishing the trip on Sunday.

Marc: If she doesn't have much stuff with her, would it be OK if she stored it at my place? It's a four-bedroom house, so there is plenty of space here for her to keep things she won't need over the summer. Besides, with the three of you coming for Irish Fest before she moves back into the dorms, that's one less hassle.

Elliott: You're sure about this?

Marc: I already made the offer to Val concerning Erin and her stuff, so it makes good sense to offer the same to you, Suzanne, and Steph.

Elliott: If we don't have to come to Milwaukee to move her out, that would be great. How will she get home, though?

Marc: That will get figured out in the next few days. She could ride back with Erin, Val, and Jim to Rockford, then catch something from there to Kitchener, or you could pick her up there or any of a number of options. You six work that out amongst yourselves. Onto the other reason why I called. I am taking Erin and Steph out to dinner on Saturday night, a sort-of last hurrah before they leave for the summer. What is Steph's favorite flower?

Elliott: She is SO NOT a girl in that way. Why are you asking?

Marc: I want to get each of them a corsage with their favorite flower in it.

Elliott: If you want to do that for her, maybe something leafy and understated.

Marc: Additionally, I plan to give her something of extreme value that night, if she'll accept it.

Elliott: What's that?

Marc: Danielle's engagement ring. Since we didn't have kids of our own, she decided that she wanted to pass it down to Erin, thus my giving it to Steph. She can store it at home and then I don't have to think about losing it or not getting it to her when the time would come.

Elliott: If she takes it, I'll be sure to put it in a safe place for her.

Marc: Thanks. You talk to Val and get whatever worked out between y'all that needs to be done. I'll talk to her early next week to get their actual schedule and then work on getting the girls' stuff here.

Elliott: Will do, and thanks for being there for Steph. She needs someone to kick her butt every now and then and it sounds like you're willing to do it. Take care and we'll talk again soon.

Marc hung up, then packed his stuff up and left for campus.
Friday was Dead Day at Trinity, where the students were off from classes to study for next week's finals (although we ALL know no one actually studies on Dead Day). Marc started his morning with a birthday Skype call to his goofy nephew.

Marc: Happy birthday and congratulations, Matt! You have just earned to right to fight and die for your country, be sued, get married without parental consent, and buy cigarettes from the corner store. Don't do all of those the first day, mind you, or you won't have a second day of being 18.

Matt: Why do you ALWAYS have to rain on people's happy times?! Besides, I don't think any of those are things I will be pursuing with my new legal status.

Marc: Any plans to celebrate?

Matt: Andrew and I are going to the Mall of America after school. He got a tip on there being some Bloom Jeff (Bloomington Jefferson High School) seniors taking Prom pictures in Nick Universe, so I thought we'd go and do some scoping.

Marc: Son, ya thinkin' with your wrong head! Then again, I was probably the same way when I was your age.

Matt: Good thing you called. After being in Milwaukee for Aunt Danielle's funeral and meeting some of the students you know at Trinity, I was wondering if you could give me some inside information on a few of them.

Marc: You'll be here for your Summer Orientation session in two months, where you'll have 48 hours or more of interaction with a section of your incoming class. Then there's Orientation just before Fall semester starts, where you'll have even more opportunity to get acquainted with students. Save the Hugh Hefner imitation for then and don't expect me to give you an leg up with those who trust me to watch out for them. Tell your mom I said hi and that I'll give her a call in the next few days to go over what Danielle chose to leave her, you, and Sam.

Matt: Bye, Uncle Marc.

After making breakfast and changing, Marc went back to working on Erin's room, hoping to finish it tonight after he returned from errand-running for tomorrow night's "family" dinner.

**********

Seated on the couch, Marc waited for his three dinner dates to finish their preparations. As always, Steph was the first one ready. Marc stood up as she entered the living room and commented on her choice of attire for the evening (a turquoise shift and nude-and-black flats with a slight heel).

Marc: This is a new look for you, my dear.

Steph: After being so uptight with my outfits for the visitation/funeral and committal service, I wanted to go more feminine for tonight. I also hope this shows Erin that I DO have a bit of fashion sense and can be almost as girly as her.

Marc: Well, you look quite adorable.

When Erin came down the stairs, the two of them turned to look at her and were slightly amazed at
how her cute-but-flirty look had been kicked up a couple of notches with how she was dressed in a sleeveless blue lace skater dress with black block-heeled sandals). Marc fanned himself slightly at the heat radiating off the woman.

Marc (to Erin): If Steph's outfit was a shock, than yours is a complete electrical storm. When did you become such a hottie?!

Erin blushed deep red at Marc's comment. "I guess I want to turn others' heads the way some of the other women on campus do."


Steph walked over to Erin and laid a soft kiss on her lips, which was reciprocated. A couple of minutes later, Dani entered and, as usual, knocked Marc for a loop, wearing a form fitting paisley dress with spaghetti straps and 4" patent-black stilletos. While he was catching his breath, Erin spoke up. "Dani, you know that you might have all three of us fighting over you by the end of the night, right?"

Dani (smirking): Great. My man and his two kids are all horndogs. Thank you for what I perceive was a compliment.

Marc: All I can say is WOW! You sure aren't holding anything back tonight. I love how that looks on you, and later I might have to see how it looks OFF you.

Dani thwaped Marc on the arm, then laid a sensual kiss on his lips. "Hold that thought."

Marc went into the kitchen and pulled out the ladies' corsages from the refrigerator. When he returned to the living room, he heard a couple of gasps from them.

Marc: Since this is a very special night for me, and hopefully will be for you as well, I thought it made sense to go all-out for it. I asked those closest to you to help me out with this, since I didn't have a clue on what to choose.

Marc walked over to Erin, then took her daisy-dominated corsage from its package and placed it on her wrist. She leaned forward and gave him a peck on the corner of his mouth to thank him. Next, he took Steph's corsage of succulents and placed the cuff holding it onto her wrist. She blushed and turned shy before looking up at Marc and giving him a tight hug, with her face pressed against his. Lastly, Marc pulled Dani's orchid corsage and tied it onto her.

Dani: It's lovely. Who told you about my wish to one day be given one?

Marc: Cali. She told me the story about your last two years at Nicolet and the outcomes of Homecoming and Prom.

Dani put her arms behind Marc's neck and the two of them spent about 20 seconds kissing one another.

Steph: Hey, you two! You have all night after we get back to do that. Let's go eat!

The four of them exited the house and took Marc's car to the Cheesecake Factory at Mayfair.

**********

Dani: Why did you ask the three of us out tonight, and why all the pomp and circumstance?
Marc: I have a number of reasons. First, this would probably be the last time the four of us would see one another before summer break started, with Erin and Steph going home and me all over the place between Synod Assembly, Churchwide Assembly, some vacation time away from Milwaukee, and other events. I also wanted to make good on what I had said on Tuesday afternoon, that this is the image I want to see in three years when I'm celebrating my 50th birthday. I plan to show you the level of my seriousness when we get back to the house, but for now, I want to tell you what I'm thinking and feeling. I consider tonight to be the start of my next chapter in this crazy little thing we call life. I no longer have any set commitments other than those associated with my job, and I can choose how I want to live and who I want to have be a part of that. With that said, I wish to have the three of you be part of my new family. Erin, having you at Trinity has been a true blessing for me. The opportunity to see you grow and develop over this last year is something I cherish. With Danielle no longer here, I don't want the bond we've created to change. Will you be part of my next chapter?

Erin: Yes, Marc. I have come to love you so much in this past year, and not just because you're generous, kind, sweet, funny, and have a heck of a Rolodex. I didn't know that my coming out to you when I applied to Trinity would lead to all that I've now come to experience. You're my home-away-from-home dad, and I don't want that to change.

Marc: Stephanie, you have been a wonderful partner for Erin and have come to deal with some of your admitted faults that could stand in the way of a forever for the two of you. As a protege, you've taken my call for inclusive ministry and stuck yourself into the middle of it, developing your gifts and taking steps of faith to hone the skills that you will need as a rostered leader in the ELCA or ELCIC. The two of you asked me around Christmastime if I would marry you someday. I say yes to that and ask you to be part of this next chapter. Will you do so?

Steph: I'm a bit unsure about what you're asking. I plan to be at Trinity another three years and to be Erin's partner as long as she will have me. Unless you're asking for something beyond that, I'll already be part of your future. If that's what you're asking, then yes.

Marc: Very well. Now, Danielle, words don't do justice to describe how I feel when I'm with you. You've been a friend, a lover, a work wife, and I hope will become my life partner. Will you be part of this next chapter and give me the time I need to eventually make good on that desire?

Dani: I would be most honored and it would make me extremely happy to have our relationship grow to the point where we can make that kind of commitment to one another.

Erin asked the others if she could get a picture of the four of them to remember this night by, and to possibly post on Twitter and Instagram. Everyone gathered around Marc and, once in good positions, Erin snapped a selfie of them. She uploaded it to the two social media sites with the caption: "May 4, 2019, a new day in the life of @DeaconMarc @StephLafleur @DaniPDillon and myself. #MyTLUFamily" before they left the restaurant for home.

**********

Once they got back to Marc's house, he went to collect his gifts for the three women while they sat on the couch talking. After joining them, he asked everyone to follow him upstairs.

Marc (to Erin): You're here in Milwaukee for eight months or so of the year and I know that being on-campus 24/7 can be a drag, which is why Danielle and I were happy to have you stop over whenever you felt like it, be it to get a DECENT meal or to escape the dorm for a night. She and I had discussed turning one of our three extra bedrooms into a space for you to call your own, but hadn't gotten started on it before she got ill. This week, I chose to make good on our intentions.
Marc opened the door to the room he re-did and led them into it. "What do you think?"

Erin: I love it.

Erin went over and sat on the bed to test its firmness, followed by Steph.

Marc: Plenty of space on it for the two of you to share if you wish. Speaking of that, I suppose I should give Steph the first of her gifts.

Marc reached into his pocket and pulled out a house key on a TLU keychain. He then handed it to Steph.

Marc: This is a key to the house. Erin has one already as you know, but I don't want you to feel like you can't stop over without her. Mi casa es su casa.

Steph: Thank you, XP!

Marc: XP?

Steph: Stands for Expansion Pack. You're like the add-on to my own dad's operating system for when I'm at school.

Dani and Steph exited Erin's room, leaving Marc and her in there temporarily. Seizing the opportunity, Erin wrapped her arms around him and reached up to give him a peck on the lips. "Thank you for everything. I couldn't ask for a better second dad than you." Marc held her for a few more seconds, then the two of them left her room and went to another of the extra rooms.

Marc: Erin and Steph, I talked with your parents earlier this week about their plans for moving you out of the dorms next week and offered to have you store some of your stuff here for the summer. Erin now has her room here, but there are still two empty ones where I can keep your belongings. They are supposed to work out the timing of everything between themselves and I'm sure will fill you in once it's finalized. Now, onto my second trinket for you, Steph.

Marc handed her a small velvet box. Steph opened it and looked at its contents.

Steph: A birthstone necklace? It's beautiful, but why six of them?

Marc: Because I felt that any smaller combination wouldn't cover everyone. The emerald is your mom's, the ruby your dad's, the opal yours, and the aquamarine Erin's.

Steph: Whose are the other two?

Marc: The sapphire is both Jim's and Dani's, while the diamond is mine. As for Val, her and your mom have the same one.

Steph shed a tear at hearing that, then kissed Marc's cheek and hugged him tight. "Thank you. I'll wear it with both pride and love."

Marc: Save the waterworks because you might need to unleash them after I give you the third piece of your gift, which I wish to do in private. Follow me to my office and we'll meet back up with Erin and Dani in the living room.

Upon entering his office, Marc went to the bookshelf and pulled down a safe disguised as War and Peace. He opened the book and pulled out a simple 0.35 carat marquise-cut diamond ring.

Marc: Before you jump to any conclusions, this is not from me to you. Before she died, Danielle and
I talked about what she wanted done with her rings. She said that he wanted to be buried with her wedding band, but that her engagement ring should be passed down to someone. With us not having kids of our own, the person she felt should get it is Erin. That is why I am giving it to you, and your dad knows that I am doing so. The two things I ask are: 1) It be part of whatever ring you eventually give Erin when you propose; and 2) If you do not feel you can commit to marrying her, that you return it to me.

Steph was slack-jawed at Marc and Danielle's benevolence. "I really do not know what to say except, whoa. Why are you giving this to me now?"

Marc: So that I don't end up losing it or forget to give it to you in two, three, four years when the two of you get to that stage.

Steph: Thank you, Marc. I will keep this and present it to Erin when the time is right for the two of us to take that step, letting her know that the marquise stone was from Danielle's engagement ring.

The pair returned to the living room and Marc handed Dani a tie box. She opened it to reveal her plane ticket to Boston along with rolled-up American flag.

Dani: I'm confused. A plane ticket to Boston and an American flag. What's the connection?

Marc: Seeing the Boston Pops Orchestra's July 4th concert live and in person has been on my bucket list for almost 30 years. With no commitments here that week, I felt this was the right time to check it off, and I'd like you to join me.

Dani: You know this is during the Women's World Cup, right?

Marc: Yes, and I took that into account when planning the itinerary. The presumptive US/Canada quarterfinal is on June 29th. We fly out on the 30th and return on July 5th, the day before the 3rd place match. The winner's semifinal match is on the 3rd and we can make plans to find a pub in the area to view it. There is also an NWSL game at Harvard that night, the Breakers and Hearts. I am looking at this as our first unofficial public event as a couple. I might not be ready to be in a full-on relationship with you, but I want us to spend time together and don't wish to have anyone else take the place you hold in my life.

Dani rose and took Marc by the hand up the stairs and toward the room where she was staying. Marc stopped her and pulled her toward his room, where they connected with one another physically for the first time in 2 1/2 months, sealing their intentions for the future. Sensing that Marc and Dani wouldn't be returning downstairs, Erin and Steph went up to her new room and broke in the bed with an extended session of lovemaking.
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

* On May 7th, the athletic directors from the Northern Athletics Collegiate Conference's thirteen institutions gathered for their end-of-year meeting. Commissioner Greg Lawrence brought forth two resolutions authored by MSOE athletic director Brian Murphy, one that would enforce a three-year ban on Lauren Heberlein coaching at any NACC school and the second to request from the NCAA a show-cause order on her. The first motion passed 9-3-1, but the second was close to failure before Rockford athletic director Joanne Corbin cast the decisive seventh vote in favor. Three weeks later, the NCAA issued the proposed order to last a period of 18 months, expiring on November 28, 2020.

* May 10th was the year's final meeting for the Trinity Lutheran University Board of Trustees. After passing the omnibus legislative packages from the SGA and Faculty Senate and a motion to move future meetings of the board to the second Friday of the month, Bishop Emerson re-appointed Paul Ridgeway and Peter Wilkins to the Board for a second five-year term and appointed for first terms Lisa Devaney, Arnold Whitman, Gregg Best, Cindy Paine, and Carla Ormond. The board then re-elected David Strasser as Chairman before adjourning until August 9th.

* The Greater Milwaukee Synod held its annual assembly at Trinity Lutheran the weekend of May 17-19. Among the major decisions made by those gathered included: 1) The approval of TLU offering the Diakonia program through its Department of Religion and Theological Studies as a certificate in Practical Ministry; 2) Taking an official position in support of the Draft Social Statement on Women and Justice, to be voted upon at Churchwide Assembly in August; and 3) Supporting the new Luther's Promise fund with a permanent line in the synod's budget. Gavin Winchester made an appeal to the assembly for seed capital to begin upgrading Niemoller Field in expectation for a move to Division I by one of its athletic programs for the 2021-2022 academic year, which was tabled with directions for him to bring the appeal to the synod's August 7th meeting at Churchwide Assembly.

* On June 1st at the Milwaukee Highland Games, the Lady Elgin Memorial Pipes and Drums remembered their fellow band member and friend, Danielle Schmidt, with a tribute before the pipe band competition began on the day. Marc attended the event with Dani and cheered on his wife's band, which took third in Grade IV behind City of Chicago's Grade IV band and Celtic Cross.

* June 8th was the first full day of the 2019 Women's World Cup (France defeated South Korea 3-0 in the opening match on the 7th) and the Greater Milwaukee Synod's Service of Consecration for its newest class of synodical deacons, held at Lake Park Lutheran Church, the partner congregation of UW-Milwaukee's Lutheran Campus Ministry. In an eleventh-hour decision, Jamie Krueger was given approval for consecration following the completion of a three-week mini-course designed by Dr. Tom Sinclair and Bishop Paul Emerson on ELCA doctrine and practices. Following the service, Marc went home and caught up on the day's matches in France [Sweden 2-0 Costa Rica; England 4-2 Nigeria; Germany 3-1 Japan].

**********

Most of June was spent following the Women's World Cup. With a much lighter schedule, Marc was able to watch most of the matches live, either alone or with Dani, then re-watch them with Erin and/or Steph on Skype in the evening. The United States and Canada won their groups (US going 3-0-0, Canada 2-0-1 with the tie being to Switzerland). Both teams dispatched their round of 16 opponents (US over Belgium, 4-0; Canada over South Korea, 2-1), setting up a border battle in the quarterfinals. Marc sent out invites to a number of his favorite soccer-loving people for a breakfas-
based viewing party on Saturday morning, with kickoff at 8am. The early start meant that Dani would be staying the weekend with him, as they were leaving for Boston the next morning.

Marc’s alarm went off at 6am and both he and Dani got up, then headed to the kitchen to start cooking for the mini-crowd they expected to arrive somewhere between 7:30 and 8:00. After an hour or so, the two of them had put together a veritable buffet (scrambled eggs, pancakes, sausage, bacon, cinnamon rolls, and muffins), which was being kept warm in the oven in foil serving trays. The first arrival was Christen, walking over from her house in Washington Highlands. Alyssa and Amanda came around 7:45, with Dawson and Michelle right behind them. Cali and Emily Bowman showed up a few minutes before kickoff, while Kelley arrived as the teams were walking out onto the field. Dani and Marc got their laptops up and running, then piped in several others via Skype (Erin, Steph, Julie, Lauren, Lindsey, Emily Sommer, and incoming freshman soccer player Jordan Hubbard who was with her former high school teammate, Lexi Millen).

Steph: What is Herdman THINKING?! No Sinc, no DMath, no Des.

Marc looked at the starting lineups for both teams and pondered the coaches' rationale for them.

Canada: Labbe; Agnew, Buchanan, Zadorsky, Chapman; Quinn; Schmidt(c), Lawrence, Fleming; Beckie, Prince.

United States: Naeher; O'Hara, Johnston, Sauerbrunn(c), Dunn; Horan, Mewis, Brian; Heath, Press, Morgan.

Marc: John seems to be playing the long game here. Sinc at 36 and Diana at 35 can’t be expected to go 120 minutes and you know he wants the two of them available if the game goes to kicks. As for starting Becca over Des the Destroyer, it gives them a third center back so they can push Agnew and Chapman up into the attack. As for Harvs, she seems to be playing for an early lead with the attack-minded back line. This looks to be lining up similar to the Canada/England quarterfinal in 2015. England was able to get a 2-0 lead by halftime and hung on just long enough to see out the win, 2-1. The US will need to do that if they expect to finish the match in regulation.

After the national anthems and the exchange of pennants between Sophie Schmidt and Becky Sauerbrunn, the teams positioned themselves for the start of the match. Once referee Melissa Borjas blew her whistle, Christen Press passed the ball back to Sam Mewis. Over the first 15 minutes or so, the US were the more enterprising side, trying to use their slight experience advantage to get out on the front foot against their scrappy rivals from the north. A cross from Tobin Heath was deflected out by Allysha Chapman, resulting in a corner kick. Heath's kick flew through the six-yard box and was headed out by Lindsay Agnew, giving the Americans another corner kick. From the left side this time, Heath played a short corner which Julie Johnston flicked between Steph Labbe and the near post, giving the US a 1-0 lead after 21 minutes.

Marc: Can't be leaving that front post open against the Yanks, because JJ will find a way to get there and score.

Alyssa: Steph could have started a little closer to the post if they were planning not to put a body against it, but there was very little she could do once Julie beat Agnew to where the ball came.

The US nearly doubled the advantage on another corner kick, but Chapman was able to scramble away a shot from Horan that hit her on the goal line. At that point, Herdman made an adjustment and had Lawrence on defense for corner kicks, pressed up against the right-side post. Neither team did much with the time remaining in the first half, which was called after two minutes of stoppage time.

During the halftime break, Marc and his guests (both live and virtual) discussed the match and what
to expect in the second half.

Amanda: Can Canada get that goal back? It looks like the US is just too taut in the back at the moment to be breached.

Marc: Don't count out this team, EVER! Do you remember how they got bronze at the 2012 Olympics?

Amanda: It was on a stoppage-time goal from Matheson, right?

Marc: My favorite pint-sized Canadian. They have also had the upper hand on the US over the past couple of years, with two wins and two draws in their last four matches. I think Herdman is OK with where the game is now, because they still have a chance to win it and he has yet to introduce Sinc or DMath to the proceedings. I just have this feeling that if the US doesn't get another goal before they come in, they might be looking at extra time.

Emily S.: How does Harvs counter their inclusion?

Marc: She can't try to make straight-up adjustments to contend with them. Best course of action is like-for-like moves on offense and pulling back one of the outside backs around the 80 minute mark.

Dawson: I read something about there being additional substitutions in extra time. Can you explain that?

Marc: It's a relatively new rule aimed at encouraging teams to be more daring in normal time and to deal with the pedestrian nature of most extra-time sessions. Each team is allowed three subs during the first 90 minutes and are given an additional one if the match goes to extra time. The two teams in this game are probably the most comfortable and most adapted to the fourth substitution, as the NWSL, where a large percentage of their players ply their trade, allows four subs in league matches. Herdman and Harvey are also two of the best tacticians when it comes to spotting trends and tendencies and taking advantage of them.

No changes were made coming out of the locker rooms and the second half got underway. Despite dominating possession, the US couldn't turn it into worthwhile chances on goal. Just past the hour mark, Herdman sent Diana Matheson and Christine Sinclair to the midfield stripe, where they handed the fourth official their substitution slips. At the next stoppage of play, Matheson entered the match for Agnew, then told Lawrence to take up her position at right back. Sinclair came on in place of Nichelle Prince, eager to add to her international goal scoring record, which currently stood at 188. The addition of the two national team veterans shifted the tone of the match as the Canadians began making promising forays into the US' defensive third. Harvey responded to Herdman's changes by inserting Rose Lavelle in place of Morgan Brian, followed by Megan Rapinoe for Heath. As the match moved past 75 minutes, Harvey played her final card of regulation, bringing on Emily Sonnett for Kelley O'Hara. Three minutes later, Jordyn Huitema was brought on for Schmidt, who handed the armband to Sinclair. Janine Beckie took up Schmidt's post at right midfield with Huitema joining Sinclair on the front line. Crystal Dunn made an attack up the left side of the field, looking to battle past Lawrence on her way to the end line. Beckie came from behind and poked the ball away, sending it to Becca Quinn who struck a one-time cross-field pass over Sonnett's head where her CWNT bestie, Jessie Fleming, latched onto it and drove into the penalty area. She crossed the ball and it skidded in between Johnston, Sauerbrunn, and Sinclair, ending up in the path of Matheson. Her shot deflected off the US captain's right cleat and went to Sinclair, who quickly sent the ball between the two center backs into the corner of the net, catching Alyssa Naeher leaning the wrong direction. It was a new ball game and momentum had shifted to the Canadians. The final three minutes of regulation and four additional minutes for stoppages produced two scoring chances, with Morgan whizzing a shot wide of Labbe's far post and Huitema going high on a header from 8 yards.
Cali: This is going to kicks, as neither team seems like they will want to chance losing by pressing for a winning goal.

Marc: Depends on who those extra subs turn out to be. Canada have a few possible tricks left in the deck, and the US has weapons at their disposal who can change the complexion of the match if they are brought on.

The first half of extra time saw both teams use their final substitutions, as Desiree Scott entered for Huitema in the 97th minute, moving Beckie back up front and the Canadians into something resembling a 3-3-2-2. Abby Dahlkemper replaced Mewis in the 100th minute with Johnston joining Horan and Lavelle in the midfield. During the short break before the second half of extra time, the television announcers discussed the most recent substitutions.

JP Dellacamera (play-by-play): Both teams made what looks like defensive moves with their final substitutions. Aly, are we on a collision course to penalties or will one of the sides be able to sneak out a win in the final fifteen minutes?

Aly Wagner (analyst): Though it might look like both teams are bunkering in and looking to run out the clock, the entry of Scott and Dahlkemper actually will allow both teams to play more aggressively. Ashley Lawrence has the pace to challenge Crystal Dunn along the sideline, while Julie Johnston's move to the 6 and Dahlkemper's insertion means the US will be trying to pull this game out by way of a set piece.

Dani: Is she right about that, Marc?

Marc: Maybe. Abby is probably the best corner-kick taker in the NWSL and JJ's playing further up the field has made her extremely dangerous on any ball inside the box. On the other side, if Dunn gets toe-poked again like on the play that eventually led to Canada's equalizer, Lawrence can blitz past her down that side and would have acres of space before she'd run into Johnston or Sauerbrunn. We. shall. see.

The final fifteen minutes started off with both teams eager to get the game winner, but after goal attempts by Press and Beckie, the pace dropped off as the players tried to save as much of their legs as possible as a shootout was looking more and more inevitable. Borjas blew the whistle right on 120 minutes, which signaled that today's quarterfinal would be decided from the penalty spot.

As Herdman and Harvey decided on their shooters and lineup, Sinclair and Sauerbrunn met with Borjas for the coin toss that would determine who would shoot first and at which goal the kicks would be taken. Canada won the toss and Sinclair elected to shoot first, with the American captain choosing the west goal for the shootout. Matheson stepped up to the spot with the ball and placed it down. Naeher bounced back and forth, then settled in and planted her feet on the goal line. On the referee's whistle, Matheson stepped forward and sent the ball to her right, just past Naeher's left hand. Alex Morgan was the first shooter for the US and scored on her attempt, sending Labbe the wrong way. The Canadian's second shooter, Jessie Fleming, had her strike pawed away by the American netminder. The next four players made their shots, but Megan Rapinoe sent her attempt wide of the left post. Christine Sinclair and Julie Johnston, each team's fifth shooter, scored, sending the shootout to sudden death. Desiree Scott walked to the spot as Canada's sixth shooter and placed a hard shot deep inside the left side netting. As Lindsey Horan made her way to the penalty area, Marc quizzed everyone watching the match.

Marc: In this situation, where two club teammates face each other in a shootout, who has the advantage?
Lexi: Wouldn't it be the shooter given that goalkeepers usually have a preferred side to which they dive?

Lauren: I think it's the shooter because he or she has control over where the ball will go. The keeper can only react or try to outguess, and even though they will have faced each other in practice numerous times, the shooter has the upper hand in the end when it's for real.

Dani: Gotta be the shooter, if only because the keeper is frozen to the line.

Marc: Surprisingly, it's the keeper for the exact reason Lauren gave. Steph will have had Lindsey shoot on her dozens of times in training, so I'm sure she has a good read on what she will do. Lindsey is either going to try to be too perfect with her shot and have it hit the post or go wide, or she will play her normal shot but get it saved because Steph will cheat a little toward the side it is going.

Labbe walked back and forth between her posts, giving them the Gigi Buffon treatment (a peck on each for good luck), then took up her position on the line.

Marc: Lindsey won't be able to tell because it is so minute, but Steph's stance has her left foot about two or three inches outside the penalty spot's dimensions. If she shoots to Steph's left, there is no way she makes it since Steph should be able to beat the ball to where it is aimed.

Borjas blew her whistle and Horan took two steps toward the ball. Just as her left foot hit the ground, Labbe leapt to her left and was able to get all the way to the post by the time the ball arrived. The shot struck her left hand and deflected away from the goal, ending the shootout and sending Canada onto the Women's World Cup semifinals against the winner of the Brazil/Germany match later in the day.

**********

* Marc and Dani flew to Boston on June 30th for their five-day Independence Week vacation. On the 1st, they went touring some of the historic sites in the city (Old North Church, Bunker Hill, Faneuil Hall) as well as having lunch at Quincy Market. The 3rd was the Women's World Cup semifinal between Canada and Germany, which they watched at the Phoenix Landing (Germany won, 1-0, on a shot which deflected off Kadeisha Buchanan's calf and was re-directed past Steph Labbe) prior to attending the Philadelphia Hearts/Boston Breakers game that evening at Jordan Field (the Hearts picked up their third straight win, 2-0). Independence Day was a gala on the Charles River Esplanade, where patrons flocked to get prime seats when the gates opened at 9am. The pair, curled up on a blanket, enjoyed the concert featuring the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra with special guests James Taylor, Tedeschi Trucks Band, and Connie Britton. After a final night at the Courtyard Boston Copley Square, they walked around the Back Bay neighborhood before heading to Logan International Airport for their return flight to Milwaukee.

* Matt and Laurie came to Milwaukee two days later for the start of his Summer Orientation session at Trinity. Despite warnings from Marc about playing on his connection to him, Matt made mention in a number of his sessions about the chaplain being his uncle. When told of this by one of his incoming peer ministers, Marc read his nephew a short version of the riot act and told him that he would be passing word along to his cousins-in-spirit so they might take him to the wood shed when all three of them were on campus come August.

Chapter End Notes
The second installment of this series is complete. Coming up in Love Out Loud 3:

* A few goats from Love Out Loud and Love Out Loud 2 become heroes.

* A major scandal threatens to tear the campus apart and is costly to a number of people.

* Trouble finds several characters. Some learn their lesson, while others don't.

* The ELCA makes a major decision regarding education at Churchwide Assembly, which creates a domino effect at Trinity and throughout the synod.

* Ships, ships, and more ships.

* And more!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!