

**A****L****U****M****N****I****January 2023****Kara Diemer-Graham, Class of 2017**

Last month, we had the chance to visit with Kara Diemer-Graham. She is a 2017 graduate of UI where she earned her teaching degree. Kara is currently teaching English to students in grades K-6 at Hills Elementary in the Iowa City School District. Her focus is students that are learning English as a second language. Although this is her first year at Hills Elementary, she has worked in the Iowa City School District for 5 years.

Kara says that it was always her dream to be Hawkeye however, she had a horrible time transitioning to university life and spent most of her non classroom time in her dorm room with no friends. “My mom came to UI around spring break time, and we came to Mass at the Newman Center. They were presenting about the upcoming Antioch Retreat 2013 and my mom signed me up against my will,” she laughs, “I was not one to step out of my box and I didn’t know anyone at the center. At that time, I had almost given up on UI as the place for me to be and had even stopped going to Mass.”

Her retreat experience changed her perspective and her college experience. Kara talked about the small groups at the retreat and how she found out that everyone was struggling in some way, and no one was judgmental about her struggling with the transition to college. She said she remembers thinking that it was great to have an opportunity to open up to peers going through the same thing. This small group became her core group of friends, and she started spending more time at the Newman Center.

Thursday Night Mass (TNM) became the favorite part of Kara’s week, and she loved how Fr. Jeff used their life experiences to connect with the Gospel. She found his homilies so relevant to her life experiences. This is where her new small group of friends really became a community based on their shared faith.

Kara said that what she learned at the Newman Center has greatly impacted her marriage. (She was married last summer!) Her experience here made her more confident in sharing her faith and her relationship with God and taught her that it is okay to lean on other people. She also talked about the close friends that she has because of her Newman Center experience. One of her Newman friends was even in her wedding!

Kara hopes to transition from teaching to youth ministry soon. Her advice to current students and alumni is to approach new places and experiences by getting involved, reaching out, and working to intentionally connect with others.

Thank you for sharing, Kara!

