

A L U M N I

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Alumni Corner— Lucero Manzanares, Class of '21



Lucero Manzanares is a 2021 Newman Center at the University of Iowa alum. She is currently a second year FOCUS missionary at Temple University in Philadelphia, PA. She says, “Although, the East and Midwest are very different, there is so much that I was able to bring with me to the East. One the main aspects that I brought with me was the desire to build a community like the one I had at Iowa at Temple. The community I had was constantly building me up, specially at times that I didn’t notice. It was where my relationship with the Lord blossomed, where I found some life-long friends, and a family where I never thought I would. I desire for the Newman Center at Temple to be like that and more, and what a gift it is to have come from a place that showed me how to build it.”

Lucero tells us that when she came to college, she desired to be in a community, but didn’t really care which one and always felt as if she was jumping from friend group to friend group. Throughout it all, the Newman Center community was always there, constant and ready to welcome her back with open arms as if she had never left. The friends that she made at Newman are now the people in her life that lift her up, remind her of her identity as a daughter and constantly push her to be better in all aspects of life.

“My Newman Center experience is impacting my life now because I desire others, specifically college students, to have a community like the one that I had. To have a community that is striving for the same thing, that truly desire the best for you, and

have found what fills that ache (a relationship with God), a community like that is what we were made for. As a missionary now, my team and I are constantly striving to make our Newman Center that, a haven for students amid the chaos that is college.

One of Lucero’s favorite Newman Center memories is Day of the Dead November 2020! She was the Prayer and Worship Fellow that year and had the opportunity to create a Día de Los Muertos altar. The altar was displayed in the gathering space where everyone could see and even had a poster board explaining what the altar was, why it is a tradition and what each aspect represented. Her favorite part about being able to do this was people from the community were able to send pictures of members of their family that had passed away so that they could be remembered. It was so beautiful to share part of her culture but to also have it be received so beautifully.

When asked if she had any “holy moments” during her time at Newman, Lucero says, “Yes! I had my interview for FOCUS the same weekend as our Spring retreat. The theme of the retreat was: Surrender. That whole weekend, the Lord was constantly reminding me that I could surrender to Him, to His will. Along with His presence, I also was surrounded by all my friends who were praying for me during their retreat. It was such a joyful and blessed weekend that I hold very dear in my heart.”

We always like to ask alumni if anyone specific impacted their faith formation while at the Newman Center. Lucero tells us her senior year one of the groups that formed her the most were her fellows; Kelsie, Nicole, Brynn, Cade, Zaq, Nicole and Liv. She says, “We truly worked like a well-oiled machine, all striving to give more of ourselves to the students. Megan, a freshman and I a senior, yet her friendship allowed me to learn how to be vulnerable and how my story can relate to others as well. Liv, Julia, and Cam, those women have such a special place in my heart especially now that we are all serving as missionaries together. Aurelia, no words can ever express my gratitude for everything she did to form me, and I couldn’t have asked for a more amazing missionary to walk with me. The staff at the NC! Christine, Ronda, April, Mike, they are such a family and I loved having them there and how their witness showed me Christ in many ways. Of course, Father Jeff, he is such a dad. I don’t know if I can describe it but if you know Father Jeff you understand. He does a beautiful job of relating to students and making sure they feel seen, known and loved, even if he can’t always remember their names.” (Did she describe Fr. Jeff perfectly or what?!)

Thank you, Lucero, for sharing your memories and great love for the Newman Center!