

# Athletes in Action

Colby and Sarah Keefer 4695 Sycamore Dr. Ypsilanti, MI 48197

937.902.1767 colby.keefe@athletesinaction.org

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937.681.6533 sarah.keefe@athletesinaction.org

“Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.” 1 Thessalonians 4:13

To say this has been a difficult month might be an understatement. On January 11th our dear friend and co-worker passed away after cancer wreaked havoc on her physical body. Some of you who have been with us since our days at the University of Dayton may remember Elizabeth as she labored alongside us there. Over the years she and her husband Steve (who is the national campus director for all of Athletes in Action) have grown to become some of our most cherished friends. Elizabeth and I, along with two of our other close girlfriends have taken weekend trips to be together over the years, not letting the miles between us separate our deep friendship. Our kids and husbands are also all good friends, and this past week those same friends mourned alongside us at Elizabeth’s Celebration of Life service back in Dayton. Many tears were shed as we remembered our dear friend and our hearts ached at the thought of her husband and three children picking up the pieces of life without her. The one thing I keep wondering through Elizabeth’s cancer journey and now death is how people possibly do this without Christ. Without Him everything is so final. Without Him the fear of death overwhelms. Without Him there is no room for hope. I have clung to Jesus in new ways throughout the past few months as we have watched Elizabeth’s body become weaker and weaker. And there was an odd excitement I had near the end for her as I imagined what it would be like as she met Jesus face to face. The book of Hebrews talks about how Jesus is able to free those held in slavery by their fear of death, and it was an incredible privilege to walk alongside Elizabeth this past year and watch God do just that for her. She stepped into eternity trusting and believing in the One who said He had gone ahead of her to prepare a place for her and all who trust in Him. And now she is experiencing wholeness and joy in His presence. I am motivated all the more to live my life on mission for this great God, who provides hope in this broken world and purpose for living out our days in it. Please pray along with us for Elizabeth’s family as they move into this new season of life.



Colby, Matt, Ed, Steve  
Sarah, Sally, Amy, Elizabeth



This picture was taken this past Labor Day weekend as this incredible friend group that God has provided for us traveled to be together for some fun with our kids for a night. The reality of this group of people not being able to gather again is absolutely heart-wrenching.

## The Importance of Community

Recently Lauren, one of our student leaders on the gymnastics team, was asked to write an article for a Christian athlete website. We thought you might be encouraged to hear snippets about what she had to say about the lessons she has learned in understanding the role of Christian community. It is truly a blessing to come alongside Lauren and others during their time at Michigan!

*"If seventeen years of gymnastics has taught me anything, it's that this community is my mission field. In high school, I came to the realization that the Lord has blessed me with my ability to do this sport to reach others for Christ, not only to win competitions or earn accolades.*

*Coming into the University of Michigan, I was intimidated. Mostly, I was nervous about how others would perceive me. I didn't know how to navigate discipleship in the midst of my transition from respected high school senior to inferior college freshman. Or, at least that's what it felt like. So, my solution was to avoid it.*

*I spent my entire freshman year pursuing my personal relationship with Christ, while hiding from everyone else. For some reason, it was ingrained in my head that a freshman could not lead or take initiative, and therefore, I didn't even try. Instead of taking action toward discipling teammates and friends, or seeking the Godly community I knew I needed, I stuck with what felt comfortable, which meant not letting anyone in. It left me feeling so incredibly lonely and empty. That was, until last summer.*

*For three weeks, I had the opportunity to work with hundreds of college students at Kanakuk Kamps, a Christian sports summer camp. There, I experienced a very solid Christian community. I remember desperately asking the Lord why I wasn't able to find that at Michigan, which caused me to contemplate whether I was even strong enough to stay at the school. I didn't realize it, but in reality, I was disregarding the fact that it was really me who wasn't allowing myself to find that community.*

*After seeking the Lord, I realized that He was calling me to stay at Michigan. So, that's what I did. And before long, He began answering my prayers by placing community in my life. In the past year I have found a church home, started leading an Athletes in Action discipleship group and gained the confidence necessary to have a voice on my team. Now, like in high school, I have been able to read Scripture and pray with teammates. We've also taken the time to brainstorm how we can be a light for the Lord in our sport. It's been the biggest answer to prayer..."*



**To the left:** Lauren with our three youngest kids at her recent gymnastics meet

**Above:** An unexpected blessing that came from being at Elizabeth's funeral was that we were able to visit with some former UD students...some we had not seen in 10-15 years! To hear that they are still walking with the Lord brought joy to our hearts!

Please pray...

...for Elizabeth's family — Steve, Olivia, Turner and Quinn.

...for the students who attended the AIA Winter Retreat 1/25-27 (which will have happened by the time you get this letter!). Pray they would stand strong in the truths they heard over the weekend.

...for God to raise up students to go to Los Angeles with us over spring break to serve in the city.

...for our student leaders as they faithfully lead their discipleship groups and invite others in to join them.

...for us to cling to Jesus and hear from Him in our grief.

*As we walk this road of life and ministry, we are thankful that you are on this journey with us. May God bless you in the investment of your prayers and finances for His Kingdom!*