

# VALPO Lutheran Connection



Valparaiso University ... an independent Lutheran university that fosters a community of scholars, free inquiry and commitment to faith-based education.

## Connecting Faith to Life

Daily connecting of faith to life is the goal of followers of Jesus Christ. In doing so, Christians are trusting Jesus' promise to be with them, to give them hope and courage, and even words to say when left speechless.

Sometimes the connecting of faith to life happens in remarkable and memorable ways. More often, Christians have the opportunity to be like and live like Jesus in the everyday happenings of life. Whether the times are ordinary or extraordinary, the Christian still seeks to faithfully follow Jesus in a life of service and cross-bearing.

Recently, I was asked by a colleague, "What inspires you these days?" My response was simply, "I am inspired when I witness a follower of Jesus who expresses words of appreciation to others, willingly engages in sacrificial actions to another, and offers to others something of excellence." For me, these actions can be tangible ways that faith gets connected to, and expressed in, life.

Is connecting faith to life any different, say, for a student in an academic environment like Valparaiso University? Not really. While the situations and stories may be different, the connecting is still centered on using one's time, talent and treasure in the Name of Jesus and on behalf of others.

On the pages to follow, you will read of four Valpo students who, in pursuit of their faith and vocational goals, are connecting faith to life in some impressive ways. Each, in a different way, has been shaped by the "Valpo experience" during their time on campus. As expected, their lives reflect the behaviors of their Savior. For instance, they ...

- See their actions as reflecting a connection of their faith to life.
- Connect faith to life by addressing a situation of basic human need.
- Seek to reflect the life of Jesus in their dealings with those they are serving.
- Overcome obstacles in their pursuit of being faithful to Jesus Christ.
- Invest their whole heart and mind when connecting their faith to a life situation.
- Apply their classroom skills and knowledge in ministering to others.
- Impact their fellow students by their faith and actions.



Daily worship in the Chapel of the Resurrection fuels students' capacity and desire to connect faith to life.

I hope that the reading of these four students' stories will, in some measure, edify your life. What's more, I trust that it will provide you with another glimpse of the many remarkable students who are using VU as both a training ground and a launching pad for their own adventures in connecting faith in Jesus to their daily life.



Photo Provided

# Without Faith,

## Life is Just a Continuous String of Questions With No Real Answers

Kara Felde is a junior nursing student at VU who hails from **St. Paul Lutheran Church in Olean, Ind.** Periodic challenges with her own health, combined with what she's seen in nursing settings in recent years, have taught her that without faith in Christ, life can be pretty lonely, uncertain and discouraging. Even more, for some who face challenging health issues without faith, life is just a continuous string of questions with no real answers.

This conclusion was amplified last summer when she served on the nursing staff of Camp Riley in Martinsville, Ind., a facility specially designed for children with physical disabilities such as cerebral palsy and spina bifida.

While very excited by the prospect of working with children with special needs, Felde initially was jolted by the secular environment of the camp. In her words, "At first I questioned whether or not I could find a way to fit in. Because it was not a Christian community, I found it a challenge to know how we could support each other. I am used to living in a community that is centered around the cross."

Still, there were lots of children to get to know and numerous nursing skills to learn and perform. Quickly the children of the camp won her heart as she interacted with them while "doing her rounds." No question, Felde was in a real-life situation. As she admits, "I was

**"He [Professor Gilbert Meilaender] did a wonderful job of encouraging me to dig deeper into my faith. ... Thus, I was able to look at the limitations and complexities of the campers' lives and still see God's hand in their lives."**

—Kara Felde

saddened by the campers' life situations and their suffering, I began to question why they had to be that way. It was my faith that enabled me to look past their seemingly limited life situation to God's unconditional love for each of His children. This realization gave me a depth of compassion and purpose that only Christ can give."

One thing that was particularly helpful to Felde upon returning to Valparaiso University was a course she took on

bioethics with Professor Gilbert Meilaender. "He did a wonderful job of encouraging me to dig deeper into my faith with what I learned from his class and connect it to the experiences of the summer. Thus, I was able to look at the limitations and complexities of the campers' lives and still see God's hand in their lives."

Felde's Camp Riley work experience helped confirm her desire to be a pediatric nurse. Some day she may even pursue a Ph.D. so she can, as she says, "teach at a university where I can help students connect their faith with their lives and careers in nursing."

For now she knows that whether working with physically limited children and their families or interacting with co-workers, her faith provides a way to understand and deal with life's vagaries that is much more than a string of questions with no real answers.

Above: Kara Felde (left) with a Camp Riley participant and medical resident Dr. Shane Tsai.

# Engineering Project *Connects* Faith and Life

Since 1996 Rachel Husfeld has participated in 10 international projects. This spring she will undertake trip No. 11.

What drives this VU senior civil engineering student to undertake so many humanitarian endeavors that involve traveling so far from her home? The answer: Rachel's abiding desire is to live out her faith in Jesus Christ in ways that better the lives of others regardless of where they live.

Rachel's first eight trips involved traveling south to various locations in Mexico. She participated in five trips as a member of the youth group at **Memorial Lutheran Church in Katy, Texas**, and three trips while attending Valparaiso University. It was while participating in these short-term trips that she first discovered her twin loves: mission work and engineering.

These two passions also landed Rachel at Valparaiso University, some 1,200 miles from her home. In her words, "Valparaiso University provides not only a spiritually

nurturing environment but also a very accomplished College of Engineering."

Since attending VU, Rachel has helped found the VU Chapter of Engineers Without Borders – USA. As a member of EWB-VU, she has had the opportunity to travel to Kenya, Africa, to express her servant heart and engineering mind. In May of 2004, Rachel traveled with a group of 12 students and three advisers to lead a clean water initiative in Nakor, Turkana, Kenya. This three-year project involves working together with the Turkana people to make potable drinking water and water for irrigation available to the approximately 3,000 inhabitants of Nakor.

The May 2004 trip resulted in the installation of a windmill and irrigation system that supplies water from an aquifer to a half-acre garden. This system demonstrated to the Turkana people that even in the midst of drought, there is a sustainable manner in which to provide food for their families.

As president of EWB-VU in 2005, Rachel led the preparation for the second phase project implementation. In May of 2005, 14 students and four advisers worked with community members of Nakor to install three windmill bases and two windmills, drill one well, install drip irrigation systems for five one-half-acre gardens, and perform a health survey.

This May, one day after her graduation ceremony, Rachel will return to Nakor on the final phase project implementation. She will keep reinforcing the ongoing work of the local Christian missionary and the Turkana people. Together they will install more windmills and wells, expand the size and number of irrigated gardens, and provide the village with an illustrated instruction manual in the Turkana language.

Through her experiences traveling to Kenya, Rachel has discovered, again, what glorious things can happen when people of faith link hands to address life's fundamental challenges.



Rachel Husfeld and Turkana women work together to punch holes in drip irrigation lines.

Photo Provided

# ‘This is the Perfect Place for Me’

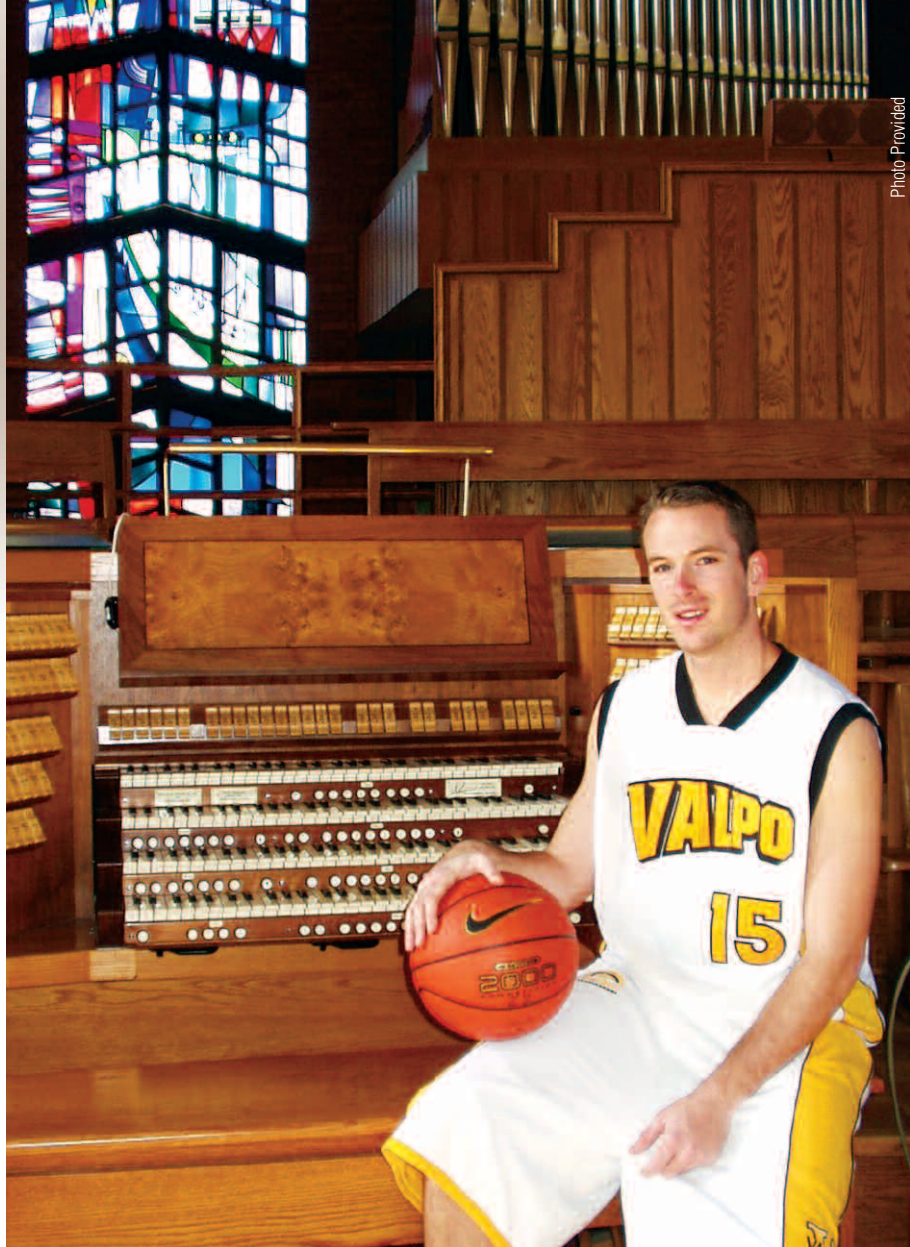
By Frederick Niedner, Director of the Center for Church Vocation and Chair of the VU Theology Department

How many church musicians today could truthfully tell of the time they played basketball in a nationally televised game at Cameron Indoor Arena, home court of the mighty Duke Blue Devils and their notoriously crazed fans? Valparaiso University senior Jim Hooper will some day regale his friends, and perhaps his grandchildren as well, with just such tales as he recalls his college days. First, however, Hooper has some accounting work to complete, and some checking up to do on a foundation he helped to establish.

No, Jim Hooper hasn't led three lives, but he has come a long way toward fulfilling three distinct dreams he brought with him to Valpo. One of them involved basketball. Though he had broken his brother's scoring records at Lutheran High School of San Diego, no Division I scholarship offers came his way. Still, hoops played a part in bringing him to Valpo. During sister Sandra's first year as a VU student, Bryce Drew and his teammates took the Crusaders to the NCAA's "sweet sixteen."

Hooper was hooked. He enrolled at Valparaiso and, at the beginning of his first year, applied to serve as a student manager for the Valparaiso men's basketball team. Coach Scott Drew took him on and, by the end of the year, Hooper's hard work as a practice player earned him an invitation to join the team as a "walk-on," a role he has enjoyed for the past three years. He's not the only one who relishes his frequent, late-game appearances. The VU student section erupts with raucous delight when Jim enters a Valpo home game, and Valpo's longtime radio play-by-play announcer Todd Ickow lets the regional and web-cast audience know, "It's Hooper time!"

Playing of another sort fills his time as well. Hooper also dreams of serving one day as a



While Jim Hooper normally plays for worship services in his dress clothes, this photo aptly depicts his multi-faceted life.

church musician, and so he has studied organ for four years with Professors John Bernthal and Lorraine Brugh of the VU Music Department. "We were pretty skeptical about someone trying to meet the demands of both the basketball and music programs, so we pushed Jim," recalls Brugh. "He showed us he could do both."

In the fall semester of this year, Hooper served as a musician and planning member on Chapel of the Resurrection's Morning Prayer staff. Along with all his other commitments, he made a valuable contribution to the daily worship life of the campus.

Hooper will likely remain a juggler of multiple commitments and time demands, as he also is on track to finish an accounting major in Valpo's College of Business Administration when he graduates in May. Indeed, he has already accepted a job offer from an Indianapolis accounting firm. "I knew I needed to be practical," Hooper explains. "I won't make a living playing basketball, and maybe not as a musician, either. This way I can serve the church as I'm able and still not starve."

The complexity of Jim Hooper's calling as teammate, musician, and businessman became clear behind the scenes of a very public story that gripped the Valparaiso community in the spring of 2005. Hooper's roommate and fellow basketball player, Kenny Harris, suffered a mysterious heart stoppage while working out at the Athletics-Recreation Center. Afterwards, Harris lay in a coma for several weeks.

Throughout that wrenching stretch as Harris hung somewhere between life and death, Hooper proved to be one of the basketball program's spiritual pillars. He arranged and played hymns for a campus and community prayer vigil held in the Chapel of the Resurrection and, along with teammates and Kenny Harris' family, he kept his own vigil of prayer, encouragement and trust.

Homer Drew's basketball program at Valparaiso University is known for its attention to the team's spiritual health as well as its physical conditioning. Daily prayers punctuate the practice routine, and road trips include team worship when travel schedules don't allow time for attending church services. Rarely have those disciplines proved so important as they did when the team had to cope with the devastating circumstances that had struck their friend and teammate Kenny Harris.

Jim Hooper, the accountant, also responded to this crisis. Along with brother David, an Indianapolis attorney and alumnus of the VU School of Law, Hooper developed a plan for establishing a foundation that would see to providing heart defibrillator machines in high school and college locker rooms and training facilities all over the United States. Such equipment had saved Kenny Harris' life, and Hooper determined that every young athlete should have the same potentially life-saving equipment available.

Harris emerged from his coma during the summer of 2005, and while he has not yet and, may never, return to Division I basketball competition, he stood on the floor of the Athletics-Recreation Center with Jim and Dave Hooper before a Nov. 28 game to celebrate the establishment of the Kenny Harris Foundation. You can find it on the Web at [kennyharrisfoundation.org](http://kennyharrisfoundation.org).

People at Valparaiso University use the word "vocation" constantly, and some might say, too much. Vocation is the perfect word for describing the intersection of the dreams that brought Hooper to Valpo and the ways he has been educated and formed here for a life of service in a complex and broken world. Or, as some put it more simply, he has learned at Valpo to practice the connection between faith and life.

In Coach Homer Drew's words, "Jim is a young man with a very quiet but firm faith in Jesus Christ. We've really admired Jim in our basketball program as his work ethic, his communication skills, and his ability to work with people have made him a wonderful addition to our team."

Picture Jim Hooper sitting in a meeting room of the Christopher Center, dressed in a basketball travel outfit only hours from departing for a road game, describing how grateful he is for the ways both his coaches and his organ teachers have shaped him for a future as an accountant with something more than accurate numbers to offer his community and world. "This is the perfect place for me," Hooper says matter-of-factly.

And he's been perfect for this place as well.



On Nov. 28, 2005, Kenny Harris speaks to the crowd attending a VU men's basketball game. Also addressing the crowd (center photo) is Kenny's coach Homer Drew; looking on in the third photo is Dave Hooper, Jim Hooper's brother, as they celebrate the launching of the Kenny Harris Foundation.

# Barriers of Connecting Faith to Life



Katherine Peters in Washington, D.C., at the Metro stop near her internship at Lutheran World Relief on Capitol Hill.

Katherine “Kat” Peters walks whereof she speaks. Her deep Christian commitments have led her to extensive involvements in bettering the lives of Latino people in barrios and on the tree-lined streets of Washington, D.C.

Whether organizing a vacation Bible school in a Hispanic neighborhood near her home congregation (**Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Sioux Falls, S.D.**), doing children’s ministry in a Hispanic mission (Gloria Dei Lutheran, Valparaiso, Ind.), or traveling to Central America on mission trips, Peters has practiced her international service and Spanish majors.

When it comes to connecting faith to life, Peters suggests the phrase “simply means living out, in actions—words and deeds—the convictions that proceed from faith. This includes involvement in one’s local community and community of faith, while striving to serve others with the love that emanates from a loving and faithful God.”

Peters also believes that the phrase has an easily overlooked dimension, a “backstreet,” if you will. “Not only does faith inform and transform and direct life, but life must inform and transform and direct faith. Faith cannot be deepened or strengthened without really taking a look at what happens in life. For faith to inform truly loving actions, faith must be informed by the reality that exists for people so that the service meets a need.”

This connectedness of faith and life became most real to her this past summer when she served as an “advocacy intern” for Lutheran World Relief. “Probably one of the most inspirational testaments to the connection between faith and life was all of the work that I saw being done by people of faith in Washington on behalf of the poor around the world. Individuals in various faith-based organizations were dedicating their lives to change situations of injustice and violence because they believed in a God that does not wish to see people hungry or killed. My faith had also led me there so that I could learn to work to change harmful policies.”



Photos: Provided

Katherine Peters (center) translates for children who participate in a vacation Bible school in urban Guatemala in March 2005.

She continues, “While I was there, I met seven Colombians who had traveled to the United States to speak with members of Congress and other U.S. governmental departments because their lives are being affected by U.S. policy toward Colombia. That was real life to me. Christians from Colombia who recognized that faith has something to say about the things they were experiencing on a daily basis—war and poverty, discrimination and violence.”

Traveling the “backstreet” of faith and life isn’t easy. As Peters explains, “When you’re working in hopes of changing a situation of civil war and violence, faith gets tested every day as there are more killings, or more weapons sent to Colombia, or another activist abducted, or livelihoods destroyed. It’s all so big that feeling overwhelmed and tiny in comparison to all of the problems is very easy. But faith is most alive when I could see communities of people actually making a difference, changing minds in Congress or coming to a new awareness themselves about what the world is like and how we can respond.”

Peters sums up her experiences this way: “Throughout traveling to Latin America, working with Latinos in the United States, or working with Lutheran World Relief, I think the most important thing that I’ve learned has been that faith is experienced in communities of people

who live together and support each other, always working to improve their lives or the lives of others, and hoping for a new time when wars and oppression will end.”

As a student, Peters appreciates the way Valpo has helped her maintain the faith and life connection. “VU has been a place for me to think critically about what my faith means to me, what faith means to communities, while always remaining a community that is safe for this kind of critical thinking. I have been asked to wrestle with my understandings of the Bible and theology in addition to wrestling with my understanding of the world and the way systems and institutions work. That’s a real shake-up of a process, but VU is an excellent place to struggle with this because there are others here who have undergone a similar struggle. They understand the importance of the questions as well as the importance of the answers to those questions and are good guides along the way,” Peters says.

Peters plans to join the Lutheran Volunteer Corps next year, an organization that she believes will keep her focused on connecting faith and life. She says, “Whatever I may be doing in five or 10 years, I hope that my job or career helps me to stay tuned to the “back street,” so that what I do on a daily basis can meet the real needs of those Christ called ‘the least of these,’ realizing that what I do to the least of these, I do to Him.”

# Five Ways You Can Promote Lutheran Higher Education

We have all read about, or experienced personally, the tremendous positives of Lutheran university education. Major pluses, like access to mentors, opportunities to explore one's faith, and small classes are part and parcel of the Lutheran approach to education.

Sometime this spring, why not have a Lutheran Higher Education Sunday? Or, if you would prefer, a Valpo Sunday! Here are five ways you could proceed:

1. Establish a resource area or center for Lutheran higher education materials.
2. Make a quick call to Valparaiso University's Office of Church Relations, 800-803-7184, ext. 24, and order Valpo Sunday bulletin inserts, children's activity sheets, posters and devotional resources.
3. Arrange to have some Lutheran university graduates organize and host a coffee hour or a brunch.
4. Invite several Lutheran university graduates to participate in the worship service and speak briefly of their school experience.
5. Offer prayers for the students from your congregation who attend Lutheran colleges and universities.

*For further information about a Lutheran Higher Education Sunday or a Valpo Sunday, call 800-803-7184, ext. 24.*

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