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B.A. Valparaiso, 2001

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I'll never forget that fall day in 1996, as I sat in the VUCA auditorium, listening to Dr.

Duvick explain the philosophy behind the IECA program during my very first visit to the Valpo Campus. I remember leaving that seminar knowing that this would be the program to which I would aspire, not to mention sign up for that junior year in Tübingen, Germany.

What a unique program; to be able to study a variety of disciplines, while focusing on a foreign language. The wide spectrum of courses offered within the IECA major, coupled with the learning of a foreign language truly gave me a basis on which to expand my mind and studies.

My year studying abroad through the Tübingen program was just the beginning of what would become for me a long adventure. As I returned to Valpo for my senior year, I knew that I wanted to get back to Germany as soon as possible. I applied for and received a Fulbright Scholarship to study Eastern Expansion of the European Union at the Universität Rostock with a professor who had a connection to Valpo. Subsequently I was afforded many other opportunities to continue to work and study in Germany. This included an internship at the *Deutscher Bundestag* (German Parliament), a Masters of European Studies from the Center for European Integration Studies at the Universität Bonn, an internship at the Human Rights Center at the Universität Potsdam, and work with a campus student ministry in Berlin. Each of these activities helped me grow in academic knowledge, but more importantly as a person.

In 2003, I finally returned back home to Chicago, but wouldn't stay there long. I moved to Washington, D.C. and found a job as a government contract worker at the Foreign Service Institute of the Department of State. I served in that position for two years and learned a lot about the work of that agency. I was able to utilize my foreign language skills and built great relationships with the teachers from all over the world. But it was at this time that I began to feel a different calling on my life. I had been serving with National Community Church in DC as a volunteer worker, assisting the homeless community in the city. In addition to that I was leading several church small groups focused on international social justice issues. I decided to return to Germany one more time to pursue a new line of work. I traveled to Karlsruhe, Germany and participated in a Discipleship Training Program with an international Christian organization called Steiger.

Now, after all of those years, and all of that training and education, I am on staff full time at National Community Church. My position is a unique one. I am currently involved in mobilizing small groups of aspiring young professionals in the DC metro area, to serve both their communities and neighborhoods, but also the world through activism and awareness-raising in social justice issues and missions.

Higher education is a funny thing. Sometimes on the surface it doesn't always appear that you are utilizing your actual degree. Though, if you look a little deeper, it is the experiences that accompany one's studies that really make a person. The classes I took at Valpo were definitely a catalyst for thought and further knowledge; however, the opportunities that the school provided me to go abroad and seek out many of the other endeavors in my life were invaluable. For something that is more important than finding a good job, is finding purpose in your calling.