

## CONVOCATION ADDRESS: “A Legacy of Leadership and Service”

Fifty years ago. 1960. The first day of classes. Here. President O. P. Kretzmann stood where I stand. The Chapel was packed. It was probably hot.

I don't know what President Kretzmann said on Convocation Day in 1960. But I do know who heard it.

Sarah Parsons was here. Sarah came to Valpo wondering where her personal journey would take her. Today, she's an internationally recognized researcher leading the development of new breast cancer therapies. Perhaps she sat where Tiffany Harris is seated this afternoon. Tiffany, why don't you stand up so everyone can see where you are.

Kenneth Farr sat here 50 years ago. During a 30-year career with the United States Agency for International Development, Kenneth helped create new infrastructure for water, sanitation, roads and bridges in 65 countries. Perhaps he sat where Andrew Schrader is seated this afternoon. Andrew, please stand up so everyone can see where you are.

Sarah, Kenneth and their classmates from 1960 are part of a 152-year legacy of Valpo graduates making this world a better place by using their gifts as scientists, public servants, business leaders, scholars and artists.

What does this legacy mean for those of us gathered here today? What does this mean for Tiffany, a freshman biology major from Chicago who has worked tirelessly to make the dream of attending Valparaiso University possible. Or for Andrew, a freshman engineering major from Idaho following in the long tradition of his parents' and family's footsteps. Tiffany and Andrew, maybe a future president will stand up here and tell others about the important ways you will lead and serve after you graduate from Valparaiso University.

What does this legacy mean for each of us — students, faculty and staff alike — knowing that generation after generation of people of promise have gathered in this place, struggled mightily to grow in both knowledge and wisdom, committed to lead lives of unquestionable character, built relationships that sustained them for a lifetime, and graduated carrying within them a light, a most precious light, and a burning desire to lead and to serve.

For each new student who joins us today—freshman, transfer, graduate, or law—today you begin to answer these questions: Where will my journey take me? And what will be my legacy to Valparaiso University and to the world? Now, your personal journey at Valparaiso University begins.

As you prepare to chart your course, let me briefly share three stories about today's Valpo students. For May 2010 graduate Lindsey Gilman, Valpo was the perfect place to be challenged. That's Lindsey, up there on the wall. A three-sport student athlete, Lindsey participated in water-quality research with one of her chemistry professors as a freshman. She was one of 12 students in the country invited to attend the national Nuclear and Radiochemistry Undergraduate Summer School. And in a few days, she begins pursuing a PhD in nuclear engineering at MIT — the winner of a fellowship for young researchers demonstrating the promise to help solve the world's energy needs. Just as Lindsey did, each student here will interact with outstanding faculty and staff. You will work rigorously with other high achieving classmates. You will experience education of the highest quality both inside and outside the classroom. Students, how will you leverage the quality of your Valpo experience to achieve things that today you, like Lindsay Gillman, could not possibly imagine?

We value each student of the Valpo community as a unique individual with unique abilities and opportunities for personal and professional growth. Take Jeff Lange. There he is. Jeff, a senior, is now general manager of WVUR, Valpo's student radio station. Jeff came to Valpo with a love for working with media and technology. What he did not know was how those passions would coalesce.

After talking to Professor Kocher in Communications, Jeff tailored a program of study to match his passions. He stopped struggling with that nagging question, “What can I do to get a job?”, realizing that, for him, the real question was this: “What interests me that might lead to a job?” After that, he felt empowered and transformed. Opportunities emerged for Jeff to pursue his passion and to lead others. Students, how will your unique interests and God-given abilities come together to reveal a career path well aligned with both your sense of purpose and your passions?

Three years ago, senior education major Chelsey Dunleavy helped launch Valpo’s chapter of College Mentors for Kids. Chelsey, why don’t you stand up so folks can see where you are. Chelsea and a handful of classmates began mentoring at-risk youth every week. Now, more than 40 Valpo students meet regularly with local elementary school children, encouraging them to succeed in school. Through service, Chelsey applied her knowledge, built her self-confidence, and developed a deeper appreciation for diversity and community service. And Chelsey was recognized this summer as College Mentors’ national Chapter Leader of the Year. She exemplifies the poise, wisdom, and concern for others that set Valpo students apart. What will you do this year, like Chelsey, that will make a difference in the lives of others in this world?

Chelsey is not alone in her desire to help others. During the past academic year, over 1,400 Valpo students performed more than 67,000 hours of service. Yesterday, Washington Monthly announced that Valpo is ranked 11<sup>th</sup> in the nation and tops among the Great Lakes states for our commitment to service. Indeed, Valpo’s record of service is impressive.

Yet I believe that more is required. I know that our community yearns to make an even bigger impact through our service as students, faculty, and staff. How might we impact the world with 100,000 hours of service this year? Valpo, we have been blessed with so much talent and so many resources. The world needs the work of our hands and our minds. Share your gifts. Commit to lifting up the poor, the sick, the suffering, the lonely, the unloved. Together, let us commit to break that 100,000 mark by this time next year, Valpo.

Today, we participate in Convocation, a storied Valpo tradition. Today, we also begin crafting our Valpo legacy. Like, Sarah and Kenneth; like Lindsey, Jeff, and Chelsey; like Tiffany and Andrew. Will you be a thoughtful leader? Will you be a peacemaker, bridging that which divides people? Will you create meaningful change that helps others live abundant lives? Will you devote your life to pastoral care or service? The journey is yours. The answers are for you to discover. One thing I can promise you, students. The faculty and staff with you this day pledge to do our part so that you can make your personal journey, your Valpo journey, nothing less than transformational. For you. And for the good of the world.

--Mark A. Heckler  
President  
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