

**Update from Elyssa Salinas, Grace Church Vocations scholarship recipient. Student at Valparaiso University.
Summer 2011**

I am grateful to Grace Lutheran Church and School, because of the help that I have received not only monetarily, but also in my faith. As a child I would watch the pastors preach and I remember always wanting to be up in the pulpit and speak to the congregation. In middle school and high school I directed this passion to competitive public speaking and theatre. These areas gave me the ability to understand how to convey a message to an audience. This talent has become extremely useful in my college years as I participate in college theatre and also as a leader in my sorority. Yet through all these years God has tested me.

I knew from a young age that I wanted to pursue a career in public speaking, but I did not know how. It was evident that great public speakers did something with their life, like pursue some injustice and then speak to crowds about what action to take. Other speakers would use their own life to demonstrate adversity and then inspire masses to go beyond life circumstances and live a new life. I never thought my life was interesting enough to inspire anyone until now when I looked back on the past three years.

At the start of college I knew that I would be in for a rough time because of changes going on in my family and the deaths of two individuals I was close to. These events began to shape my college experience and also made me feel like I was being tested. Yet throughout this whole time God was with me. To cope with stress I decided to get more involved in theatre and Greek life. This allowed me to pursue my love for public speaking while also keeping my mind off my troubles.

I also decided to take an opportunity to take a weekend retreat offered through the chapel. At this retreat my pastor at the time began to speak to me about my call to ministry. As I spoke to her I realized that these hardships in my life could truly help me in my ministry later on. I hope to be a pastor someday and being able to connect to your congregation is important. Therefore the difficulty in my life could help me build a connection with someone else.

Along with my own life circumstances that could help me connect to a congregation, my education has been an incredible help in making me ready for seminary. My education has become a wonderful example of the liberal arts. In my major of theatre, my classes have prepared me for so much more than the onstage performance. It has also taught me the importance of having a crew backstage to help you and a co-performer who you can always trust. One of the first rules of the theatre is to remember that you will mess up in a performance because you are human. This mindset helps me connect with the idea that if I mess up the show will go on and also that there are people around me that will help. In my theology classes I have

learned about not only the text of the Old Testament, but also about the thoughts of great philosophers of the 18th and 19th centuries concerning Christianity. Yet I have not only learned about Christianity, but also about Islam and Hinduism. I have compared different aspects of both of these religions to Christianity and have found it fascinating. In each of my classes at Valparaiso University I have found something interesting and important, even if I didn't love the class itself. VU not only has given me incredible classes to immerse myself in, but the community has allowed me to embrace my calling.

I know that I feel a calling to become a pastor and teach the gospel and no one aspect of my life has made me understand that. It has been a process, a journey, so to speak, that has allowed me to see past the bumps in the road and understand that every bump is a story. These stories will allow me to speak to a congregation, study group or distressed member in a way that I would not have been able to before. God gives me only what I can handle and I feel blessed that God has given me more strength than I could ever imagine. My life is a journey and no matter the bumps, detours or difficulty I know the Jesus will walk beside me and guide me to my next step.

**Church Vocations Initiative
Scholarship Recipient Report
Summer 2011**

Amy Gillespie, a student at Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago and another of our recipients, sent this report, written on June 25.

Hello and happy summer to the grace-filled community of Grace Lutheran Church. As the birds sing outside my seminary apartment and the air conditioners start showing up in the neighbors' windows, I can see the signs of summer all around Hyde Park. Students are moving in and out of their apartments and moving trucks blocking half the streets are a regular occurrence. One class of seminarians at the Lutheran School of Theology has graduated and some are soon to be ordained while others wait for their call. Another class of middlers (second-year seminarians) are gearing themselves up for their year-long internships in parish settings this summer or fall. My junior class (first-year students) is mostly getting their feet wet in their CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) 40-hour-a-week field placements, myself included. One year of seminary education completed and many more coming soon.

I started my CPE internship as a chaplain in training with VITAS Innovative Hospice Care agency located on Damen and Roosevelt on June 6. After an extensive orientation and a whole day in which all of the CPE group members told their life stories, we have been shadowing various team members in the field. I have had the privilege to shadow the chaplain and social worker, and tomorrow I will go out with a registered nurse to work with patients and their families to provide comfortable end of life care. This has been an enlightening experience so far, and I am eagerly looking forward to the day (soon) when I will be given my own case load as a chaplain. One thing I really didn't realize before about working as a chaplain in hospice care is that the majority of one's time and energy is more focused on maintaining and encouraging healthy family dynamics in the dying patients' families. I had an image of older people being the only focus for my prayers and ministry, whereas the reality is that the family and friends are very involved emotionally and need almost more support than the patients. What a privilege to be allowed into such precious moments within a family's system, providing comfort for their spirits at a time of extreme distress. The work this hospice care team does helps me to truly see the hand of God and the Holy Spirit's presence in all that they do and say for the families and patients.

Besides CPE this summer for me, I am joyously preparing for my next year as a dual-degree student of ministry and social work in the School of Social Administration at the University of Chicago. I was accepted into the program late at the end of the second semester and God has opened up this exciting new path to me to enrich my ministry to those who need it the most. I will be on track for endorsement into the ELCA in the fall after I have completed a 3-month unit of CPE. I had a successful first year of seminary, and I have very high hopes for the SSA program as well. While at SSA I will be allowed to continue living in LSTC housing, and I have plans to move in with two LSTC students this summer.

I want to thank you all for your ever present love and support of my ministerial education. I am so very blessed to have you all in my life. I will continue to pray for the Grace Church congregation of friends, family, members, leaders, and teachers. You are a huge reason I am even considering a career in ministry, and I am so grateful for the lessons you have taught me along the way."

As they grow in years, you should place in their hands the Holy Scriptures and provide for their instruction in the christian faith, that, living in the covenant of their baptism and in communion with the church, they may lead godly lives until the day of Jesus Christ.

Lutheran Book of Worship, Rite of Holy Baptism

Grace Vocations Scholarship
Spring 2011 Semester Report
Rachel Foran

Today I took a rather large step in my faith journey: I boarded a plane to Bethlehem. For the next seven weeks I will be volunteering with Christmas Lutheran Church and the Bright Stars Program in Bethlehem, an organization and ministry that Grace supports and partners with. I will be working with their summer soccer camp for both Muslim and Christian Palestinian youth, as well as teaching English and helping the organization with whatever ministerial tasks needed. This trip will be unlike anything I have ever done before. I have never lived abroad for such an extended period, I have never been to the Middle East, I have never been so far away from friends and family, from home. Though all of this is both exciting and terrifying, what gives me peace is the knowledge that God has presented me with this opportunity to deepen my relationship with Him as well as to use my gifts to serve His will. I am completely putting my trust in Him and I pray for His guidance, His comfort, and His peace as I embark on what promises to be a life-changing experience.

My educational experience at Carleton College has prepared me to take this leap of faith today and has greatly enhanced my faith journey this past year. One of the most important contributions Carleton has made to my faith journey is providing me with a variety of mentors, both spiritual and academic, who have influenced my life in so many ways. I am lucky to be a part of a small department, as there are only **eight** religion majors at Carleton! Thus, many of my classes have only 8-15 people and I have been able to get to know my professors on a very personal level. One particular professor has encouraged and supported me throughout the second half of the past year in my field research with a nearby Somali Muslim community in preparation for my senior capstone project. She is not only an academic advisor but also a spiritual mentor; she is a practicing Jew and Hindu and she has been able to offer me a plethora of spiritual and practical advice for traveling to Israel. Her example, as a strong, smart, religious woman, feeds my faith and sets an example for the kind of person I want to be.

As a Chaplain's Associate I also have been lucky enough to have fostered a close relationship with my chaplain who is a constant source of spiritual and personal guidance. My chaplain makes issues of social justice a priority in her work, while also constantly striving to make Carleton's religious and spiritual community welcoming and accessible for all faiths and for all people. As a Carleton graduate and religion major herself, she sets a fantastic example for me of ways to combine my love for service, social justice, and community, all in the name of God's grace and glory. Through the Career Center at Carleton I have also been in contact with several other alumni, besides my chaplain, who have similar interests as myself, to understand what paths they took after Carleton to get where they are today. I have heard several fascinating stories, most filled with faith and a desire to serve others in their occupational capacity. Their stories and life experiences inspire me and provide possible options and resources for when I graduate next year.

Academic life at Carleton continues to influence my faith. In my classes I am consistently challenged to think critically and to be open minded about not only my own tradition but also the faiths and traditions of others and the field of religion in general. As I

mentioned earlier, I have been doing research with a Somali Muslim community and through this experience I am reminded of the value and necessity of learning from the stories and experiences of real people. Each conversation I have with these individuals is a testament to their strong and rich faith—it truly radiates off their bodies. Nowhere in a book could I experience and understand lived faith and religion like this. My fieldwork experience has inspired my own faith and has given me confidence and encouragement to share my beliefs with others and to proclaim my Christian Lutheran background proudly.

Thus, as I near the end of my plane ride to Bethlehem I know that in some respects my faith journey has only just begun, but I am thankful for the strong foundation it rests on, partly provided by my educational experience at Carleton College. I want to thank the Grace Vocations Committee for granting me this scholarship and for the support and care of the entire Grace community, it means so much.

**Church Vocations Initiative
Scholarship Report
Spring 2011**

**Caitlin Becker – Alverno College, Milwaukee, WI
Hopes to teach Science in a Christian high school**

I feel that I am growing in my faith in different ways, and being at Alverno really helps me in that. It is like a family, with teachers and students there willing to listen and to help you. In a group project, everyone works together to get the project done. People are willing to listen and accept other people's ideas. My religion class is really helping my faith grow. We are learning about different religions and that is making my faith even stronger. All of the religions proclaim that God is good, and that he has created everything. This makes my faith stronger because I can see that God is there is everything and that we are here on this planet to praise him. Having all of the people at Alverno willing to be there and to help me if I have any problems makes my faith even stronger, because I can see these people serving God, and doing his work.