

KUYPER

College News

A Publication for Alumni & Friends



James, Jaelah, Barbarita,
Jaedyn and Joshua Lee

OUR STORY

BARBARITA & JAMES LEE

FOLLOWING TALENT'S TRUE PURPOSE

James and Barbarita Lee are two Kuyper College graduates who know exactly what it means to use their God-given abilities for a higher purpose than their own elevation.

As missionaries in Queretaro, Mexico, each does work that is uncommon in the mission field but perfectly aligned with the gifts God has given them.

James works with a campus ministry called COMPA, short for Compañerismo Estudiantil or "student fellowship." COMPA partners with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship USA and Canada and the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students.

Barbarita works with the Queretaro Cancer Center, training nurses and doctors to form hospice care teams who attend to the terminally ill of central Mexico.

James and Barbarita saw their journeys to Kuyper, and eventually to their unique mission field, begin on opposite sides of the world. James was born in South Korea and moved with his family to Argentina, where he learned

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Together Doing Good Work

*Welcoming. Christ-centered. Relational.
Community. Supportive. Intentional.*

These were the most-suggested words shared in a Google survey this fall by our students, staff and faculty when asked to describe Kuyper's campus culture in one word. These words express the qualities we value and share as we purposefully learn, work and serve together. And I'm quite certain our alumni would affirm these words, too.

These words fit the living-sacrifice lifestyle that Paul calls us to in Romans 12. A lifestyle shaped by serving, encouraging, giving, leading, teaching and caring. A lifestyle committed to being transformed by God's grace and truth rather than being conformed to culture. A lifestyle where we recognize our gifts and strengths and work together as we love God and our neighbor and fulfill our mission.

In verses 4-8, the Apostle Paul represents the Christian community as a body made up of people with different gifts that are fit together to do good work.

At Kuyper, we celebrate the various gifts and skills of our faculty and staff as, together, we focus on providing a flourishing campus culture in which we equip students to live faithfully for Jesus Christ.

Anna, this issue's Student to Watch, shares how she's found "so much more than I expected" at Kuyper as she prepares to become a social worker in order to "empower children to do what they are capable of, even if no one's believed in them before."

We also celebrate our alumni who are using their gifts and abilities to serve God and others in more than 50 countries around the world.

In this issue, you'll hear from Barbarita Lee '00, who writes, "Since we moved to Queretaro, I feel like I've really been able to do what I'm gifted to do," and Justin Christensen '11 who shares, "Everything I learned at Kuyper is so relevant to what I'm doing in recruiting. I wouldn't trade my 14 years in ministry or my four years at Kuyper for anything."

As well, this issue highlights the new book written by Rev. Dr. Simon Thiongo '13, founder of Family Empowerment Ministries Kenya, an organization dedicated to empowering people to rise from poverty by creating communities of faith and sustainable income opportunities.

What a privilege it is to foster a Christ-centered community where our students and alumni can thrive and wholeheartedly serve God and others within the Church and the world!



"What a privilege it is to foster a Christ-centered community where our students and alumni can thrive and wholeheartedly serve God and others within the church and the world!"

As we've completed another year, I want to express my deep gratitude for your generous support through your gifts and prayers. And, in this new year, I urge you to continue to invest in the body of Christ represented at Kuyper College, for you are a part of this body.

Grateful to serve,

Dr. Patricia R. Harris
President

Kuyper News and Events



Refer a Student

Our referral program allows you to impact Kuyper's future community directly.

To refer a student, scan the QR Code.

For example, are you part of a church youth group with students who would thrive here? Will you be working at camp? Do you have younger siblings or other family members who would be a great fit here? If so, we would like to start a conversation with them!

Marriages

Jacob and **Krista (Vermeer) Sterling** (2015) were united in marriage on July 2, 2022.

Doug Nol (2010) and **Lexie Oosse** (2011) were united in marriage on November 12, 2022.

Kyle (2009) and Sharon (Brown) **Wellendorf** were united in marriage on November 25, 2022.

Births

Alex and **Aubrey (Boomsma) Smith** (2016) welcomed Owen Menzo James Smith on December 16, 2021.

Desmond and **Danielle (Johnson) VanderTill** (2013) welcomed Gianna VanderTill on May 29, 2022.

Ken (2007) and **Kristi (Lyman) Kruithoff** (2008) celebrated the adoption of Wilson Hezekiah Kruithoff on September 30, 2022.

The Church's Role in Poverty Eradication

Earlier this year, Rev. Dr. Simon Thiongo published a new book, *Hope for the Poor: The Role of the Church in Poverty Eradication*. A 2013 Kuyper graduate, Thiongo earned graduate degrees from the Earlham School of Religion and Asbury Theological Seminary before returning to his native Kenya. There, he founded Family Empowerment Ministries Kenya (FEMK), an organization dedicated to empowering people to rise from poverty by creating communities of faith and sustainable income opportunities.

The idea for the book began while Rev. Thiongo was still pursuing his Master of Divinity degree at Earlham. His internship there involved working with members of Indiana's farming community. During this process, he began to notice a disconnect between the ways Christians often view physical and spiritual matters. Seeing the farmers he worked with produce physical nourishment for their communities made him wonder if the Church could do better at this.

"Many of our churches focus on the heavenly things," he said, "but it's a misconception that God is only concerned with our spiritual needs."

Perhaps, he thought, meeting physical and spiritual needs could take place at the same time. With this idea in mind, FEMK was born. An important part of the ministry's mission has been the creation of an agricultural training and development program, where participants learn farming techniques while also hearing the Gospel.

The Noble Task of Caring for the Less Fortunate

As Rev. Thiongo explained: "We're waiting on the eternal Jesus Christ to come again, but we can't wait on empty stomachs."

The book emerged out of this important work. In writing it, Thiongo desired to spark a discussion in Christian spaces about meeting the physical needs of their fellow image-bearers in better ways. In the book, he discusses different aspects of a Christian perspective on poverty, such as provisions for the care of the poor in the Old Testament or the ways Jesus ministered to them. Helping to lift people out of poverty is not a periphery issue, Thiongo argues in the book. Rather, it is an essential part of the Christian life.

"I have seen people who were struggling become better Christians because they are now able to feed their families," he said.

A quote from the book highlights the importance of this work for the church:



Family Empowerment Ministries Kenya was begun by Kuyper graduate Simon Thiongo to empower people to rise from poverty.

The notion that the church is a place only for spiritual deepening and worship is erroneous and ignores Jesus' core message to minister holistically and liberate humankind. It was through the love of the world that Jesus was crucified. All of us who are true believers and Jesus' ambassadors should continue with the noble task of taking care of the less fortunate (Thiongo, 17).

This endeavor has not always been easy.

Thiongo has encountered pushback from many within his community who think he should focus his efforts on spiritual matters. He believes their disagreement is rooted in an insufficient theology of work which, according to him, they view as part of the curse resulting from the fall. This, however, does not deter him. He continues to lovingly engage his detractors to create change. He tells them: "I believe in a holistic ministry. We need to tell people about the coming of Jesus, but we must also feed them so they can have the nourishment necessary to hear our message."

Thiongo hopes the publication of his book will inspire leaders in the Church and ordinary Christians alike to work toward poverty eradication. He desires to see programs that empower and uplift those experiencing poverty implemented in schools, churches, and anywhere else they might be needed. He concluded his book by saying: "I am convinced that when people are ministered to holistically and guided to live empowered lives, they may be more inclined to follow the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and ultimately become ambassadors for the Kingdom of God" (Thiongo, 120).

Professional Development

Kaase Boer (2012) accepted the part-time position of 7th/8th grade ministry resident at Wellspring Community Church in Hudsonville, MI, in addition to his current position as the unit coordinator of the Adolescent Partial Program at Pine Rest.

Noah Matthyse (2018) is now the high school guide at Imago Dei Learning Community in Jenison, MI.

Kyle Wellendorf (2009) accepted a licensed mental health therapist position at Cummins Behavioral Health.

Josh Westhouse (2010) became the behavioral health chaplain at Holland Hospital.

Ingrid (Van Veen) Van Haitsma (2012) accepted a job as a SUD therapist for youth at Mental Health Partners in Longmont, CO.

Events

Kuyper College Spring Celebration Gala
April 17 | Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park

Commencement
April 28 | Kuyper College

Kuyper College International Golf Scramble
August 28 | The Ravines

We invite you to get involved and stay in touch by calling the Alumni Office at 877.229.0941 or sending us an email to alumni@kuyper.edu with your contact information or the most recent news about you.

Spanish when he was 9, before settling into Southern California as a teen. There his high school youth pastor, a graduate of Calvin Seminary, encouraged him to attend a Christian college in West Michigan.

“He saw that I had a passion for missions, so he suggested I apply to Kuyper, which was Reformed Bible College (RBC) back then,” he recalled. “I loved RBC’s strong focus on missions.”

Barbarita grew up in the southern United States and came to Christ at age 21. “Right away, I knew I wanted to be a missionary, but I’d been a Christian for all of two minutes,” she said, smiling.

Realizing she needed more education, Barbarita joined a training program in Yucatan, Mexico, through IDEA Ministries. There, she learned Spanish and developed a passion for the country. The president of IDEA at that time, the late Dr. Dick Van Halsema, happened to also be the former president of Kuyper College. “He suggested I come study at what was then RBC to get the training I needed,” she recalled.

James and Barbarita met at Kuyper in the late 1990s, where they connected through their shared passion for missionary work. Both would go on to earn bachelor’s degrees in missions, Barbarita in 2000 and James in 2002.

IDEA Ministries had continued to be an important part of Barbarita’s life, and she soon invited James to participate as well. This proved to be a formative experience for the couple.



COMPA students participating in a Bible study.

“IDEA Ministries really planted the seed of passion for missions within us,” added James.

During their time at Kuyper, James and Barbarita met a representative of Resonate Global Mission, the missionary arm of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

“We talked with him and expressed an interest in working with Spanish-speaking countries, and we maintained contact after graduation,” James said. Eventually, Resonate would be the organization that commissioned them into the field.

Never Losing Sight of the Goal

Before that could happen, however, both James and Barbarita decided to pursue graduate studies. She earned a nursing degree as he completed his undergraduate studies, then became the breadwinner as he worked on his Master of Missions degree at Calvin Theological Seminary.

“When he was in seminary, I worked two or three nursing jobs so that he could study,” she said.

James and Barbarita never lost sight of their goal of entering the mission field, however. “All along the plan was to be missionaries and to go to a Spanish-speaking country. The first opening with Resonate was in Tijuana, Mexico, reviving struggling churches and planting new ones,” said Barbarita.

Though they both felt God had gifted them in other areas, they wholeheartedly committed themselves to this work. “We stayed there for 10 years altogether, reviving two churches and planting one,” she added. By that time, they also had three young children: Joshua, Jaedyn and Jaelah, who are now 15, 11 and 10, respectively.

Though James and Barbarita were grateful for the opportunity to serve God in Tijuana, they wondered if they were meant to be elsewhere. “I think there were times in Tijuana where both of us were really struggling with wondering if it was where we were supposed to be,” recalled Barbarita.

Eventually, it became clear that God was, indeed, leading James and Barbarita away from Tijuana. “God connected us with COMPA, which is InterVarsity’s campus ministry in Mexico,” James recalled. “It really inspired me. I knew how much we need more Christian leaders—professionals with a biblical worldview—in Mexico, and I wanted to be a part of that.”

Professions and Passions Collide

They couldn’t wait to begin this new phase of their lives and ministry. James’ passion was working with young people and students. “The door had finally opened for him to do what he was really passionate about and really good at,” Barbarita said.

God also placed them in the perfect location. “The COMPA office is in Queretaro, which is in central Mexico. From here, James can work with students and universities all over the country,” she added. And, Barbarita said, God provided the opportunity for her to serve in the ways she is truly gifted.



“ James and Barbarita and their daughters, Jaedyn and Jaelah, celebrating a birthday.

“There hasn’t been a time yet where I haven’t felt God with me or where I wasn’t sure that this was what He wanted for me. I feel like I’m right in the middle of where God wants me to be.”

“Back when we were living in Tijuana, I worked in hospice care in nearby San Diego. I got a lot of training and figured out that it was the kind of nursing I was built and gifted for,” she said.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck Queretaro, it became apparent to her that she needed to use her knowledge and experience to help ease the suffering in her community. “Nearly every day somebody we knew was losing somebody. Since I had this training that I wasn’t using, I decided to reach out and see how I could help,” she added.

Beginning within her church family, she offered to help provide end-of-life care to families in need. “The COVID vaccine didn’t exist yet then, but I started helping anyone who was suffering from something besides COVID,” she said. Word of Barbarita’s gifts began to spread and eventually made its way to the Cancer Center.

“They invited me to help them organize and plan a hospice program for the state. From there, I got involved with a United States-based program called ELNEC, which stands for End-of-Life Nursing Education Consortium,” she said. Since then, she has been working closely with ELNEC to bring end-of-life care training programs into Mexican universities.

“I’m trying to reach the nursing and medical students who can then create teams to train families, so they can provide end-of-life care to their loved ones themselves,” she added.

‘Where God Wants Me to Be’

Things have not always been easy for the Lee family. In particular, legal and social factors often create barriers for James’ work.



COMPA students socializing on campus.

“Unlike InterVarsity or Campus Life in the United States, I cannot physically go onto the college campuses. They have strict rules surrounding the separation of church and state,” he said. Mexican universities do not permit religious organizations of any kind. James shared the story of one student who posted fliers for a Bible study she organized. “The Dean of Students called her and said that, if she continued, she could be expelled,” he said

COMPA meets an important need in this hostile environment. “We train the Christian students at those universities to essentially be missionaries on their own campuses,” James said. “Sometimes, they will let me go onto campus as a visitor, and I will meet with the students who then organize Bible studies and things like that, but it’s up to them to do it.”

Despite the adversity, James and his colleagues continue to find ways to spread the Gospel. Recently, James also took on an important new position with COMPA.

“My role is to walk alongside of the staff, encourage them, and help them raise funds. Currently, we are at 28 full-time staff, about five of whom are really struggling with fundraising,” he said.

His Kuyper education and seminary training have made him a perfect fit for this kind of work, he said. “Because I am an ordained minister, I can preach in churches. Afterwards, I often lead a talk about campus ministry and how to participate in support,” he said. This allows him to provide much-needed fund-raising assistance to his COMPA students.

James and Barbarita are grateful for God’s constant guiding hand in their lives, from South Korea to Argentina, the American South, Kuyper College, and, finally, to Mexico. Though they have followed an uncommon path, he and Barbarita know that God has brought them to exactly where He wants them to be. And knowing they are ministering in the unique ways God has gifted them gives James and Barbarita strength to face whatever challenges might come their way.

“Since we moved to Queretaro, I feel like I’ve really been able to do what I’m gifted to do,” said Barbarita. “There hasn’t been a time yet where I haven’t felt God with me or where I wasn’t sure that this was what He wanted for me. I feel like I’m right in the middle of where God wants me to be.”



A group of Empower U students on the Kuyper campus.

EQUIPPED TO SUCCEED

Kuyper Partners with Empower U

Empower U is a program of the Kent Intermediate School District that provides employment and independent living skills necessary for young adults with complex needs or disabilities. That mission is a great fit for the work we do at Kuyper College, and it's why Kuyper and the Kent ISD have forged a fruitful partnership that sees one of Empower U's three locations on the Kuyper campus.

Amanda Cavazos, the teacher in charge of the Kuyper location, is thrilled by the arrangement.

"This partnership allows the two organizations to be in community together and learn from each other," she said. "Kuyper has really been wonderful." Empower U participants can practice and learn skills at job sites and in their communities. "At the Kuyper classroom, we work on the skills to get students from school to adulthood," Cavazos said. Some of her students have jobs on the Kuyper campus, while others work in various locations throughout the community.

A typical week sees the Empower U students do life skills lessons in the morning and then spend about three hours on their job sites on Mondays through Thursdays. Fridays are fun days, including things like cooking lessons.

Working with Empower U puts Kuyper in the middle of a project designed to meet a very pressing need in the community. "Michigan is one of only two states that can educate special education students until the age of 26," Cavazos said. But, she added, even in Michigan, navigating the world of special education can be difficult and confusing for students and their families. Empower U offers much-needed guidance on getting a job, living independently and more, Cavazos said.

And the Kuyper community is grateful to be part of the process.

In My Words

TOGETHER TO SERVE

When I came to Kuyper in 2006, I was attracted by the idea of integrating my "worklife" into both the mission of Kuyper and its expanding vision, a vision that saw the College striving to broaden its reach to equip people for ministry and service.

In Romans 12:4-5 we read that "For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

These verses are found in a section under the heading of "Humble Service in the Body of Christ." These verses speak to me because they reinforce that we should take joy in the various talents and work of others as we joyfully (most of the

time!) serve alongside them in the various types of work to which our Lord has called each of us.



Ken Capisciolto

Vice President for
College Advancement

As one member of our Kuyper "body," I support the work of our faculty as they instruct and mentor our students and guide them along the paths our Lord has laid out for them.

Indeed, throughout my time at Kuyper, I have enjoyed playing my small part as collectively our faculty and staff pursue the College's mission while living out our common core values as a Christ-centered community of believers.

Those core values—the primacy of Scripture, the biblical worldview, the Reformed doctrine, our emphasis on academic excellence, the holistic development we seek for our students, the caring community, and more— still speak to me every day.

They center me and the work I do on behalf of the College and Kingdom, and I am grateful to be part of a community that is united in the best ways. It's a major reason why, after almost two decades on our campus, I still derive great pleasure and real joy from seeing how our students grow, develop and flourish during their time here.

In the past few years, we've transitioned to become a Christian Work College, and that is also exciting and energizing to me and my work. I think it's an edge for Kuyper that very few colleges can offer (in fact, we are one of 10 work colleges in the U.S. and the only one in Michigan).

It's also a good indication of the ways in which the College has remained constant in the things that matter, like our core values and beliefs, but also nimble and willing to adapt as students' needs change.

At the beginning of a new year, as I approach my 17-year anniversary at Kuyper College, I am hopeful for the future and excited to see what God has in store for us in 2023 and beyond.

"In My Words" is a feature of the Kuyper College News highlighting first-person stories by Kuyper College faculty and staff.

Athletics Update

The athletic program at Kuyper College is off and running, and we eagerly anticipate beginning competition in fall 2023. Coaches have been hired for men's basketball, including JV basketball, women's basketball, men's and women's cross country and women's volleyball, and those coaches are out on the recruiting trail looking to fill their squads. They also have been busy hiring staff to help lead their respective teams.

Here are a few of the current athletic department highlights:

- The resurfacing of the basketball and volleyball floor begins this month, and the new design for the floor is outstanding.
- The athletic offices are moving to their new location in the student center with updated decor.
- Athletic apparel will soon be available for purchase in the spirit store.
- Athletic signage for the campus has been designed and is awaiting installation.
- The athletics website is available and updated for all teams at www.kuypercougars.com.
- All athletic scheduling is underway, and schedules are filling up.
- New athletic equipment is being ordered for all teams, including uniforms and travel gear.
- Recruitment is in full swing with teams receiving commitments and many student athletes signing their letters of intent.
- Membership in the National Christian College Athletic Association has been approved and will begin in early spring 2023.



We are grateful to see student-athletes enrolling and eager to see them in competition and in the classroom. Go Cougars!



Get the latest news on the Kuyper College Cougars at www.kuypercougars.com



Justin Christensen
Class of 2011

Taking the Leap: Following God's New Direction

After graduating from Kuyper and spending 14 years working in youth ministry, Justin Christensen, class of 2011, sensed God was beginning to lead him elsewhere.

"I never thought I would not be in ministry, but God had some other plans for my life," he recalled. The transition was not easy. "When you place your identity in your calling, and that calling ends, it's hard," he said.

Leaning into his identity in Christ and listening for God's direction in his life helped him to begin to feel a sense of clarity. "I realized that I loved meeting with people, figuring out their talents and abilities, and plugging them into new opportunities," he said. "That's how I decided to become a recruiter." Through a friend, Justin found a job at Harrison Gray Search & Consulting, a Grand Rapids firm.

It felt right from the very beginning, and he has been able to forge

meaningful relationships with his clients and coworkers. "I've been able to have the kinds of deep spiritual conversations you can only have when you've earned someone's trust," he said.

Justin believes God is already using him to positively impact the lives of others. He shared the story of a young man who came to him with a two-year gap in his employment history.

"Normally, when you see gaps like that, it's a bad thing. Come to find out, it was because he'd been battling cancer," he recalled. Justin both helped the young man feel empowered and met his very real need for employment. "He went from battling cancer to landing his dream job. I was just glad I got to be a part of that," Justin said.

Justin knows his time at Kuyper gave him the knowledge and skills to thrive in this new career. "Everything I learned at Kuyper is so relevant to what I'm doing in recruiting. I'm building relationships, and I'm working hard," he said. "I wouldn't trade my 14 years in ministry or my four years at Kuyper as a student-athlete for anything. I know that both prepared me for this brand-new world."

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

STUDENTS TO WATCH

Anna Winkle

I have three younger sisters—Abby, Alea and Audrey—and my parents were good and intentional at incorporating the Gospel into our lives. They encouraged each of us to lean into learning more about the Kingdom through devotionals, Bible stories after meals and before bedtime, volunteering, sending us to Christian schools and more.

We also grew up with an active lifestyle: running around outside, playing at the beach and sports such as soccer, basketball, track and cross country. A curiosity for Christ and a love for sports were two of the main things that I carried with me. In high school, I participated in track, soccer, bowling, basketball and my favorite sport, cross country. During my junior year, I seriously began to take hold of my faith and began to pursue a deeper relationship with Christ.

Nearing the end of high school, I didn't feel like anything stood out as the right fit for me, so, in addition to looking into different colleges and universities, I began to look into gap year programs.

I found the Grand Rapids Bridge Year (GRBY), an eight-month-long program run by Bridge Street Ministries (BSM)—formerly known as Bridge Street House of Prayer. Beyond classes taught by local pastors and other experts on various Biblical topics, we worked with inner city middle school students, in the ministry's coffee shop and doing ministry abroad with BSM's international partners.

I learned much about my strengths and life mission and was affirmed in my desire to work with kids and to make people feel heard, loved and empowered. Bridge Street Ministries also got me interested in Kuyper. I was originally drawn to the business program, but also was

loving working with young students in summer school and thinking of going into education. After talking to my admissions counselor, and a few trusted friends, and praying about it, I recognized that God was calling me to Kuyper College and into Social Work. I knew this was the correct path for me, and I have not doubted it for a second since.

At Kuyper, I have found so much more than I expected. The number-one unexpected thing that I love about it here is the professors. I never expected my professors to genuinely care about me as a person even beyond the classroom. It's super encouraging to see how the professors and other staff and faculty members care about the student body as individuals beyond just what we can do for the college and what grades we get. I feel like the material I am learning in the classroom is preparing me well for what is to come on top of how to lovingly interact with others.

Although it is challenging to find ways to get all my work done well, I look back on most assignments and projects that I have completed glad that I learned the information and proud of the hard work I put into it. I never expected to find myself having fun doing some of my projects, especially writing a 26-page paper. My classes here are helping me become more confident in my abilities and in articulating what I believe in both simple and complex ways.



CLASS **2024**

HOME **Grand Rapids, Michigan**

MAJOR **Social Work**