

Chapter 14

Hope College & Western Seminary

With these two disappointing surprises - our second son's severe illness and the farm rental falling flat over night - God used to help crystallize our thinking about our purpose in life. And so, it was late fall of 1952 that I was led to have a talk with our minister in Chatham, the Rev. Herman Maassen, about the possibility and feasibility of preparing for the full time Gospel ministry. We still did not have a telephone but our neighbors were very willing to let us use theirs at any time. I made an appointment to see Rev. Maassen in the evening for "a very important and personal matter." When I told him what had been on my heart for some time now, he wasn't open for the thought at all. He mentioned various difficulties I would have to face. Of course, I knew there were big challenges to be encountered, but he placed them in a deeper and wider perspective. He also pointed out that I was needed so much in the Chatham church as well as helping out in other churches.

I should also mention that by this time, I had started holding church services at Leamington in the home of the Vanden Berg's. The group had grown so much that we had to move out of this farm home into a hall we had rented above a garage (gas station) in town.

I tried to see my purpose in life the way Rev. Maassen sought to explain and picture it. We talked some more about it. We prayed for clarity, wisdom, and direction. And thereupon, I left for home. On my way home, doubt, faith and confusion all played their part. When arriving home Corrie and I talked and prayed some more and we felt should let it rest from here on. And, I must say, we honestly tried. But peace about it did not come.

Two months later I was back in his office again with the same "problem". All I can say is that the Spirit of God brought me there. Actually, I had nothing new to bring up or discuss, but I just needed to again talk about it. Our minister had nothing new to say either. He again brought up the same problems, arguments, and objections. The whole evening was a repeat, including our prayers. On my way home, same thing again: faith fighting with doubt and obedience battling with confusion. And that evening, we found things more difficult to accept than before. Was there no way God could give us peace about the "problem"? Was there no way to drop the whole idea? Was there no possible way for God to help out?

I was having quite a bit of stomach troubles during these weeks. We figured it was because I had night shifts. We now know that it wasn't just because of night work. Within another month I was back in our minister's office again! I felt sorry for him. I felt ashamed of myself. But I just could not stay home any longer. Same thing again, except, I was more forceful and so was our elderly pastor. He was stressing again that I was 30 years old when, without warning, the pastor's wife

entered the office. Usually, she would bring us coffee, but this time, she just stayed. After a little while she said, "Herman, I think this has gone on long enough. I believe that God is behind this. We should do something about it. We should take John to Holland, Michigan, and talk with President Arend Lubbers of Hope College and Dr. John Mulder of Western Theological Seminary." I could not believe what I was hearing! We still thank God for Mrs. Maassen's spiritual sensitivity and intervention.

Within one week, the Maassens and myself were driving to Holland, Michigan. We first had an appointment with Dr. John R. Mulder. What a stately man this brother was. He could even talk a bit of old fashioned Dutch. I felt encouraged. This was going to be "Er op, of er onder" ("make or break," or more literally, "we'd come out on top or underneath"), I felt. He asked me all kinds of questions. The questions where I got bogged down were in the academic area. And, of course, I knew this would happen. But I also knew that the RCA Constitution had an Article that allowed for special cases. We had the same in Holland. It now came down to whether I was "special" enough to be considered here? What also entered in was the need in Canada to have sufficient ministers to go on with the growing task of providing services and ministry for all the incoming immigrants. The years 1952 and 1953 counted for the highest numbers of Dutch immigrants coming into Canada. Dr. Mulder's advice was disappointing. He sought to stress the blessings I would have as a leading elder and "preek lezer" (sermon reader).

From his office we crossed the street to the office of Dr. Lubbers. He was different. There was nothing stately about him. He was a very kind and reasonable man I concluded within myself. Again, all kinds of questions were directed at me. He listened attentively. And his further questioning was based on what I had sought to bring out. At last, he looked at Reverend Maassen, and said, "Herman, I believe we should help this man prove himself. I am prepared to enroll him as a 'Special Student' here at Hope College. It is obvious he does not have the academic qualifications that are needed, but God has used such men before. He may well be another. We will waive his tuition and provide a place for his family in the barracks." I do not know whether this was word for word what he spoke, but it is very close to the unbelievable good news I heard him speak. Before leaving his office, he stressed again that I would be coming on a trial basis, and within a year I had to prove to the academics - and to myself! - that I could handle the special courses I was to take. They had some more discussion as what these courses should be. Thereupon, I figured we would leave for our trip back home. I was so eager to share this best news of all with Corrie. However, our pastor and his wife by now had also caught the excitement. Thus, before driving home, they suggested that Dr. John Mulder should be informed of Dr. A. Lubbers' advice and decision. This was fine to me. It sounded like music to my ears!

You can imagine how Corrie was waiting at home for the results of our trip to Holland, Michigan. It was late at night when we arrived home. Her mind had been every hour of the day with us out there. She did her work at home, but was more in prayer than anything else. This decision was as

big for her as it was for me. Neither of us had gone beyond grade eight. We had taken a few courses to help us further prepare for making a living on a farm and Corrie in home economics, but otherwise, our "learning" had been mainly years of difficult experiences. Many times our faith had been tried, but as to academics and mingling among college people, both of us were, so to speak, out and out greenhorns. Now the decision had been made, though as it was stressed a few times, "you must prove yourself this year that you will be able to manage college". Corrie's concern was whether, without any education, she would be able to be a good pastor's wife. We looked upon it as a very normal and natural concern. I sought to assure her that God would take care and provide here as well.

It was early in the Spring of 1953 that we began to prepare ourselves all around for the move to Hope College. One thing that we had to fit into this preparation was Corrie's pregnancy with our third child. She was due to deliver our new baby on September 22nd. I was to leave for Hope College on the Labor Day weekend in early September. At least, this was the difficult decision we had to make. We did not want to change our good doctor for someone who would be strange to us. Also, we wanted our baby to be born on Canadian soil rather than on American soil.

We had been struggling with the decision as to whether the Lord had a different purpose for our lives than the original reason we had for emigrating to Canada, but we had kept this very much between us and the Lord. We only discussed it with our minister and his wife. And so, when we began sharing this news, first with our parents here, followed by Corrie's family and my family back home, there were all kinds of responses and reactions. Some were very surprised that at our age this was still possible. Others said that they were not surprised at all and that they had been expecting something like this. Still others said that we should have decided this much earlier. Someone in Holland said, "if John becomes a minister, I am not going to write him anymore. I don't know what to write to ministers." And, indeed, he kept his word. We never received a letter from him again. Also, we were told that someone had overheard a discussion at the bus stop in Schipluiden where a person said, "Jan is the lui om te werken, daarom gaat hij maar studeren." (John is too lazy to work, this is why he starts studying." When someone wrote this to us, we had a very good laugh about it. These are just a few samples of what we heard or picked up. In the main though, people were very supportive and encouraging. This was especially so with our parents, brothers and sisters, friends and church family in Chatham and elsewhere. We knew that our decision and move would be a drastic change of life style. And, of course, this "trial basis" was bit of a sword hanging over my head. Another thing we were also aware of was that sacrifices would be called for. And that this would involve both of us, and though they would not be aware of it, also our children.

Financially, we were just beginning to make some headway. We were beginning to be known among some people in our area. We had a growing family.

Many people asked us after we returned to Canada: "it must have been a real sacrifice to both of you." Corrie would not be able to buy another dress for five years. Financially we would be going down instead of up. In 1948 when we arrived here, we had no debt and now we did. The children always wore second hand clothes. We never had been able to buy them a new toy for their birthdays. Did we feel terrible about this? With integrity we could always reply that we really never looked upon it as a sacrifice. I recall that Murray and Cornie (his name had changed to Jack when we moved to Edmonton in 1961), together with their sister Anne, could not have played longer and better with brand new toys than they did with the blocks of wood I picked up at a small furniture factory near by.

Rev. Maassen wrote a number of letters to churches he served and others where he was well known, asking them for financial support for our family. The response was beyond his expectation. Some churches supported us for all five years. The money was sent to what was called at that time "The Board of North American Missions". Dr. Richard Vanden Berg, the executive secretary, would send us each month a check of \$100.00 while our study lasted. With the exception of the three summer months when we would serve one of our Canadian congregations, the money was there.

Telling my boss, Roy Warwick, that I would terminate my employment with him by the end of August wasn't the easiest thing to do. I was hoping that he would not ask me any questions as to why I did this. But he did. I have never seen a more dumbfounded look than that day in his office. It was beyond his grasp of understanding that a person of my age with several children would do this. I know there was a lot of gossip and ridicule among the workmen at Broadwood, McQuigan, Thomson, and Warwick. I must say though, that Leonard Giffen surprised us in that he had informed the Blenheim paper that his former hired man, John Moerman, was going to the USA to study to be a minister.

The time now had come for my parents to leave again. It had been a strange year for them as far as we were concerned. They had originally planned to stay only half a year, but when we asked them whether they would like to prolong their stay, they indicated that if this would be possible, they would do it. We had no problem to do so. The summer months were hard on mother. She just could not cope with the heat and high humidity of Ontario. For days on end she would walk around with a bath towel, wiping off her forehead. We were concerned about her weight loss. We hoped it was because of the heat. She also was too quiet, we felt. But then, we figured that everything was just too much for her to work through. She had never been a person who could share the deep things of her heart. She had only one sister with whom she would do so - Tante Jaantje of Maasland. They were more than just sisters, they were the closest of friends. Now however we know that stomach cancer had begun to rear its ugly head. The going away was very hard on her. She must have intuitively known that she would not see any of us on this earth again. All of this made it harder on us as well. I don't think that mother was able to really let go of

Andrew and his wife and children. In fact, most of my sisters and my brother felt that was true as well.

The Chatham church gave them a warm and official farewell. This was something they were not used to in Holland. There, nothing is to "interfere" with the stately style and order of worship. "The Lord is in His Holy Temple, let all the earth keep silent before Him" is in effect from the Invocation to the Benediction. But just the same, it did father and mother good. It was very moving to them.

Then came the time for me to leave and say "good-bye" to the Chatham church family and the Leamington congregation. Now it was our turn for a warm and official farewell. Corrie and her September 22nd date had not materialized. But she was included in the farewell as if she would be leaving with me the same time. The expressions of gratefulness toward us made our leaving actually easier. We felt that our roots had grown strong and deep within these few years.

The farewell at home was much harder. Now Corrie was to be all by herself with the delivery. We had so much hoped and prayed that the baby would be born prior to my leaving for college but this was not to be. I still look back on that personal good bye with mixed emotions. We both tried to be brave for one another, for the children and for the little one making Corrie (and all of us) wait and wait and wait some more. We always had sensed deeply that the way mother felt emotionally is what the baby felt too. We expected that within a day or so after my leaving Charing Cross, Corrie would be calling the college with a message for me that she had left for the hospital.

I moved to Holland, Michigan and tried to make myself at home in the barracks that would be our home. But no call came, not even after one week. I immediately made arrangements to have my own telephone hooked up. As soon as this was done, I called her and passed on our new number. By this time, the Veenman family had moved in with her. They had been our friends as long as they were in Canada. We had sold our house to them which made us all very happy. This was a great relief to Corrie as well as to me to have these friends there with her. Every few days I would give her a ring and every day there was the same disappointment.

In the meantime, I had to get going with the registration and all the other things connected with attending classes. I will never forget the uneasiness with the totally unfamiliar things that I had to do. I knew absolutely nothing about "registration". My English was far from what it was for the others. I felt so inferior. It was totally different from my "standing" in the Chatham church! Here I was just a number, and a dumb number at that! I still thank the Lord for Dutch speaking students who explained things to me and sought to help me, such as Cornie Rottenberg, Helen Brugman, Professor Ponstein, my English professor Dr. De Graaf, my Philosophy professor Dr. Dykstra, and my German Political Science professor Dr. Friedman.

The barracks were used to house soldiers during the war and Hope College had taken them over from the Government. Most of the students living there were seminary students who rented them from Hope College. And since I was about 10 to 12 years older than the other college students, our children mingled only with seminary student children. Of course, they did not know any difference, nor did it make any difference, but this way we did not come to socially mingle with any of the married college student families.

The pressure was on immediately to study and try to understand what had to be done. There was one table in the house when I came - no chairs, no bed and few kitchen utensils. There was carpet, though. And this carpet functioned as my mattress for a number of weeks. There were no pots or pans and neither did I have time to cook anything. I just bought lettuce, carrots, bread, jam, peanut butter, milk, and potatoes. Corrie had given me instructions how to cook potatoes, some vegetables and how to make soup. When we talked on the phone, she would ask me what I had bought at the grocery store. She made sure I had potatoes in the house. I never told her though that I had no time to cook. I just ate bread, carrots, and lettuce for the time being. Helen Brugman was also an older student and she would bring her Jewish girlfriend along and a few times they cooked a meal for me.

In the meantime, Corrie was not doing any better than I was. For me it did not matter, but for her and our baby it did. I hardly dared to call her anymore for fear of more disappointment to both of us. At last I received a call from her. I firmly believed it was Corrie telling me either that she was on her way to the hospital or better, that the baby had been born. Wrong. She was in the hospital all right, in fact for three days already, but this baby inside of her for some reason or other refused to make a beginning of entering the world. Even the doctor had come to the end of his wits. He had given her injections to force the labor to start, but nothing helped. At last he said, "I know only one more thing: "Call your husband to come to be with you; this might well be the answer." Needless to say I could not miss the time studying, but I must also say that I could not care less about the time to be made up later on. Immediately I went to the Greyhound Bus Station and bought a ticket. After a few hours of waiting, I was on my way to my dear wife and this baby that was supposed to be here for a while already. I arrived at 8:00 a.m. in the hospital. I still see Corrie walking in the hall as we met. All morning we walked together in the hall. Then we ate some and walked some more. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon the labor pains started and by 6 o'clock our little Ann Margory was born. Hallelujah! What joy! A healthy girl! "Thank You, Lord God, Almighty."

No one better raise the question as to whether Corrie and I belong together. The familiar words: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let no man separate", reached even further and deeper than we had thought! College had brought

about a temporary separation, but according to Corrie and the baby's feelings, this should not have taken place!

The baby was born on Friday and on Sunday I boarded the bus back "home" in the USA. The only thing I lost was two classes on Friday afternoon and one weekend of study. My happiness and gratitude made even studying on the bus next to impossible. On Monday morning I was back in class. And to celebrate the joy, the two ladies mentioned earlier made a meal for me in the evening.

Two weeks later, I borrowed a car from one of the seminary students I had talked to a few times, and set out for Chatham again. This time, to bring Corrie and our three children to Holland, Michigan! I arrived late Friday evening. The next day the Veenmans helped us load the belonging we could and should take along. We have never seen a car more crowded with belongings than that car! Murray and Cornie literally laid against the car's roof! The following day in Chatham, our baby was baptized and after another farewell, we were on our way to our new home. The week before I had been given a few chairs, a baby crib, some kitchen utensils, a few blankets, and so on. So I was able to welcome Corrie and the children to a more furnished home than it was before. The trip was actually too much for Corrie so shortly after the birth of our new daughter, but we all wanted so much to be together again. So we did it.

When arriving at the place that would be our humble home for a few years, we were so happy to step inside. We were so grateful to be together again, and especially now with three children - a daughter and two sons! Yes, there was uncertainty. College was going to be a trial, but we had had other trials behind us and God helped us through. Would He not do so again?

And to let you feel what we were feeling at that time, I would like to take you back a few years as to the way God had been leading us and providing for us. The first letter is a translation from one who did us a big favor at that time by writing our Consistory in Dutch. His Dutch is very old and even laughable to read today.

Third Reformed Church
Kalamazoo, Michigan
August 2, 1949

Dear friends:

We were happy to receive your letter. I should have replied earlier, but sickness at home prevented it.

We are very happy that the Dutch Synod at last has decided to cooperate with the convictions of you people, now sending the membership papers of the new immigrants to you people rather than the United Church of Canada. This is a real step ahead for all of you. I encourage you now to write a letter of appreciation to the Synod for this change of direction. We trust that with the return of Rev. Jacob Brouwer from his visit with the Synod, we shall hear more about it.

A few weeks ago we had been together again to talk about the work we should be undertaking among you people. I am quite sure that as soon as Rev. Brouwer is back, we shall be making preparations for the organization of your group there. We would like to even do it sooner, but it involves more than it looks on the outside. We have requested \$25,000 from the Board of Domestic Missions to officially begin our work in Canada.

No doubt you are aware of the writing by the Christian Reformed Church against our work to be undertaken in Canada. Rev. Jacob Blaauw and I have talked about replying to this type of writing but have decided against it. We believe we should start and what they want to write against it is their business. We are not ashamed what we have been doing in our church and if we continue to work with integrity and uprightness, we shall stay away from this type of writing. Well good friends, this is all for now. We look forward to be with you in Canada again.

Greetings,

Rev. Nicholas Rozeboom.

"What we saw in Canada"

The Church Herald (August 25, 1950)

The Rev. Henry A. Vruwink, D.D.

President of General Synod, RCA

The Rev. Herman Maassen was installed as the minister of the church in Chatham on July 25th. The service was held in the Baptist Church with 125 immigrants in attendance. I wish that you could have looked into the faces of these people and heard them sing. From hearts overflowing, they lifted up their voices not only in singing songs, but also as they sang in English, 'What a Friend we have in Jesus'.

At the close of this impressive service an Elder rose to express the gratitude to the congregation. Later, while enjoying each other's fellowship over refreshments in

the basement of the church, I said to this Elder, "You must have suffered in the days of occupation in Holland." He asked, "How do you know that?" and I answered, "Only one who has come through great tribulation could have the insight and understanding that you have."

Here was a young man of 27 years to whom God was a dynamic reality, to whom Jesus Christ was really Savior, and the Church the indispensable Body of Christ. He fully appreciated the chance to make a good living for himself and his family in a new land of opportunity, but his speech plainly revealed that, "he looked for a city which hath foundations and whose Builder and Maker is God." And he was speaking not only for himself, but for the congregation."

Immigrants will continue to need our help for quite a while. Most of those who are here had church affiliations in the Netherlands which made it quite natural to join the Christians Reformed Churches in Canada, some of which were established some time ago. But from now on a much larger proportion of those who come will want to become affiliated with the RCA. Whether or not the churches organized in Canada will ultimately form a Classis or even a Synod of our denomination, remains an open question. They may do so, or they may with the United Church of Canada. That is a question for these Dutch churches to decide. But meanwhile, it is clearly our responsibility to supply these immigrants with Dutch speaking ministers and competent lay field workers. Men who with the ministers will continue to secure sponsors, meet incoming ships, direct new immigrants to their new homes, see them settled, provide them in some cases with necessities, especially clothing and shoes for children. At Chatham we have purchased a lot and hope to raise about \$20,000 with which to build a church and a parsonage. At other centers, this will need to be done in the future. These immigrants cannot do it because they are not allowed to take more than 150 guilders out of Holland. The immigration department of Canada is doing all that Government can and is expected to do. We can depend on their continued cooperation.

This experience in Canada reminds me of facts in the history of our church. Three hundred years ago, the mother church in the Netherlands sent ministers and funds to help Dutch people organize and build churches in America. Over one hundred years ago the Reformed Church in the East assisted Dutch Colonizers build churches and parsonages and schools in the West. Now we are making it possible for Dutch people of the Reformed faith to establish and maintain churches in Canada where they have come to make permanent homes for themselves and their children. All of our churches should be interested in this enterprise. Every church would if it could see what we saw in Canada.

Western Theological Seminary
Holland, Michigan.
Office of the President.
March 9, 1953

The Rev. Herman Maassen
Chatham, Ontario
Rural Route 5

Dear Brother Maassen:

Your letter concerning Mr. John Moerman has been on my desk since its arrival. I wanted to give it a little time to think the matter through, and to come to some conclusion that could be helpful. I have not conferred with Dr. Lubbers about him, and I do not know what Dr. Lubbers is going to write you. I shall, however, communicate to you my opinion.

I fear that the requirements that stand before this man, from an academic point of view, are too heavy to ask him to face them at this point of life. Humanly speaking, he has more than all the college work to do, plus three years of seminary. That would put him close to forty before he is finished, and it would give an interim of possible hardship in terms of his family and his family life, to say nothing of what it might do to him at that age level.

He is, undoubtedly, a very competent and helpful man. I wonder whether it would not be better to use him for such task as one can perform. In the old church of the immigration here, there were many such men who were called "Iloefenaars". Those men took their places as very fine elders of the churches, and in circumstances of emergency, stepped in and gave such help as they could. I am inclined to think, myself, that it would be a very good thing to train Mr. Moerman in that direction. I would suggest that your continuing to help him as much as possible, but not to hold before him the idea of going to school, college, and seminary. That seems to me, now, a mistake.

I hope you won't misunderstand this. It is written in the most cordial terms and of attitude. But the practical situation that a person of that type would face would, as he looked at them, seem almost insurmountable. And I should not consider it good psychology, and probably not even good Christianity, to ask him to face such odds

when it is not necessary. There is good work that he can do, and on a very fine level, and he can find much contentment on that level, in such work.

Thank you for the privilege of talking this over together. I hope that his mind and yours may come to some definite and satisfying conclusions. I offer this all as my humble opinion.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. John P. Mulder

And here now follows one of the copies of the letter Rev. Maassen sent to some churches on my behalf.

Dear Brother:

At the suggestion of Rev. Richard J. Vanden Berg, Sr., Executive Secretary of the Board of Domestic Missions, I am sending this letter to a few of our churches.

You are aware that it is very difficult to get pastors to supply our churches in Canada, and of necessity we may have to call some ministers from the Netherlands. However, one of our own elders, Mr. John Moerman, feels that he is called to prepare himself, if at all possible, for the ministry among Holland immigrants in Canada. He is 30 years old, thoroughly orthodox and a consecrated Christian. Very frequently he conducts a church service and gives good satisfaction. Although he is better able to do it in the Dutch language, he has several times conducted a service here at Chatham in the English language.

Recently I went with Mr. Moerman to Holland, Michigan, and we had interviews with Dr. J.R. Mulder of the Seminary, Dr. I. J. Lubbers and other men of Hope College. They were all very favorably impressed and assured us of their whole-hearted cooperation. Hope College will take care of tuition and will supply an apartment. The Seminary will admit him as soon as he may be able to finish in 3, or at the most in 4 years, then to be ordained and take up the work here in Canada.

Mr. Moerman is married and has two children. Therefore Dr. Vanden Berg and myself are trying to get sufficient support pledged so that he will not have to spend too much time at manual labor in order to support his family. We estimate that one hundred dollars per month during the school year would be sufficient. They live on less than that now, but we like to have them enjoy a little higher standard of living.

Would it be possible for your church, or some of the organizations, to help this brother, and through him the extension work of our denomination? The money is to be sent to Dr. Vanden Berg, who will take care of the distribution. Mr. Moerman expects to commence school next September, and it could relieve him of financial worry. Will you please let me know what you can do for him?

Your friend in Christ,

Rev. H. Maassen
R.R. # 5
Chatham, Ontario

Hope College,
Holland, Michigan
Admission Office
July 25, 1953

Mr. John Moerman
Charing Cross, Ontario
Canada

Dear Mr. Moerman:

I am pleased to officially inform you that you have been accepted of the admissions to Hope College to begin your studies September 14, 1953, opening date of the 1953-1954 school year. You will be entered upon some phase of accelerated program in pre-theological studies with the intent that you be prepared to enter theological studies as soon as possible. Certain details of that plan have already been explained to you.

Information about Registration Week will reach you later in the summer.

As I recall, you considered the matter of lodging for you and your family with Rev. Herman Maassen. I assume therefore that you have completed plans for this.

As part of you admission materials, \$10 Matriculation Fee is required. Kindly mail this fee to the Office of Admissions at your early convenience.

Enclosed find the Health Form which is to be completed in conjunction with a physician and then returned to us. Our best wishes to you.

Sincerely yours,

Albert Timmer
Director of Admissions.

Reformed Church in America
Board of Domestic Missions
156 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y.

American Consulate
Windsor, Ontario

Dear Sirs:

This certifies that the Board of North American Missions of the Reformed Church in America has requested Mr. John Moerman of Charing Cross, Ontario, to enroll as a student at Hope College, Michigan, preparatory to entering the Gospel Ministry.

The Board of Domestic Missions has entered into an agreement with Hope College whereby Hope College waives tuition and provide living quarters for Mr. Moerman and his family. The Board of Domestic Missions of the Reformed Church in America agrees to pay Mr. Moerman a sum sufficient to supply him and his family while he attends Hope College, certifies that he will not become a dependent on the State, and agrees when he graduates from a seminary to extend a call to him to become a pastor of a church serving Dutch immigrants in Canada.

Very truly yours,

R.J. Vanden Berg
Executive Secretary

It is our hope and prayer that the above letters have shed a somewhat fuller light on what we have been seeking to present. It is very important to look at things always from the best possible perspective. We now knew without a doubt that God had been calling us from where we were to where we now found ourselves. And, yes, we knew what Mr. Albert Timmer meant when he wrote in his letter of my admission acceptance, "certain details of that plan have already been explained to you." This spoke of, "you prove yourself during the first year that you can handle college courses and you're on your way to seminary."

During these days, I often thought of what Amos answered Amaziah the priest of Bethel when he objected to him prophesying in Israel (the ten tribes). Amos said "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd (herdsman), and I also took care of sycamore fig trees. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel!'"

I was an uneducated farmer's son too. I knew about working the land, caring for animals, and pruning trees. And now, here I was - God's called one, like Amos! I very much wanted to preach, teach, prophesy, and minister, but these feelings of inferiority and inadequacy were still very much around me! In fact, both Corrie and I were plagued with it. We felt it everywhere - in college with the professors and students, in First Reformed Church among the people who did their level best to make us feel at ease. We tried not to compare, but when invited to their homes, we just could not help doing so. In Chatham we knew everyone in the congregation, but here with these 700-800 worshippers, we felt lost. And though we now laugh about it, their minister wasn't just a "dominee", he was a doctor!

Many times I have had a dream about a crowded hallway and chairs with students going to their next class. And indeed, this was quite an experience for a person with my background. The English and Philosophy courses were the most difficult at the start. I knew next to nothing - if that much - about verbs and adverbs, nouns and pronouns, adjectives, clauses and compound clauses, morphology and syntax, the system of word structures and arrangements, rules for speaking and writing, and so on. For me, this was something from another world. I have sweated at Leonard Giffen when haying there, but I did it in my English class too. The same in Dr. Dykstra's Greek Philosophy class. Following this, the student went home and sought to be daddy and husband.

My first semester grades were dismal. But my English professor, Dr. De Graaf, was a God sent man for me in this class. He was Christian Reformed, as sound in the faith and doctrine as anyone can dream about. But he also was a man of the highest principles. To describe him as a thoroughly pietistic would be very fitting for him. I loved the man and he loved me. He understood where I came from and where I sought to go. As my first semester drew to a close, he told me that though I should be given an 'F', he would give me an 'E' because I worked so hard. He also told me that he was sure that I would do better in the second semester. There was one

student in the class who was as bad as I was. Yet, he had just graduated from high school. I never knew how this was possible.

Ten years afterwards when I was appointed as Classis Cascades representative on the Board of Trustees of Western Theological Seminary, in all the five years I served on this Board I never missed to pay a visit to my English professor Dr. Clarence De Graaf. And he appreciated the visit as much as I appreciated him for helping me struggle through his English Literature Class trying to tackle Milton's "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Regained".

I wore out my new English - Dutch dictionary in one year. When I registered for my courses I was told by my faculty advisor, Dr. Lambert Ponstein, that the courses he felt I should take would not necessarily be the easiest, but they definitely would be the best for me. As to the first part of that advice, I readily agreed. But as to the latter I sometimes wondered why. This was especially so with Dr. Dykstra's Introduction to Greek Philosophy course. I had a hard time understanding what "the processes governing thought and conduct, and investigation of the principles that regulate the universe and underlie all reality", had to do with my preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ! I thought this was why God gave us His Holy Scriptures and why He had revealed to us everything we needed to know about the world and right and wrong. I just could not see what Socrates, Plato, Archimedes and others knew about what God had revealed. I know this is putting it crudely and simplistically, but that is how I felt. Corrie can tell you too how one evening I was so frustrated and even disgusted with my Introduction to Greek Philosophy, that I threw the book into the corner, saying, "waarom moet ik deze rommel leren om dominee te worden"? (Why must I learn this junk to become a minister?) Of course, after a little while I sought to overcome my defeatist attitude, left the chair and picked up the book. We looked at each other, smiled, Corrie gave me a hug, and I went back to my book again.

The course I liked best was "Introduction to the Bible." Had I been allowed to take a few more Bible courses I would have had no problem. In this class, in spite of my English drawback, I was ahead of a number of other students. Dr. Henry Voogd was the professor.

Next best classes were those courses on History, Political Science, and Speech. My teachers in these classes were, respectively, Dr. Vanden Berg, Dr. Fried (a new German immigrant with whom I was able to hold good conversations about war experiences), and Dr. Schrier. The latter course was hard, too. I could not say a word without being corrected. It was hard to be corrected, but it did not feel too pleasant with all the other younger students around. The very first day Dr. Schrier gave me a 3 x 5 card and on it was written: "Theopholis Thistle sifted three thousand thistles through the thick of his thumb." I was told to read this over five times each hour of the day. The year before the RSV had become available, and how happy we were to have this version replace the King James with all its "thus saith, doeth, thinketh, thou and thee"! Reading the KJV was so hard with all these "th" pronunciations!

One day Dr. Schrier announced that our next test would be a demonstration speech. After finding out what this meant, I tried and tried to come up with something to demonstrate. The grade for this test had to be good, otherwise I would have another E or even F. All at once an idea bit me - I was the only one in the class who was married with children, and a baby at that! I would take our baby Ann along and show these smart young students how to change a diaper! At first I was little fearful to ask my professor whether this would be acceptable. But when I asked him, his face just brightened up as I had never seen before and he said, "Why, sure, John. That'll be a great idea. I will announce it to the class for the girls to take their camera along." This was more than I had bargained for. However, it was too late to back out now.

What a demonstration speech this became! It was a good thing baby Ann had nothing to say about it. Not one of the girls in the class stayed in their place. Everyone wanted to hold her, crowding around not so much to listen what I had to say, but to watch the baby! I don't know how many pictures were taken. A picture even appeared in the next Hope College paper. And my next grade was better than I had dared to hope or dream. I received a new standing in my speech class! I had received a much-needed boost. Very often the girls in the class would ask how the baby was doing. Even in the following years some of the girls would ask how little Ann was doing!

When Sunday came around we would all walk to church. We took our Dutch baby buggy along for baby Ann. Not all the people talked to us, but everyone looked at us with wondering eyes. We were immediately invited to join the young couples' Sunday School class. There we met three couples who helped us with many things. They were the Albert Kleis family, the John Van Tatenbover family, and the Ken Raak family, all somewhat older than we were. Our adult Bible teacher was Rev. Howard Van Egmond. For some reason or another, he had been in the ministry only five years before he left it. The Sunday School Guide was our teaching lesson, and as long as we were able to attend, we enjoyed it to the full. These hours became a great blessing to us. Dr. Raymond Van Heukelom was a fine preacher, teacher, and pastor. We appreciated him very much and up until very recently he has been in contact with the family.

Living in the barracks provided the children with several friends. They loved to play with them. Across the road two lonely, elderly single men lived. They loved to have Corrie and the children come over for a little talk.

The walls of the barracks consisted of soft compressed paper. Any noise on the other side could easily be heard. We only had neighbors on one side while on the other side was a driveway. Our next door neighbors Bob and Mary Langenberg had one child. They must have been the only couple not attending church. Bob was a chemistry major. His wife was, according to our background and experience was a "modern woman". Several years later they told us that when I was praying in the morning and evening, they would be listening to our prayers. They also started

reading their Bible because they heard us do so and they even entered the ministry later on because of what they had heard and seen of us!

We thank God for the academic improvement during the second semester. There was no more F's or E's. Now was getting D's and C's, and even one B-. God again had been "a stronghold in times of trouble" (Psalm 9:9). "He will deliver the needy who cry out" (Psalm 72:12). Yes, the reasons were different than when David said "I sought the Lord, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears", but it was true here too that "this poor man called, and the Lord heard him; He saved him out of all his (college!) troubles. So at the end of the first year, God enabled us to succeed and made us say, "Taste and see that then Lord is good; blessed is the man (and woman) who takes refuge in Him. Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear Him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing" (Psalm 32:4,6, 8-10).

A very, very grateful couple and family left for the summer months to take up a student ministry in Leamington. And the people there were very happy to have us return for a few months. These too were unforgettable months. How good it was to be among them again.

It was there that I had my very first funeral. A single man from Holland had come to visit his brothers but died shortly thereafter from a heart attack. I was not prepared for what followed immediately after the interment for the brothers started arguing about his possessions in a rather loud and uncivilized way.

I remember the most about the first year of our Michigan experience because of the intensity of all the work and the effort of the first year studies. We were so grateful that following our first summer ministry charge, the second year of study went much better and easier. The Leamington congregation presented us with a watch, which ran for 25 years without any trouble.

The second year it was recommended that I should be taking some Greek courses. Dr. Ouderluys from the Seminary would be teaching the pre-seminary students who stood in need of these courses. Well, I surely was one of them. It was no surprise to me that these Greek courses proved to be the most difficult during my second year of Hope College. Often I had to translate the Greek word first from English into the Dutch before I knew what the sentence said. This, of course, was very time consuming.

The old soldier barracks where we lived had been up since the United States involvement in World War II. Talks were already being held when we arrived in Holland, Michigan to replace them with more permanent student housing. When leaving for our first summer charge we were informed that there was a possibility our home would be gone by time we returned. And, indeed, in the second year we lived in a different one of the barracks. Happily, we were singled out to still

be able to move in one of the last rows slated for demolition. And this was going to be our last year of free housing. Thereafter in Seminary, we had to take care of our own housing needs. And this was when our little bit of savings were to be used.

My second college year called for a heavier academic load. My Bible courses were replaced by psychology courses. And I should mention here that during the second semester of my first year at Hope College, I had been given a special test to determine what area I would be the strongest and best. To my surprise, it showed that I should enter the field of psychology and psychiatry! When I was informed about this, I first had to look up in my Dutch Dictionary what these areas were all about! When I found out what it was, I told them that I was preparing for the right thing because this talent was useful background for helping Dutch immigrants in Canada. Besides psychology, my second year included philosophy (again), english, history, speech, political science and Greek. This year sociology was added to the list too. My psychology professor was a bright man and a very fine evangelical Christian. And of all places, his grandfather originated from Schipluiden! When we wrote this to our parents, they recalled that way back a large Vander Lugt family had emigrated to the USA.

During the second year we felt much more at home than in the first year. Also, the pressure was off as to whether or not I would be able to stay. This had weighed very heavy on me. It is not that we felt perfectly at home in the American culture and mentality - for we did not - but it definitely was getting much better. I did not even look as much as one "coming out of the sticks" as before - Corrie had bought me a new pair of pants! There was nothing in our budget for clothes for her or the children, but I had to look more like a student than before.

This second year, I also came to see more fully that my age of being 10-12 years older than all the rest of the student body was not altogether a drawback. I began to see so many students just having "a good time" and not caring much about good grades. Their attitude seemed to reflect "Hey, Dad and Mom pay for my tuition and board and room, so why should I worry?" We, on the other hand, kept on turning over every nickel and dime before it was used and never talked about what some of them were always talking about – spending! These students did not have the privilege and opportunity to work themselves for every nickel, dime, and dollar like we did. They had no idea what saving money was. All of this came to stand out so strongly during my second year. We sought to thank God for the special experience and privilege of learning to handle money. And while doing so, we also watched ourselves from falling in the trap like Jesus described in Luke 18:9-14. We only move beyond "God, have mercy on me, a sinner", when in glory Christ has spoken the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come, and share your Master's happiness."

For the summer months we had been invited again to be student pastor at Leamington. This time, they rented a house all for ourselves. We lived on Highway 3 right at the sharp bend where trucks would constantly gear down and pull up again. It was rather noisy, but we lived all by ourselves this time. Perhaps Murray remembers something about the de-railing of the train that summer that took place nearby. It was a very hot few summer months but the ministry was very rewarding. We look back with deep appreciation on these two summers in Leamington. Somehow, subconsciously, both the congregation and we ourselves figured that this would be our place of full time ministry when the study years would come to conclusion.

In 1955 I entered Western Seminary, again as a "Special Student". And since there was such a crying need for Dutch speaking ministers in Canada whereas new congregations kept on being organized following 1953, it was felt that perhaps I should take only one year of Seminary training instead of two years. Neither of these options happened. It became the regular three years like all the other students. The reason for this was that my studies went so well that I was advised to work for my professorial certificate, enter the ministry, and then during the ministry take two more years of university training and obtain my College and Seminary degree at the same time. Well, I did receive my Seminary professorial certificate, but with the growing pressure of a growing church and family, it never materialized. Four years later, while attending the Seminary's Board of Trustees meeting, I arranged to discuss this matter with Dr. Richard Oudersluys. We had a very good discussion about it. At last, he asked with great sincerity, "John, are you sure such a College or University degree will guarantee you a more fulfilling and rewarding ministry than you have now without it?" Before leaving, this matter was what our prayers together were all about.

At the Seminary I joined the small prayer group that came together each week to intercede for our missionaries. And if the second year made us feel more at home, the third year was better yet. I was still older than most, but there were also a few others like me. Also, we became more part of the First Reformed Church: Murray began to attend a Sunday school class, we took turns attending the Wednesday Bible study and prayer evening and occasionally I would be asked to teach the Adult Sunday School class.

This was also the time we had to rent our own house. Our savings from the five years of farm work and the two years of student summer charges helped us to pay rent and utilities. It was a very good thing that Seminary tuition was still, for all students, paid by other sources. Each student needed only to pay a \$10.00 registration fee during these years. This was special blessing indeed!

My study habit was still to go to bed around ten o'clock and rise early. Not only was this how we were brought up, it also fit in perfectly with our organized family life. Corrie did some baby sitting at home, but it was always without receiving any money for it. She also attended the seminary wives group that met once a month. This was a real learning experience for us.

However, she felt there like I felt at first at Hope College. Because of our family circumstances, I always studied at the Seminary library in the afternoon.

I am like all seminary students who never forget the first time preaching in front of the professor and the whole class. In fact, I was more nervous than most of the others. Not only my accent but also my English speaking in general was still a stumbling block. There also were opportunities where I was asked to come and speak in and around Holland (Michigan) about our church and immigrant life in Canada. And since Rev. Nick Rozeboom and his church in Kalamazoo still had a Dutch service on Sunday afternoon, some of the Dutch speaking people wanted me to preach there. The whole family always went along and afterwards we were really spoiled in various ways. The remuneration was always generous as well. It was a real help to keep our car on the road too.

Editor: Finances were always tight. My memories include my parents sub-letting rooms in our rented home to my father's fellow-students, the crisis of a \$5.00 bill lost between home and a grocery store and the periodic generosity of someone bringing by a meal or an envelope.

The following is a copy of a loan agreement made upon graduation from Western Seminary to be repaid from salary paid by Galt Reformed Church, carefully noted by pen, month-by-month until fully discharged.

- Murray Moerman

WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA
 HOLLAND, MICHIGAN

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

May 21, 1958

Having today received from the Seminary Student Fund of Western Theological Seminary the sum of One Thousand Five Hundred (\$1500.00), I hereby promise to repay this amount in bi-monthly installments of \$125.00, with interest at the rate of 2 percent per annum.

Signed

John Moerman

<i>✓</i> 10/1/58- paid 125.00		<i>-</i> 10.00 interest	<i>115.00 on principal</i>	<i>\$</i> 1385.00
<i>✓</i> 11-19-58 paid 125.00		<i>-</i> 3.48 "	<i>121.52</i>	1263.48
<i>✓</i> 1-29-59 " 125.00		<i>-</i> 4.21 "	<i>120.79</i>	1142.69
<i>✓</i> 3-16-59 " 125.00		<i>-</i> 2.29 "	<i>122.71</i>	1019.98
<i>✓</i> 5-18-59 " 125.00		<i>-</i> 3.40 "	<i>121.60</i>	898.38
<i>✓</i> 6-30-59 " 125.00		<i>-</i> 2.10 "	<i>122.90</i>	775.48
<i>✓</i> 8-10-59 " 125.00		<i>-</i> 1.77 "	<i>123.23</i>	652.25
<i>✓</i> 8/31-59 " 250.00		<i>-</i> .73 "	<i>249.27</i>	402.98
<i>✓</i> 10/19-59 " 250.00		<i>-</i> 1.08 "	<i>248.92</i>	154.06
<i>✓</i> 12/19/59 " "		<i>-</i> .51 "	<i>154.06</i>	<u>Out</u>
		<i>29.57</i>		

John Moerman

*Paid in full
 Dec. 21, 1959.
 Congratulations, & thanks
 Western Theol. Seminary
 J. R. Muller*

*\$15, -
 95, 94*