

Chapter 17

A Return Visit to Holland

It had been a difficult decision which Call to accept. We had three Calls: to Leamington, Whitby and Galt. Any one of these three would have been a good challenge. The Leamington congregation we were able to start and serve for two summers; the Galt congregation we had served the summer prior and we would be their first pastor; the Whitby congregation was the largest of the three. And so it was very much, "Lord, where do You want us to be serving You?" As to salary differences, I have no recollection whether there were any or not. It must not have entered into the picture. All I remember is that our annual salary in Galt was \$3,700. Declining a Call is greatly disappointing to a congregation. We had to disappoint two churches. It was a battle to reach our decision, but at last we came to the point to accept the Call to Galt.



During our visit to Holland with our four oldest children this picture was taken at my mother's graveside.

Soon after graduation we moved whatever belongings we had to our new residence - a stately brick parsonage on 84 Aberdeen Road. The house was located only a three minute walk from the congregation's place of worship. The Ordination and Installation Service was held on June 11, 1958. In Chatham when the church was first organized, we had belonged to Classis Kalamazoo. A few years later we were transferred to Classis Lake Erie. Here in Galt, we belonged to Classis Zeeland. The Ordination and Installation Service was such a solemn and impressive experience for both of us. I can still feel, as if it were, the laying on of hands. I know God's Spirit was there in this laying on of hands.

One of the very first things I did there was prepare what I called "A Responsibility List". Reaching out to the unchurched has always been a priority in my life. But I recall that the list just kept on growing and growing. It did not take long before a number of the unchurched began attending.

Prior to our accepting of the Call to Galt, we had informed Consistory that arrangements had been made for a trip to the Netherlands as a boat chaplain. Between 1951 and 1959, Canada had a wide open immigration policy. Moreover, the Dutch Government wanted to help the thousands who wanted to leave and so during these years they heavily subsidized them. This certainly was not the case when we emigrated! This immigration arrangement had come to include having each boat staffed with a chaplain. It was a free return trip for the chaplain. When we made this known

to our family in Holland, the Van Leeuwen family right away offered to pay for Corrie and the children. We literally had no money. By this time, we had borrowed money from Seminary.

We left Galt by car with the whole family on July 28, 1958 heading for Brockville, where Rev. and Mrs. Cor Bons were pastoring. This is where we parked our car. From there we went by bus to Montreal and sailed with the *S.S. Grote Beer* to Rotterdam. Corrie again was very seasick and so were most of the children, but for them it did not last the entire trip.

What a surprising reunion this was! Never had we dared to dream when we left Holland that this reunion would happen ten years later. And for the older children especially, this was the treat of their life. And father and mother Van Leeuwen, who had never seen any of these grand children, were elated to see them. To use the word ecstatic would be no exaggeration. It was God's answer to their prayers - especially for Corrie's father, who just would never think about traveling to Canada. When something out of the ordinary Dutch way of life would be written in one of our letters to Holland - which happened several times – father Van Leeuwen would remark, “*Je kan het beter hier geloven dan daar gaan zien.*” (It is better to believe these things here than check them out over there.)

Since the old church in Schipluiden where we had always worshipped was undergoing a lengthy restoration, we worshipped in the Gereformeerde Kerk. One of the first things father Van Leeuwen asked was whether he could arrange to have me preach one Sunday. This surely was a very special experience to see all kinds of our old class mates, neighbors, relatives, acquaintances, friends from the underground, and our own families sitting there, listening to the Word of God that "this Canadian Schipluidenaar" was preaching. It is difficult to describe all the emotional feelings that were present within me.

Another unique experience was when I was able to go to Rotterdam and welcome my Old Testament professor, Dr. Lester Kuyper, who had arrived by boat for a visit to Geneva and Palestine. He just loved to meet our parents and talk Dutch to them. Now he could picture where this Dutch student of his was brought up. I took him also on a bike ride around Schipluiden. When I came though at what we call “De Kade”, he motioned that he was not going to follow me there. I had already told him that it was rather narrow. These four kilometers were on the top of a very narrow dike where the path we were to drive was just two feet wide. To the left was a foot of grassy shoulder and then the wide canal. To the right was a similar grassy shoulder, but then the dike sloped down ten to fifteen feet where there was a creek, separating the dike from the meadows. Most of that side had trees on it to hold the dike in place. (This was part of the 25 kilometer dike we had to check during the occupation years for the possibility of being sabotaged.) Dr. Kuyper just stood there admiring it all and taking pictures, but in no way was he going to risk riding his bike on there. He asked me, "John, which way would you like me to miss this path - to

the right or to the left?" He also asked me what people did when someone else approached from the opposite direction! When I informed him that one would lean over to the right and the other to the left, he just shook his head in disbelief.

During our stay it was decided that my father would return with us for another trip to Canada. It was now five years ago that they been with us together. Dad mentioned that if he would be with us in Canada for one year, he could thereby save up enough for the paying of his trip. That is how they did it in 1952/53. My father's walking had measurably deteriorated in these five years. He could no longer move the entire length of his one foot past the other. In layman terms, the grease around his bones had been drying up and yet, he had no pain to speak of. But when helping him up the steps and holding him on his back trying to lift, a person could literally feel and hear the bones rubbing against each other.

One day while "walking" with dad on our way to the Post Office, we met our Roman Catholic neighbor, Piet Kloosterman. He was also around 73 years of age like my father at that time. He stopped right in front of him and looked him straight in the eye and said, "*Rinus, wat heb ik gehoord?*" (Rinus, what do I hear?) My dad replied, I don't know. Then he mentioned he heard that my father would go again for a visit to Canada. Thereupon, he added, "*En dan zo slecht ter been! Man, wat haal je in je hoofd?*" (And then, such a poor walker! Man, what have you got in your head?) I will never forget my father's reply. He said, "Piet, ik ga niet lopen." (Piet, I am not going to walk there!)

Corrie's sister, Rina, in the meantime had decided that it would economically be better for her to emigrate too. She also had a steady boyfriend who was a purser on the Holland-American Steamship Line. The plans were that I would officiate their wedding in Canada. So we were not going back home alone!

Murray and Jack will no doubt remember a few things from our visit as well. I will mention here just two: the big hole they dug together with Jan van Leeuwen in the bush on our farm. It was there for years thereafter we were told. The other was Jack's walking away from where we were visiting. Our visit there must have been too long and too boring for him and there were more interesting things to do at Opa and Oma Van Leeuwen. In order to go there, he had to walk all the way along the canal. We were quite panicky when we found he was no longer where we were. There was nothing around but water - three canals crossing each other. What a relief it was to find him on the way, nearly having arrived at Corrie's parents. This way, we have not forgotten our visit at "De Molen".

Toward the end of our visit, I actually began to get a feeling I never had before. I began to long to go back to the wide open spaces of Canada. Though I knew all about the narrow roads from past

experiences, I longed for the highways and gravel roads of Canada. This strange feeling must have been the beginning of home sickness for Canada.

Well, when September 15 arrived, I was glad to leave again. Of course, saying “good-bye” to our beloved elderly parents was as difficult as it been before. Our return trip would have us disembark in New York. One of our friends, Jannie Waardenburg, who now was married with a police officer, came to the Rotterdam harbor to talk and see us off.

This third trip crossing the Atlantic Ocean made Corrie seasick again. Her sister was also seasick and so were the children most of the time. My dad and I escaped seasickness. On our first trip, I only had to look after Corrie, this time there were a few more to try care for. And when the immigrants on the *S.S. Waterman* found out that we had already been living in Canada for ten years, those who sought advice from the chaplain grew each day. At last, I just set so many office hours per day. I needed time to look after my family as well.

We passed the Statue of Liberty on September 23rd. Disembarking with father took a lot of extra time. We took a taxi to bring us to the bus station. A few of the taxi chauffeurs were not interested in taking us when they saw all the suitcases. When at last one did, he drove further than was necessary. He took a roundabout way to the bus depot and made us pay for it. I sought to point it out to him, but without success.

Pastor Bons was there to pick us up in Brockville, and soon a very grateful - but tired - family was on their way home to Galt. In all, it was a rewarding and wonderful visit.