

## Chapter 18

### *Galt, Ontario: 1958 - 1961*

As cold as it was in the West, as warm was the welcome I received in Edmonton. Jerry asked what they could do for me while being there. I requested him to drive me around and visit half a dozen families in their homes. He also showed me the manse from the church at 11623-111<sup>th</sup> Ave. There was a good response to the preaching and the next day we had a special consistory meeting. They were honest about their deep problems, divisions, inability to reach out and lack of finances. One of them shyly mentioned that it was hard to offer a good salary. It was easy to assure me that I would be facing many problems.

And with these experiences behind me I traveled back to my home in Galt. The first thing the family asked in unison, "Are we going to Edmonton or are we staying here?" I don't remember exactly what I told them. But then, when at last "decision time" arrived in earnest the certainty of the answer was as far away as ever. And so we did what we thought was "next best." We requested a two week postponement. Wise or not wise, the Edmonton leaders had no problem with it. I am sure it gave them a glimmer of hope. But as the days went by nothing much changed; the "pulling" from East and West continued. Early Saturday morning we were to make our decision known. Strangely though when going to bed on Friday evening, still not knowing God's will, a great peace had come upon us. We knew that all our prayers had not been in vain and this is how we immediately fell asleep.

Around 2:00 am I woke up with a shock and felt that something had taken place. The calmness of a great assurance had fallen on me. Corrie woke up as well and she asked, "What is the matter, John?" I said, "Corrie, we have to go to Edmonton." Kind of matter-of-factly she replied, "Well, that is where we will go then; I am glad that we know the answer." I have forgotten whether we slept much or little thereafter but we were amazed how God gave the answer again. But early in the morning, we passed on God's answer to us, to all involved; making the Galt leaders and congregation sad and the people in Edmonton glad. We also informed all involved that we would stay for another three months to finish off our work in an orderly way. This included a New Christian Class, family visitation program and a stewardship drive for increased giving which we had just started. The Edmonton church had no problem with it as they could very well see our point. The New York office, however, felt that this was a mistake. They said that it was contrary to RCA custom and that once a minister had decided to leave, no useful work would be possible any longer. Well, in Galt it proved to be the opposite. We had a very successful stewardship drive and all the people deeply appreciated that we worked hard to finish off our winter work program.

Since Corrie has written about our departure from Galt, I will reminisce a bit on our trip by Volkswagen to Edmonton. We had judged it to be wise to have our second oldest son to drive with me, while Murray was to help Corrie with things in the train. This was because she was expecting our newest addition to the family (Andy). It was on this trip that I was to get used to the change of name from Cornie to “Jack.”

One day during late fall, when I was spading another part of our lawn to enlarge the garden for our growing family, Corrie, with a mischievous smile on her face, knocked on the window to get my attention. She asked me whether I was sure we would still be in Galt next year to benefit from this work? I said, “Well, why not; don't worry, we will.” With another big grin on her face she said, “Are you sure?” I reminded her what we had said to elder Van Oostveen when he had mentioned that he hoped we would stay for many years in their church. I had replied, “We will be like a chicken hatching her eggs; they will not get us off our nest.” We hoped to be here for ten years. (We have learned that God is in charge of our lives; we do not know how long we stay at a certain place.)

But then out of the blue, in December we received a telephone call from 475 Riverside Drive, New York City. Dr. Russell Redeker, Secretary of the Board of North American Missions, under which umbrella the Canadian churches operated, informed us it was their conviction that we should be moving to Edmonton with our family to pastor the First Reformed Church. Indeed it came as a complete surprise. And neither did we have any feeling to go there. In turn, their additional argument was that if we did not go there, the Reformed Church in Canada might lose both vacant churches in Edmonton.

For a while it threw us into turmoil. All at once, our beautiful peace and quietness was gone; as well as our cocksureness that this was our church for the next ten years! And even as we could not believe our ears, neither could our elders and deacons when we shared it with them. Their advice was to not even consider it and to not even be troubled about it. They also reminded me what I had said before in my exuberance: “Ten years, pastor, let no one get you off your nest!” Also, telephone calls and letters arrived from Edmonton. This together with more telephone calls from the RCA headquarters. Of course the problem was that all of this pleading and urging was intended for our eyes and ears and did not affect the hearts and minds of our leaders and church in Galt. They in turn, could not fathom why the Board of North American Missions would try to get us away from them, after having been in Galt for such a short time! Sometimes we felt like having a rope knotted around us with two congregations pulling on opposite ends. Moreover, we did not have much of an idea what the “West” of Canada was about! We only had heard from our friend, “burgemeester” Heersink who had traveled to these parts; that the people were different, the winters cold and the prairies endless.

The Edmonton consistory invited and urged us to come and visit them. They felt it was not right to say “no” without preaching there and meeting with them. We did not feel right to accept this offer because we still kept on thinking to decline the call. We had already said so to Dr. Redeker and to the General Secretary of the RCA, Dr. Marion De Velder, even as to our own consistory members who unanimously had been seeking to persuade us to stay. In our telephone conversation with Jerry Renzenbrink, the clerk of the Edmonton consistory, I mentioned that we did not feel right to spend their money when I was as good as 100% sure we would stay in Galt. His reply was, “We want you to come anyway; your visit might change all this.” It was good thinking from their side. And so the decision was made to make the train trip by myself. In turn, this decision to even go there and meet them was a great disappointment to the Galt leaders and congregation.

With new families coming in and great changes taking place in their lives, one man became very upset about the preek (sermon). One day while visiting them, he was sitting with his arms on his knees and head down, shaking it negatively. I asked him what was bothering him. Still shaking his head he replied, “Die preken van u, die preken van u.” (These sermons of yours, these sermons of yours) “Die deugen niet, die deugen niet.” (There is nothing right, nothing right). Asking him what he meant, he answered: “Nog nooit heb ik mensen zien huilen by u in the kerk. Je moet ze vertellen dat ze allemaal verdoemt zijn, voor eeuwig verdoemt!” (With you here, I have never seen people cry in church. You have to tell them, they are eternally doomed and damned!) My reply was, “Ik dank u feestelijk”, in English it means, “No thanks, never in my life.” I then asked him what the word “Gospel” meant? His reply, “Now, Woord van God, Bijbel. (Well, Word of God, Bible) When I emphasized it meant “Good News, Happy Tiding”, his only reply was, “Daar heb je het weer, weer zo iets nieuws van Dominee Moerman.” (There you go again, Reverend Moerman comes with something new again).

Besides the work in this growing congregation, I was also involved in the Ministerial Fellowship, the Editorial Committee of Pioneer, Regional Youth Work, Editor of a monthly consistorial theological paper called, “Woord en Dienst” (Word and Service), discussions about the feasibility of having our own Classis and writing a paper on the same for a wider discussion. Also, the Harriston church was vacant and for half a year I preached there each Sunday between our morning and evening service, as well as having a communicant class there. I ate lunch in the car, for it was a 60 km drive each way. For more than 29 years we kept contact with some of those from Harriston who made Confession of their faith in Christ.

At times, I kept on being plagued by “sore eye” trouble. This had started in Holland when I was 21 years old while cutting hay with a team of horses at one of our neighbors. At first it was thought there was something in the back of my eye. There were years that it returned five to eight times and ordinarily it lasted three to five days. Half of the time I could not stand any light and had excruciating pain. During these days sunshine especially was torture to me. Toward the end of

these days I had a lot of lower back pain. No Doctor in any of the places where we have lived has been able to tell what caused it. A few of them called it “eyeritis.” Yet, by the grace of God, when a Sunday was included, I ordinarily was able to bring myself to still preach; always experiencing that “God's power was accomplished in my (physical) weakness.” At the same time, the sooner and longer I stayed in a pitch dark room in bed, the sooner it was over and the less pain I had. I thank God so much that slowly toward my 60<sup>th</sup> year it completely disappeared. Thank you, thank you, thank you, Lord.

Though Corrie is the better one to share about the births of our children, I must mention that in Galt, on Sunday January 24, 1960, James Peter, came into this world. Mrs. Zantinga, wife of a very faithful Elder, stayed with her while I nervously still preached in the evening. However no sooner had I said, “Amen” that I quickly marched home to see how Corrie had been doing. Another great joy came into our lives early Monday morning.

Our consistory was strongly conservative as it was in almost every Ontario church, (with the exception of Drayton and to a lesser extent Harriston). Members came from a variety of areas in The Netherlands but practically all from Confessional churches. The morning preaching was in Dutch while the Evening Service was in English. Most had good size families. This meant we had a good Junior and a Senior Young People group. We also had large size Sunday School classes.

Consistory was very much in favor of reaching out among the unchurched in the greater Galt area, now known as Cambridge. Members often gave us names of new people but preaching in a more popular style, as a point of contact with them, was a different story. One Sunday when the church bulletin stated the topic to be: “Zo de wind waait, waait mijn jasje” which in English says, “My coat blows in the direction from where the wind comes from.” One of the elders said, “Dominee, niet te bond maken vanmorgen!” “Reverend, don't go too far and don't forget you are in the pulpit.” The topic was from a Dutch saying with which everyone was familiar. But the connotation is that of a person is easily being swayed. It had to be explained what I meant with it. The topic was based on 1 Cor. 9:19-23, which reads:

“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews ... To those not having the law I became like one not having the law ... so as to win those not having the law ... I have become all things to all men so that by all means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the Gospel that I might share in its blessing.”

Of course, the apostle Paul was not a man without backbone. Quite the opposite! I sought to stress that morning that we as traditional church people should allow for some freedom in our outreach and Worship Services to accommodate those not familiar with all this. Jesus did so. The apostle

Paul too. I challenged the congregation to not lag behind and make our evangelism program ineffective. I also said that such a policy did not mean, “everything goes.”

Infant baptism was one such a thing. For example, one morning when I was in my study upstairs, I saw a mother with several small children and a baby buggy coming toward our place. When the bell rang, I went to see her. She asked whether I was Dominee Moerman. When I confirmed that I was, she inquired whether I baptized children. When I said, “Yes, I do”, she asked if I would want to baptize her baby and the other three children? In return, I raised the question which I had asked at other times as well, “Why would you want your children be baptized?” In nearly all Reformed churches in Holland every baby was baptized; whether parents were strong or weak Christians or even attended church. This in spite of the fact that the “Order of Baptism” stated that churches were not to baptize babies out of “custom or superstition.”

When asking the question, “Why do you want to have your baby baptized”, it was not strange to hear answers such as this:

- “All of our family is. Everyone of our relatives is, why should this one not be?”
- “All parents have their children baptized. All the kids in school and everyone in town is.”
- “Grandma is coming over and we thought it would be a nice surprise to have our child christened.”
- “Baat het niet, dan schaat bet niet; ie. If it does not help, it will not hinder.”
- “Well, better to be safe than sorry. Just in case he/she dies. We would never be able to forgive ourselves.”

Large segments of the Dutch church had not paid any attention to not baptizing “out of custom or superstition.” It seemed evident that this mother wanted me to baptize these children right now here at our home. I had already sensed that this mother was from one of the large Dutch cities. Yet, her answer to my question not only surprised me, it shocked me. She replied, “Ja, (swearword) dat moet je mij niet vragen. Ik heb niet voor dominee gestudeert. (i.e. “Don't ask me. I have not studied for minister.”) I found out she was from Amsterdam. Carefully I explained that I would love to visit her some evening when her husband was home and the children were in bed and discuss with them what baptism of babies meant first of all to the parents and then to children. After a few weeks she came “to check out my preaching.” Her husband was indifferent and so it was just occasionally that we saw her. The explanations I shared with them about the importance of their faith in Christ and thereby the meaning of baptism made them back off from insisting their children to be baptized. They were not willing to surrender their lives to Christ.

Most of the unchurched people were from large Dutch cities. The very first month we had arrived in Galt, we received an emergency call from a screaming immigrant lady. She begged me to

immediately come to her home because her husband was trying to stab her with a knife. (“Hij zit me achterna, hij wil me in myn bast steken.”) I told her I would come that day in the afternoon or evening but for now it would be better to call the Police. This couple started attending church and eventually made Profession of their Faith in Christ and became members of our church. Others did the same and the church began to grow well. Yet, such people won to Christ remained vastly different from those who were born and raised in the Christian faith and life. There was no way they could become traditional Christians.

The Reformed Church had also attracted some very conservative families. It would have been beneficial to all had it been possible that such loyal church families could have been settled in one location and been able to form a flourishing homogeneous fellowship of their own. They were of the “Gereformeerde Bond” in Holland. A number of years later this very thing happened. But here in our congregation we had a father of such a family who came from the extreme right. For him it was impossible to even make Profession of Faith in Christ. The familiar saying of such people was, “Och, of het nog eenmaal mogen gebeuren.” (Oh, that it once would take place) meaning that God would take them by the scruff of their neck and drag them into the Kingdom of Heaven. It was not only total passivity from their side, they also clung to double predestination; i.e. some people are brought into the Kingdom while others are chosen to be damned forever and no one could do anything about it. In such congregations on a given Sunday hardly anyone would partake of Holy Communion; at time not even the minister felt himself “good enough.”

A bachelor from our church in Galt drove along to the West as well. Only for breakfasts and warm meals we stopped at restaurants. But for the other mealtime we shopped at a grocery store and made our own lunches. He had little money and so did the Edmonton church. I admit to not picking the best restaurants. One time in Saskatchewan I picked out what turned out to be a filthy place but we managed and finished off our meal. All along I thought that it was good that Corrie was not with us. Jack too said, “Dad this is a dirty place and the food doesn’t even taste good.” Our Volkswagen did well on the long trip and it also was very economical driving.

When finally in the evening we approached the city of Edmonton and saw the wide masses of lights in the darkness, for a while a scary feeling of inadequacy fell upon me. I felt so small in the face of the bigness of this city! Was I, this farmer’s son, with a bare minimum education, be the one to pastor in this huge city? “Lord, how will I be able to do this? God, help me.”