

William Spoelhof Society News

CALVIN COLLEGE OFFICE OF GIFT PLANNING • SPRING 2009



IN THIS ISSUE

REMEMBERING
DR. SPOELHOF

WELCOME
RUTH VIS '76

YOU STILL HAVE
TIME TO CONTRIBUTE
TO OUR CAMPAIGN

PROTECT YOUR
POTENTIAL
BENEFICIARIES



My Mentor

Dr. William Spoelhof, visionary leader and president of Calvin College from 1951 to 1976, died on December 3, 2008, at the age of 99. At his memorial service on December 8, 2008, in the Calvin College Chapel, Abram Van Engen '03 offered the following reflection on his mentor, Dr. Spoelhof.

When I met President Spoelhof, he was already an old man, high-stepping down the hallway with a cane. My dad told me to seek him out, and when I greeted him as a freshman, he smiled and called me into the Emeritorium—that is, into a small, windowless, concrete room lined with plastic chairs and adorned with a coffee pot. I felt awkward. I didn't belong. There weren't even professors in this room; there were only ex-professors, and I was still just a student. But nestled under the wings of Spoelhof's authority, I could sit wherever I pleased. And that, I think, is one of the first lessons I learned from this man who would be for me a mentor in many ways: that the best authority takes the form of generosity—it extends privilege, it invites, it takes an interest in the least of these.

Of course, to President Spoelhof no student was ever the “least of these.” Indeed, it seemed that he had inverted the order of importance, and it was the undergraduates, the young, the unaccomplished who mattered most. In Emeritorium conversations about the details of Dutch history, President Spoelhof would lean over and whisper in

continued inside

grateful to our ancestors...



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“My Mentor” *continued*

my ear exactly what was going on. I was not to be left out. That was a second thing I learned: that the best way to serve the least of these is to abolish the category altogether. A former president, revered and respected, sat down beside me—a young student—and, together, we became just two men talking. That was the wonder and amazement of it for me: President Spoelhof’s accomplishments—as great as they were—did not make him who he was; he made his accomplishments what they were. That is to say, he wore his accomplishments, without ever letting them define him, and if he wished to, as he did with me, he could simply shake them off.

And this, of course, this ability to transcend what he had done, to descend to the least of these, to extend his authority in acts of generosity—all of this he could do because he knew just where his worth resided, the one comfort of this life and the next. That, too, stands as an enduring model for

me. The qualities he exhibited here proceeded from the trust he placed in another sphere.

When I think of the President Spoelhof that I knew—a man I knew in much different circumstances than all of those who worked with him and under him—I think of a poem written long ago. When John Milton had gone blind midway through his life, after a full political career, he was faced with a crisis and he asked God what service God could possibly be asking of him now, having taken away his sight. This is the response he heard:

“...God doth not need
Either man’s work or his own
gifts: who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve
him best. His state
Is kingly; thousands at his
bidding speed
And post o’er land and ocean
without rest:
They also serve who only
stand and wait.”

“Well done, good and faithful servant.”

MATTHEW 25:23

That is the President Spoelhof that I knew: the waiting man—not “waiting” as in lying around but “waiting” as in “waiting upon,” serving, listening with attentive ears to the king’s commands. President Spoelhof taught me what it means to serve after one has been served; what it means to “wait” after one has been waited upon.

When all the books have been written, when the career has been run, when the presidency has been passed to the next, there is still a small room somewhere with a plastic chair where an old man sits with a cup of coffee and calls in new students, sits them down beside him, and asks them how they are. And in that asking, there is a telling. In that invitation, there is a teaching. In that

simple act of generosity, there is so much to be learned. True service, President Spoelhof taught me, simply begins with one human being and extends itself to another. So that when I think of the plans I have for my life, however much my dreams and visions run before me, I am recalled by the image of President Spoelhof sitting beside me, reminding me of the service that stands and waits.

For President Spoelhof, there is now no more waiting. Instead, there is simply that welcome embrace and the line we all hope to hear: “Well done, good and faithful servant.” In the end, this is the lesson I take from the mentorship I received: President Spoelhof was the servant I hope to be.



Abram Van Engen '03



Ruth Vis '76
Associate Director
of Gift Planning
ph. (616) 526-7744
rjv25@calvin.edu

We are happy to welcome Ruth Vis '76 as Calvin’s new associate director of gift planning. She comes to us from JPMorgan Chase where Ruth worked in various capacities, most recently as public affairs officer and grantmaker for West Michigan. Ruth has partnered with Calvin in many ways through the years. She is a member of the Calvin College Alumni Choir, serves on the Grand Rapids Calvin Around Town Committee, and has served on the Board of Trustees and Campaign Steering Committee. Please join us in welcoming Ruth!

...faithful to our heirs

You Still Have Time to Contribute to Our Campaign

During the Campaign for Calvin College, many alumni and friends have notified the college of their intent to make a planned gift to Calvin and have also indicated the estimated value of their estate. In fact, planned gifts account for 20% of the campaign gift total to date. We are very grateful!

Prior to the conclusion of the Campaign for Calvin College on June 30, 2009, we encourage you to notify the college of your planned gift and/or the estimated amount of your estate. Planned gifts can be counted toward the campaign goal according to the following guidelines:

Age of Donor(s)	Percentage of gift counted
75	100%
70	75%
65	50%
60	25%

Thank you for your faithfulness to Calvin and your investment in the college. Thank you also for notification of your planned gift, a gift that will benefit our current campaign and, more important, will strengthen Calvin College for generations to come.

You can use the form in this newsletter to indicate the estimated value of your planned gift to Calvin. Thank you!



Aaron Winkle and Larry Louters with Dr. Spoelhof at his 97th birthday celebration.



Protect Your Potential Beneficiaries

There are many ways to structure a bequest to Calvin College. For instance, you can designate a specific asset or a specific dollar amount. Many of our friends find it is prudent to make a gift of a certain percentage of their estates.

Why? By making a gift of a percentage of your assets, you can guard against inadvertently diminishing provisions for other beneficiaries—and you can allow your gift to grow proportionally if your assets grow.

Example: *Mary G. is thinking of making a gift of \$500,000 to Calvin. Her estate is currently worth \$2,000,000, and she intends that her three children will divide the balance equally.*

Under Mary's current plan, if her assets shrink to \$1,000,000

at the time of her death her children will divide only \$500,000 (\$166,667 apiece) instead of the \$1,500,000 she had contemplated, while Calvin would receive the \$500,000 gift.

If instead Mary were to designate 25% of her estate to benefit Calvin, we would receive the percentage she had in mind if the value of her assets remains essentially stable. But if the value were to change—either up or down—the value of her gift to Calvin would always stay in the same proportion to those of her children.

For more information, please return the enclosed reply card to request a complimentary copy of our booklet, **Planning Your Will for All It's Worth.**

William Spoelhof Faculty Research Fund in the Humanities

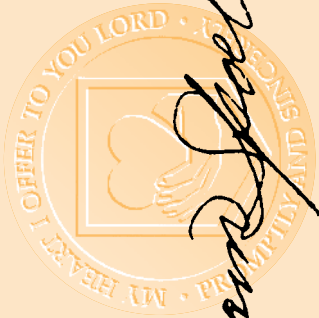


Memorial gifts in honor of Dr. Spoelhof will be collected in an endowment that will support faculty research in the humanities at Calvin. This reflects his deep interest in scholarship and his love for history and what it tells us about who we are. Gifts may be made to the William Spoelhof Faculty Research Fund in the Humanities.

grateful to our ancestors

...faithful to our heirs

The William Spoelhof Society



A NEWSLETTER OF PHILANTHROPY AND GIFT PLANNING

Dear Friends:

As so many of you know, Dr. William Spoelhof died peacefully on December 3, 2008, at the age of 99. His passing marks the end of seven decades of service to Calvin—a college that he loved dearly. In this spring issue of the *William Spoelhof Society* newsletter, we reflect on the life and work of the wonderful man whose name our society bears. We have included a special tribute written for Dr. Spoelhof's memorial service by Abram Van Engen '03.

Thank you for your gifts that help Calvin carry on Dr. Spoelhof's important legacy of training godly leaders for service in the kingdom.



Sally Vander Ploeg

Sally J. Vander Ploeg, J.D., C.P.A.

Director of Gift Planning and Major Gifts

svploeg@calvin.edu

Office of Gift Planning, Calvin College

CALVIN
College

Development Office

3201 Burton Street SE

Grand Rapids, MI 49546

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