

Foreword.

I am somewhat diffident about writing down some of my experiences in life, after reaching this age. I do it diffidently because it concerns myself. I have often been asked to write my biography and to publish it, because I have had a long and active life. At the approximate age of 30 years I became a minister in this land, at the time that our church was small and despised, and in the course of 43 years I was privileged to serve eight churches, and was involved in much of the history of our church. Especially our brother Dr. Henry Beets urged me once again to do so.

I never kept any notes of my life's experiences, and when discussing this matter with friends I would say that I do not care to present the dark side, and to picture the bright side only would be one-sided and untrue. It would then become a sort of conversion story, and that did not appeal to me. In fact, I was a bit afraid of that; never cared to read conversion stories, because I was afraid that such things were often being used as a criterion for one's own experiences, which is wrong and can be harmful. The leading of the Holy Spirit differs in so many instances; it adjusts itself to so much in our life, and moves toward God's purpose for us. God's Word only is the touchstone to be used in judging our life; not another person's conversion experience. The various instances of conversion related in the Scriptures make this very clear. Compare the conversion of Saul with that of Lydia; of Zacchaeus with that of the jailer at Philippi; or, if you will, of John the Baptist with that of the thief on the cross. Therefore you will not read a history of my conversion, nor a history of the church, for Dr. Henry Beets has done that very efficiently.

It is my wish that my contribution may find favor with the Lord and may serve to edify the reader.

Now that I have grown old, and am resting from the care of the church, I set myself to relate something about my life history, and will try to do so as objectively as possible.

Although it will relate to my person, let no one expect a conversion story nor a church history, for Dr. H. Beets has already provided the latter.

Let me tell you something about:

- I. My childhood.
- II. My youth.
- III. My departure for North America.
- IV. My 43 years of service as a minister.
- V. My retirement years.

## Chapter I.

### My childhood

I consider the first twelve years of my life my childhood years, and will say this about those years. I was born December 27, 1839, in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Province of Groningen, the village of Miezijl.

My parents were Aldert Noordewier and Trijntje Noordewier, nee Mulder. I recall them with profound esteem and appreciation, acknowledging that our parentage is not a matter of unconcern. They were considered to be among the most distinguished citizens of the little village, since they were people of excellent morals and possessed a large degree of common sense, all of which may be considered a blessing for their children. Although they - especially my father - were of lowly birth, both were intellectually well developed, and my father had a good handwriting and was quick at figures, and even as a young man gained a good reputation in many circles. I recall quite clearly that the mayor often employed him to do some written work, although he was a humble shoemaker. And mother was a quiet but worthy housewife and mother.

They had five children, of whom I was the first. Our names were: Jacob, Tonnis, Eije, Cornelis, and Maria. At this writing only my brother Eije remains; the others have passed away. Cornelis and Maria died at a youthful age, and brother Tonnis on August 7, 1913.

Miezijl is a little village in the western part of the province of Groningen, and in my youth it had a population of approximately 500. The only church was Netherlands Reformed, in which the Reformed doctrine had been lost. In that church I was baptized and received my first catechetical instruction. I recall that the minister did not believe in eternal punishment, and that he could talk very nicely about the outer darkness: God was in the center of heaven, and was surrounded by the heavenly host. Those that were at the extreme edge of the circle were farthest from the light, and were therefore in the outer darkness. My father became increasingly dissatisfied with the preaching. He was not only possessed of common sense, but also had a better knowledge of the truth than many of his fellow villagers, and often gave evidence of his love for the doctrine of grace. Mother followed her husband in all things, but her knowledge of the doctrine of grace and of the entire Holy Scriptures was less clear, although she was well-meaning and upright.

It seems that my desire for learning developed at an early age. We lived near the school, and my father took me to the school when I was only  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years old. When I was eleven I had to leave school to learn the shoemaker's trade. I do not recall what textbooks we used, but we did learn the Bible stories. Our teacher was Mr. Timmer, a good man who taught us many things; we were in school only to learn, not to play. We also received many lessons dealing with our conduct outside of the school, in connection with our fellowmen, and in all of life. The old teacher was generally beloved, although the teaching was not always as definitely Christian as it ought to be. I recall that I was generally number one in the class, and that I was quite proficient in figures and in writing.

As I have stated, our parents were members of the Netherlands Reformed church, but father especially became more and more dissatisfied with the preaching, and did not hide that fact. This became evident especially at the birth and baptism of the fourth child; I think it was in 1847. Then father came to the point at which he could no longer answer the questions of the formulary for baptism, especially this: "that the doctrine which is taught in this Christian church is the true and complete doctrine of salvation." My father could no longer agree with this, and he went to see Rev. Beegman, his minister at that time, and explained his difficulty to him. If my memory does not deceive me, the minister did not become angry, but he said: "Well, master, I am sorry about that, but your child can still be baptized, and you need not answer those questions, but may remain silent." And so it happened, but father was not satisfied, and felt that it could not remain thus. Now there had arisen since 1834 several churches of the Secession. One was located near Miezijl, and father began to attend there. Often I would go with him to Burum in Friesland, to hear Rev. Strik, or to Eumatil -  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hour walk from us - where Rev. Knol was the minister, and it soon became evident that there were others who thought the same as Mr. Noordewier.

In the winter of 1850 my father and seven others were instrumental in establishing a

Secession Christian Reformed Church in Niezijl. A barn with a thatched roof was acquired and used as a church. The majority of the villagers bitterly ridiculed the building. Thus, at the age of eleven I became a part of the circle of Cocksians, hated by the citizenry, without understanding the meaning of it all, or being able to calculate the consequences for myself and others. I recall the remark of one man who said: "Well, that old barn will make a fine storage place for me." Others became abusive, and there were some who made plans to murder the ministers who conducted the services there. It seemed that Satan foresaw what was to take place, and much did take place, for after some time large crowds streamed to that old barn to attend worship services there, and the Hervormde church was almost empty. Hundreds were converted, and many of that group later became ministers of the Word.

Now my father, or rather my parents entered a period of struggle. In May, which according to custom was the month in which the farmers and town people came to pay their bills, there were many signs of enmity. One said: "Master, you have now become a Seceder, and you must expect to lose half of my trade." Another said: "You will get no more jobs from me; you have lost my trade, etc." It seemed that my father's business would be ruined, but this could not persuade him to become untrue to his God and to the truth, and eventually the results were not quite as disastrous as they seemed to be, although he did not see much of that.

A much more severe blow occurred in our family circle when my father died during the summer of 1852. Our village was visited by an epidemic of malignant fevers, which caused 26 deaths during that year. My father was one of the victims, and he died at the age of 42. There was much sadness in the village, and especially in our family. Think of a family consisting of a man, wife, and five children, of whom the oldest was only 12. Mother was the first to be attacked, then the four younger children, and finally my father. The business was at a standstill, for all avoided our house. The hired man had nothing to do, and two female servants took care of the sick. One of these stole everything that she could lay hands on. It was a dreadful situation. When my father became ill he immediately lost consciousness, and remained so for three weeks, but the last day of his life, which was a Sunday, his mind was clear throughout the day, and he testified of his hope of eternal life. I recall clearly that I was standing outside at the open door, for all doors and windows were open that summer day, and I heard someone ask him: "How are things with you?", and he answered loudly: "I am going directly to Jesus." Thus he entered eternal rest, and is now rejoicing before God's throne. I have often wondered about the fact that the Lord gave us this glorious testimony of my father, so that we might know that He is faithful, and He is a refuge from death, and will seal the walk of the upright with His light.

At the time of father's death mother was so ill that she was not aware of having lost her husband, and when someone told her she said: "That is good." Mother recovered very slowly, but had to continue life with five children, the oldest 12½ years, who is the writer of these lines.

As a child I was small of posture, but quick and of a cheerful disposition. Did I fear the Lord? I have very little recollection of this from my childhood years. Only this. I was about ten years old when Rev. Entingh came to visit us, and asked me: "What is your name, my boy?" I answered: "Jacob, dominie." Then he said: "May you truly become an Israelite." That word touched me, and I have never forgotten it. And yet I do not know whether it had much influence on my conversion. I was a child like all children, conceived in sin, and born in unrighteousness, and I lived in that knowledge. I remember nothing further, although we often heard from father and the Seceder preachers that we must be converted; and that was something new, for in the Hervormde church in our village we never heard such a thing.

This is about all that I can recall of my childhood years, and I must continue with my further life. The reader will not take it ill of me that I said more about my parents than about myself.

## Chapter II

### My youth

The foregoing dealt with my childhood years, up to the death of my unforgettable father, when I was 12½ years old. I will now tell you something about my youth, up to the age of 27, at which time I left the old fatherland and went to North America. This is a period of 15 years which I spent in my mother's home as her eldest son.

After my father's death my mother was in difficult circumstances with her five children. They were too young to understand the real situation. Only two years had elapsed since my father as head of the family, had united with the hated Seceders, and one after the other had said: "You have lost half of my trade", or "You will get no more trade from me," etc. Much of the storm had abated, but the illness in the family and my father's death had cost several hundred guilders. Also, the wages of two hired men had to be paid from the income of the business, but the income was not sufficient to pay all debts. I was quick at figures and writing, so mother appointed me to be the bookkeeper. With an alert mind and a somewhat frivolous nature, my special talents presented some real dangers, although I did not think about that at the time.

As the eldest son and mother's right hand I was a sort of strawboss at home, and that was a bit dangerous for me. I did not go to excesses and was not outwardly irreligious. Indeed, I shunned untruths, rough language and cursing. And yet I was an enemy of God and His service. I did not attend church any oftener than required, but rather played along the way, and that, of course, on Sunday, because I had to work the other days of the week. But when I was playing along the road on Sunday my conscience troubled me, and I felt ashamed in the presence of the people that were walking to church. I was especially afraid of a certain Frissers, who was nicknamed "the tall Frissers". He was in the habit of stopping to talk to those that he met, and when I saw him coming I beat a retreat. I knew very well that he was like my father in his religious convictions, and he always reminded me of my father's last words: "I am going directly to Jesus." My conscience was much more tranquil when I went to church with mother, although we were subjected to ridicule. I did notice on occasion that those who ridiculed us on Sunday for attending the Secession church would bring their shoes for repair on Monday or Tuesday, and therein I acknowledged God's goodness, for we were much in need of the earnings of the business. Thus the Lord provided for us through our enemies.

Our living was quite scanty, for the wages of two hired men had to be paid from the income of the business, and mother had five children to support. During the first years after father's death the returns really were not sufficient for the family's existence, and when I checked the books with mother and noticed the deficit I became dejected and said that we could no longer continue; that we would be reduced to poverty. But mother was always wonderfully calm and serene. In those days I often visited father's grave, to complain that he had gone from us. Often I wept bitter tears; I could not understand nor agree that it could be squared with God's goodness that He had taken such a good father from us. I believed that God had done it, but still felt that it was not right, because we had such great need of a godfearing father. Sometimes I marvelled that God took such good care of us, but yet I felt that things would have been better if father were still here.

At times I was very much dissatisfied, although later I learned to see things in a better light, especially when I began to think more earnestly about my spiritual condition and the life to come. However, I cannot say that these things caused me much concern before my 16th year, although I knew that I was not right before God. But when I became 16 I became seriously concerned, especially about baptism. My parents had told me that I was baptized, but I had never thought of the significance for me, neither had anyone stressed its significance, to the best of my knowledge. We were told that we must be converted, but the importance of baptism was not very clear to me. I cannot explain it, but I was made conscious of its significance, and thought much about its meaning. The promise: "I am your God and the God of your seed" was ever in my mind, and I knew that it must have meaning for me.

Although I was baptized in the Hervormde church, and father had led us out of that church, I judged that the baptism was valid, because it was administered in the name of the Trinity, and that was enough for me. But I realized that it must have personal significance for me, and that gave me much food for thought, and made me anxious and burdened about my soul's welfare. I began to believe that the promise: "I am your God and the God of your seed" was also

for me. I was baptized in that Name, and the God in Whose Name I was baptized had promised to be my God. I felt that I believed that, but in every covenant there are contained two parts, and this drew my attention. God had indeed said: "I am your God and the God of your seed", and I believed that He would hold to that promise, but I had never accepted that covenant. I had never said: "Lord, I want to be Thy servant", and since there are two parts to every covenant I must come to that acceptance.

Now I must state that in those days we received very little instruction in the doctrine of the covenant. We lived in a more or less Labadistic view, and parents who had not yet made profession of their faith nevertheless brought their children to be baptized, and responded to the questions of the formulary as if they were believers. I am not sure that I was burdened by that fact, but as stated above I thought much about my baptism. Conversion was considered to be necessary, but it was presented to us without reference to baptism and covenant.

Therefore it was a bit strange that this matter should constantly occupy my thoughts, but it was so, and was probably related to my future life. These considerations convinced me that my heart was not yet ready to serve God, and that I must have a new heart which desired and was able to serve Him. I prayed constantly and fervently for such a changed heart, but kept it hidden from others. I sought many hidden spots where I might pray that God would give me a heart to serve Him, and incline me to accept the covenant, and receive me as His child. At times the vain things of this life seemed to smother these thoughts, although the inner struggle remained. Especially on the Sunday I avoided the evil, such as skating in which I was proficient and which I enjoyed so much, although mother did not say much about it. I must give up all that I considered to be sinful. I was a changed man, attended worship regularly, and read the Bible and famous writers constantly. I had changed and improved so much that, in the opinion of others, I lived a good life, and sometimes shared that opinion.

I not only avoided frivolous company but also admonished my former companions to be converted. How did I get to that point? Because of my natural quickness my companions usually sought me out, and though I withdrew they came again to invite me to join them. Sometimes I ignored them, but at other times I told them that we might not do such things, and then I admonished them to be converted. Often I would be ridiculed, and sometimes they said: "Let him go, he is going mad."

Sometimes I pitied myself because the world meant nothing to me, but yet I did not dare to call myself a child of God. I felt miserable and began to look thin and shrunken. Some folks thought that I had tuberculosis. At the age of 17 I had learned the barber trade, in order that I might earn some spending money. But that caused difficulty, because I did not dare to do this work on Sunday. Neither did I dare to refuse and thus to take a stand against my customers, so I would walk into the fields in order to escape the worldly people. I might not work on the Lord's day, but it was often difficult to explain this to adults and to people upon whom we depended for our daily bread. And yet I recall that sometimes I would discuss it quite boldly with the greatest enemies, and at such times I was in my element. Pious young people sought me out and enjoyed my company. But much of the time I could not believe that I belonged to the people of God. It was worth more to me to be one of them than to possess all the world and its riches, but I dared not appropriate it to myself. I was so miserable that I felt no one could be more unhappy than I.

One day some of my friends urged me to accompany them to Enumatil, to join a discussion group which was dealing with matters of the soul. I went reluctantly, and sat in a corner so that I would not be noticed. But I was not entirely unknown, and the leader of the group had the audacity to ask me directly whether I was converted. That was too much to dare to give an affirmative answer, and I said: "No, not that," and the man could get no further word out of me. It surely was not a sensible way of finding out where I stood spiritually. Quietly I stole out of the room and started for home, a walk of 1½ hours. I was burdened and ashamed, especially because I had denied that I was converted. I was not sure of it, but if I really was converted I had denied God's grace, and that also troubled me. Alas, I did not know what to think about myself, and I pursued my way perplexed and groaning.

In those days Rev. R. Duiker was minister in Niezijl. In spite of the changes and improvements in my life I still lacked peace with God. Vanity often spoiled the enjoyment of life, and then I would become despondent. Life was unsteady. Sometimes I opposed all vanity and vain conversation, and preached penitence to my companions. But at other times I was overcome by evil, and peace with God seemed to be unattainable for me. One Sunday evening, when I was about 20 years old, I went out to skate again. I was a great lover of that sport, although I had not practiced it for some time. Now I tried it again, and as was customary among the young folks in those days, I landed in the saloon. The gaiety deteriorated into rowdiness, worse than ever before, and continued until a voice seemed to ask me whether I was in the right place. I was so mortified that I left quickly, and on the way home I hid behind a hedge, and as a condemned man I bowed before God with bitter tears. I signed my death warrant, but pleaded for life.

But still I was not at peace. I attempted in every way to mend my ways, for I truly desired peace with God. For a long time I thought that I was anxious to become reconciled to God, but that God was unwilling to be reconciled to me. I could not understand this because I was so anxious. The ability for me, as an enemy, to become reconciled to God through the death of His Son was a mystery to me, and I labored as if I could attain peace as a well-meaning friend of God. This continued until a day when Rev. Duiker preached on "Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth." That made it more clear to me than ever before that I was an enemy of God, but in that way I must and could be reconciled to God. From that time on I was able to give myself to God without any reservations, to be saved by Him and received as His child. This gave me peace, and I was His forever.

During that time the Holy Spirit worked mightily in the church at Niezijl, and many were brought into the church. It also became a festive time for me, and we talked about God and His service day and night. I was privileged to serve many with counsel and direction. However, I had not yet made profession of faith. I was indeed made welcome to join in the fight, but that sounded very strange to me, for the fight was behind me, as I thought. All was peace and joy.

But in those days it was considered best to let a season pass before coming to the decision to make profession of faith, for conversion was the important thing. Leadership was lacking somewhat in pointing to the necessity of living by the Covenant. I am afraid that at the present time we have gone to another extreme. Sometimes I felt emboldened to profess my faith, but at such time the consistory was not in session. Often I went to the parsonage, but then I thought of the minister and the elders as angels, and I lost courage. This state of affairs continued until a day when Mrs. Duiker said to me: "You may have to do it in the face of a feeling of darkness", and so it did happen.

Finally I dared delay no longer, and after taking this step I experienced a comforting peace. Those were great days and nights, with prayer, reading of Scripture, discussion, and song. Mockers said: "They are stricken with a contagious soul-sickness." In those days I often officiated as the leader and counselor in the gatherings of the devout. The new converts often came to me for advice, and I was much in the company of our spirited Rev. Duiker. From time to time I taught his catechism classes, and was always in the front ranks. When a Sundayschool and a Mission Society were organized, I was one of the first to assist Rev. Duiker, and in Kommerzijl I taught a catechism class.

I was often urged to apply for preparation for the ministry, but although my inclination led in that direction nothing ever came of it. In this connection I had a pleasing encounter. Another young man and I were reading a sermon, after mother and the others had gone to bed. We took great pleasure in this, and walked and talked far into the night. When I finally went to bed, and knelt in prayer before going to sleep, my heart filled with pride, and it seemed that someone whispered to me that I might some day become a minister. I felt that this was Satan's work and was deeply ashamed, but I continued in prayer until I was able to say: "Depart from me, Satan; I am God's child, and you have no claim on me." I was delivered from his attack, and went to sleep. Satan knew that I had a desire to enter the ministry, and used that knowledge as an occasion to disturb me.

In 1866 a call was issued for young men to be trained for missionary service and I, with other young men, went to Kampen to apply. That was a curious story. After the call was issued

it was found that the first two missionaries of the Christian Reformed Church, C.de Best and B.Veenstra, were having difficulties and would be obliged to leave the field. I do not know the details, but the brothers who were charged with the administration of mission matters were burdened with it, and did not know how to handle it. Our group of applicants did get to Kampen, and we were interrogated, but for the time being no appointments were made, and we returned to our homes without having attained our desires.

In spite of this, I was not very much disappointed, perhaps because I had not dared to believe that I should become a missionary. It did appeal to me, however, and I thought that I should like to do that work. Later, I was informed that my name was at the top of the list, and I was asked to make myself available in the event that another call would be issued during the year. But I did not go again; my path seemed to lead in another direction.

On the way home from Kampen I became convinced, by prayer and meditation, that I should become a minister of the gospel in a foreign land. But how, where, and when? All of this was hidden from me. During the following winter Rev.Duiker received a call from the church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A. Soon after that I visited him, as I often did. In his peculiar way he said: "Jack, I have a call from North America, and if I accept it you will go with me, wont you?" I answered in the same spirit: "Of course I'll go with you." On my way home I mused about these things, and about the impressions I had received in Kampen, and I prayed to God that, if this was His plan for my future, He would also enable my mother to let me go. When I applied for missionary training at Kampen this matter had not entered my mind, but now it became a problem for me, because as the oldest son I was managing the business for my mother. I immediately made it a matter of prayer.

Rev.Duiker wanted me to ask my mother, and when I presented the matter to her and asked her whether I might go, she said very quietly: "Well, what can I say? Both you and Tonnis seem to have your hearts set on the ministry, and I cannot keep you from that." Mother knew that my brother Tonnis and I loved to study, and were receiving some instruction from Rev. Duiker. And now she said: "You are old enough to decide that for yourself, and if you think this is the way you had better go." That was a weight lifted from my shoulders, and I thanked mother, but said: "Then I will also need money to pay for my trip." She asked how much I would need, and I answered: "250 guilders; half of it for the trip, and if I cannot stay there I will need some money to come back."

At that time I was 27 years old, and had always lived with mother and the other children without a cent of my own, for we lived on a communal plan, and got along quite well.

In connection with the foregoing I must tell you a story. On a certain day I was at work, and feeling very dissatisfied. It seemed unfair to be forever working for mother and the younger brothers and sister, and never to have a cent of my own. I was grumbling to myself, and thinking that if I ever stepped out on my own I wouldn't have a cent. Suddenly the parable of the prodigal son came to my mind, especially the words of the elder brother who said to his father; "I have served you these many years, and you never gave me a kid that I might make merry with my friends." That was exactly my position. I was getting older, penniless and discontented. While pondering these things I was struck by the father's answer: "Son, you are always with me, and all of mine is yours." This deeply impressed me, and I said to the Lord: "Yes Lord, all that my mother possesses is mine, and I am always with her. Further, I believe that I am Yours, and all of Yours is mine. Oh, deliver me from my discontent." And truly, I was delivered forever. I never felt sorry for myself again. At this writing more than a half century is past, and I have never been short of money. God has always supplied all of my needs. What a blessing the fear of the Lord is, also for youth. And how sad that children, already at an early age, feel that they should board with their parents as if they were strangers, and then act accordingly. Young people, remember that if we fear the Lord, and He gave us His Son, 'will He not also give us all things?'

Now we prepared for our journey to a strange land -- North America. Quite a large group was preparing to go with Rev.Duiker, and to attempt to improve living conditions in America. This caused quite a commotion in our village; and it was to be the means by which I would

become a minister of the gospel in a foreign land. I had never felt a special desire to go to that country, although I knew that Rev.D.J.Vander Werp of Burum, Friesland, had gone there. Also Rev.W.H.Frieling, who had stopped at the parsonage in Niezijl on his way to America in 1866, and I had been present. But at that time I had an aversion to going to North America. And yet I went the following year, 1867, and arrived in Grand Rapids, Michigan on June 18th.

I wanted to tell you these things concerning my youth, and how the Lord was gracious to me, and cared for my mother and all of us; He, Who is a Father of the fatherless and a Judge of the widows. God had delivered us from great anxieties, and since I was 21 my brothers and I worked for mother and made a living. Thus the Lord fulfilled His promises also to us. I have given you a brief story of my youth, and will now proceed to an account of my departure for America.

### Chapter III My departure for North America

As stated previously, I had offered my services for heathen missions as late as 1866. However, at that time no applicants were accepted. I was not seriously disappointed by this fact, but on my homeward journey, by prayer and meditation, I began to believe that I would one day become a minister of the gospel in a foreign land. Reading of literature relating to mission work at our young men's society had created a desire in my heart to become a missionary to the heathen. But God's ways were otherwise. I am sure that it was not a sinful thought which prompted me to offer myself for that work. But God prevented it, and later developments proved that I was not intended for it, but that another task awaited me. Later I often said to myself that God's Providence is a wonderful and good gift of God, because I was not equipped and therefore not destined for that work, and now something came up to interfere with it.

The Lord now opened the way for me to become a minister of the gospel in a foreign land, by virtue of Rev.Duiker's call to Grand Rapids. When Rev.Duiker told me that he had received the call, and that he wanted me to go with him, I made it a matter of prayer. Especially that one request that the Lord would incline my mother's heart to let me go. That was the most important for me, and it was no small matter for my mother. As the oldest son I managed the ~~family~~ family business, and if I left would she ever see me again? My brother Tonnis could have taken my place, but he also wanted to enter the ministry, and mother knew it. There were two other sons to carry on the business, but they were younger. But mother calmly gave permission for me to go.

It caused quite a commotion in our little village when a fairly large number of people prepared to go with Rev.Duiker to the strange West, to North America. Some jeered, and others pitied us. In May 1867 we traveled via Scotland, and had to wait in Glasgow nine days for a ship that would take us across the ocean. The steamship company took good care of us, and we were able to see quite a bit of the old city. We were of good courage, and occasionally sang some of our beautiful Psalms. I recall that on one occasion we sang Psalm 134. The melody of that Psalm was well known to the Scots, and they enjoyed our singing, and cried: "Sing again, sing again!", and then we would repeat it.

Toward the end of May we were ready to sail. After an enjoyable ocean voyage of 16 days we arrived in New York, and were now in the new world. We were taken to what was then known as Castle Garden. Everything was strange, and we were obliged to let ourselves be transported as living freight, for we did not understand the language. After a tedious five day train journey we arrived in Grand Rapids on June 18, 1867. I recall that I had my first noonday meal at the home of Cornelis Moelker on North Ottawa Street, and it tasted very good. So I had finally arrived in this strange land, to become a minister of the gospel, according to the desires of my heart.

We found one church of our denomination, and the church building was located on Ionia Street. It was a frame building, 60 X 40 feet, if I am not mistaken. The parsonage was located on Spring Street. It was an insignificant congregation. There were about a dozen small churches in the area, with the ministers K.Vanden Bosch, D.J.Vander Werp, W.H.Van Leeuwen, and W.H. Frieling, and now Rev.Duiker was added to that number. All of these had returned from the Reformed Church since 1857. I do not intend to write a history of our church, because all of



that has been covered in the history of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, by Dr.H.Beets, and in a book by Prof.G.K.Hemkes, entitled "The Right of Existence of our Church."

Our people had to obtain their ministers from the Netherlands, because the return from the Reformed Church was started mainly by the common church people and consistory members. Only one minister, Rev.K.Vanden Bosch, supported them. These people realized, however, that they could not depend upon ministers from the Netherlands, and they had already begun to train young men for the ministry before our arrival. In the beginning, Rev.Van Leeuwen conducted some of these classes, but later the work was assigned to Rev.D.J.Vander Werp, who continued in that function for eleven years.

Soon after our arrival the Classis met, and Rev.Duiker asked me whether he should present my name as a prospective student. I answered: "No, I must first get acquainted with conditions and methods in this place." Of course, Rev.Duiker did mention my name and my ambition. For the time being I remained at his home as a boarder, and also received some instruction from him. A room in the Spring Street parsonage was assigned to me to be used as a study. That was the beginning of my training for the ministry in a land where everything was strange to me, and I did not know what the outcome would be. However, Grand Rapids was my college town; Rev. Duiker my beloved professor; a room in the parsonage my study; and I, father Duiker's only ~~student~~ student. I still had \$50, and studied, or rather lived on my own, without knowing what the results would be, for in the eyes of the world and of the Reformed church the church that we found here was very poor and insignificant. But we were of good courage, and I believed that I was walking in the Lord's way. At times things seemed very strange to me, and I wondered how I could ever have left my mother, brothers, and sister. At such moments I sometimes thought that this was the most foolish action that I could have taken.

When I received a letter from home I opened and read it on the way home from the Post Office, and sometimes the tears would flow. However, I was generally of good courage, believing that I was in the way which would lead to my desires. Sometimes I was called upon to defend the action of our people. I definitely recall that I was walking with a young man, a student of the Reformed Church, whose name I will not mention, while we were on our way to school to learn the English language. Whenever we met our conversation often dealt with the church; the Reformed Church, and the return of our people from that church. Occasionally this young man would speak scornfully and humiliatingly about the lack of erudition of our ministers, and would say: "Nothing will ever come of your church. Very little can be accomplished with men who are quite ignorant of what is going on." He seemed to take pleasure in speaking deprecatingly about our ministers. This hurt me, and I said to him: "Is it good and sensible to look down upon our ministers, and to deduce from their lack of learning that nothing good can come of our church? That really conflicts with history, and reflects a lack of knowledge of human nature. You ought not to be so scornful of our ministers just because they may lack a complete education; but they are godfearing men. We also desire to enter the ministry, and how would you like it if we were looked upon with contempt? I don't think we would appreciate it. But there is more. God's church is also small and despised in the eyes of the world, and many things have small beginnings. In the church the most important is not what and how much one knows, but whether God will use him."

I mentioned two ministers who were known to him, -- Rev.Vande Berekamp of Grootegast, and Rev.Hessels of Burum. The first a very simple and not very learned man of few talents, for which reason people sometimes smiled about him; the other a man of much greater talent, who was widely known, and of whom it was said that he presented something new every Sunday. Then I asked him who of these two is most blessed in his labors, and he was forced to grant that God had often blessed the labors of the former for the conversion of sinners. Then I said: "If God will use such a person we must also be willing to do so, and it is wrong and dishonors God to scorn them. We must refrain from such action. If God is willing to use our ministers, our church can become a blessing."

Although our church was unimpressive, I was never offended by that fact. I had found ministers and people from the Secession church in the Netherlands, and I was of the same stock. I was able to judge that we were the same as our people in the Netherlands. It was more difficult to pass judgment on the Reformed Church, with which our people had imprudently united in 1849. I was inclined to agree with Wilhelmus Brakel, who said: "One ought not to retreat ~~with~~

within himself, but to unite with the church." This implies that we should be able to judge whether the church with which we unite confesses the same Lord and the same doctrines. Many opinions were expressed about the Reformed Church, both good and evil, but that was not my chief concern. I knew that our people and our ministers were the same as those in the Netherlands. I was able to judge this, and that was sufficient for me at that time. I was at rest with the despised little group, and have remained with them until the present time.

When I had been here three months my \$50 was used up, and I was forced to apply to Classis for aid. With a recommendation from the consistory of the Spring Street church I made application, and the Classis accepted me and granted me \$50 per quarter, to be repaid later if possible. Thus I was able to continue in my chosen way.

At that time Rev.D.J.Vander Werp taught the students for the ministry, but by common consent I remained with my old teacher, Rev.Duiker. What subjects were taught? I hardly recall the primitive methods. First, the literary subjects, and later theology. At a later date I will reproduce the diploma which I received when I completed my studies, together with the subjects in which I was examined. I do recall that I often sat and wept, behind the church, wondering how I could ever become a minister. In the Netherlands Rev.Duiker had often employed me to teach catechism classes. I had conducted Sundayschool and Mission Society meetings, and had also conducted worship services in the company of believers, and family worship in my mother's home. I had also served as reader and precentor in the church services. But to prepare sermons and to have the pastoral care of a congregation seemed beyond my ken, for my preparation was necessarily imperfect. I had never received any instruction in Homiletics, in order to learn how to preach.

On one occasion I was scheduled to deliver a trial sermon before my instructor, in his study. He sat at the table, and I stood behind it. Before I began he smiled, and I probably gave him cause to smile. I was unable to go through with it. Later I was obliged to mount the pulpit or platform without having any practice. My first examination sermon was based on 1 Cor.1:9, and it was judged quite favorably. When I had completed a year of study it was stated that W.Greve and J.Stad would soon be examined for candidacy, and my instructor told me that I must also submit to the examination at that time. He said that if they could do it I could also. No more English lessons, but prepare for examination. This was done. The examination was taken after 18 months of study. We preached our sermons, submitted to an oral examination, and were approved for candidacy in the ministry of Word and Sacraments, and declared eligible for a call. Now I was really a candidate for the ministry, and could hardly believe that it was true.

I will reproduce here the recommendation from the consistory for admission to the studies, and the Classical diploma.

To the Classis.

Esteemed Brethren:

The consistory of the church at Grand Rapids herewith recommends to you Jacob Noordewier, who desires to be trained for the ministry in our churches. And since he is without means he requests financial aid from the Student Fund. He has lived among us for the past three months, and we have found him to be true in doctrine and life. The consistory also feels that he has aptitude for the ministry, is possessed of good judgment, and has special talents. We hope that the esteemed Classis will accept him, because he promises to become useful in the church of King Jesus. The Lord give you grace, esteemed brethren, to accept him in the fear of the Lord.

For the consistory, September 11, 1867,

Jacobus De Jonge, Clerk.

The Classical diploma reads as follows:

The committee appointed by Classis Michigan of the True Dutch Reformed Church in North America was convened in Holland, February 17 & 18, 1869, at which time Jacob Noordewier submitted to a preparatory examination, according to Article 8 of the church order of the Synod of Dordt 1618-19. Following the presentation

and approval of the recommendation of the church at Grand Rapids, he submitted an example of his talents by preaching a sermon based on 1 Cor.1:9. Afterward he was examined in various branches of Theology, Bible History, Geography, Chronology, Church--and General History, Dutch language, and Interpretation of the Bible. Thereupon the student Jacob Noordewier was declared capable of filling the office of Minister of the Word and Sacraments, and licensed to exhort in the churches, in order that he may entertain a call according to ecclesiastical rules. This diploma is presented to him, therefore, in the name of the Church, indicating that he is eligible for a call. We pray that Zion's King may command His blessing upon this action, and may anoint this brother with a rich measure of the Holy Spirit, in order that, following receipt of a call and submitting to a peremptory examination, he may be sent out to serve in the Lord's vineyard.

Done in Classis Michigan at Holland, Michigan, February 17 & 18, 1869.

For the Committee

D.J.Vander Werp, Clerk

W.H.Frieling, President

Now I was permitted to preach here and there and to entertain a call. I preached in Grand Haven, Muskegon, Grand Rapids, and Pella, but prior to my appearance in Pella I was seriously ill for four weeks, so that my life was despaired of. But I recovered completely.

My first task after my examination was an unusual one, and I will tell you about it because of what I learned on that occasion.

At the meeting when I was examined there appeared a man from Franklin, Illinois, named Brouwer, who stated that he was preaching for a group of people in that area, and they wanted to unite with our church. In order to obtain more definite information I was delegated to investigate, and to report to our body about my experience. I traveled to Franklin, Illinois, and was met at the depot by Mr. Brouwer, and then we traveled about ten miles into the country. At the first house where we applied for lodging we were refused with a cold: "We don't lodge sleepers." At the second place I was permitted to remain, and Mr. Brouwer walked back to his own home. I was asked to call on the people, and on Sunday each would preach once.

During my visits from house to house I could not find one person who knew anything about Brouwer's trip to Michigan, nor about the aim to be united with our churches. In fact none seemed to know much about religion nor to be much concerned about it, and I was unable to accomplish much. And yet Brouwer preached every Sunday (under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church as he said), and without pay. There wasn't even an offering taken, except when there was a visiting minister.

On Saturday I had a strange encounter, especially so for a young and inexperienced person as I was. While I was visiting in a home with three women a man came in who looked very undignified. He looked at me and asked: "Who are you?" I said: "My name is Noordewier, and such people are sometimes called 'dominie'". Then he said: "Have you come here to preach? That is not necessary. We can take care of that ourselves." I said: "Well, that is not so bad. We can sing together, but we cannot both be preaching. And since I am here you ought to give me a few feet of space, and grant me time to preach one sermon." He said: "What about? That man has a soul?" I said that I had not given much thought to that question, and asked: "Don't you folks have a soul?" He said: "Yes, the blood is the soul of man." I said: "Well, I am a young man, and I didn't know that, but now I have learned something."

I asked him: "Who built the houses and barns that I see here?" He answered: "The people did." I said: "That teaches me that there is something practical in that blood." He said: "Yes, and then you spiritualize the Bible." I asked: "Isn't that permitted?" He said: "Can you explain the books of Daniel and Revelations?" I said: "Certainly, because I am a scholar. But I was born in a land where one person did not monopolize everything. If you will explain one verse I hope to give you an explanation of those two books." He asked: "What must I do?" I said: "You explain Col.3:3."

Now he had to explain how the believers in Colosse who had died were yet alive. He couldn't do it, and refused to talk to me any longer, and raved that one always lost out in an argument with those black coats, etc. Then he left, and I was relieved of an impossible task.

The Sunday was not much better. When we came to the schoolhouse where Mr. Brouwer was to preach, the people were conversing about land and sand, and I also heard an occasional oath. But the preacher heard nothing of this, because he was deaf. And the preaching was wretched. He had a text, but didn't touch on it; merely talked at random. In the afternoon it was my turn to preach, and at that service an offering was taken to help defray the traveling expenses of the strange preacher. The offering amounted to \$1.80, and I, poor boy, had to travel from Grand Rapids to Franklin, Illinois and back, walk ten miles and preach once, all for \$1.80. That night I slept in Franklin, and developed quite a high fever. In the morning Brouwer came and knelt at my bed -- not to pray -- and asked me: "How are you, little brother?" I said: "A little better." He said: "I thought so, and I meant so well." I was tempted to laugh, and said: "That helps."

I could tell more stories about that trip, but merely mention it to show how necessary it is to conduct Home Missions in this land. Neglect has such dreadful results. I must add that this work demands men physically strong, level headed, and above all God fearing, and able to bear reproach for His sake. I returned to Grand Rapids and made my report, but never heard about the matter again.

Then I preached in Grand Haven, Muskegon, and Grand Rapids, after which I became ill, as stated previously. After my recovery in June I went to Pella, Iowa, where I preached six Sundays, was called, and accepted the call. Thus I began the life of a minister, and my friends pitied me because I was going to Pella, for in those days that town was notorious for the many deviating opinions, especially in connection with Chiliasm. At that time there were two churches west of Chicago -- Ridott, Illinois, and Pella, Iowa. But I was happy to go to Pella. My life's desire was being fulfilled, and that was all I wanted. God would care for my future.

On August 25, 1869 I was married to Johanna Hillegonda Gezon, and together we traveled Westward. I was to preach there again September 3, but could not take my Classical examination until the 23rd. Following a favorable examination I was ordained on October 10 by Rev. Jan Schepers of Chicago, and began my ministry with a sermon based on Psalm 51:14,15.

Now I was really a minister of the gospel in a foreign land, as I had expected and believed 2½ years previously. From this point forward I can now tell you about my 43 years of service. But before I do this I will reproduce my Classical diploma. It reads as follows:

L.S.

Classis Illinois of the True Dutch Reformed Church, in session September 23, 1869, in Chicago, examined Candidate Jacob Noordewier, after receiving and approving recommendations and proof of his preparatory examination, and since he declared that he received and accepted a call from the church in Pella he submitted to the peremptory examination. The examination covered the various subjects involved in this examination, and the brother evidenced competence in these subjects, wherefore the Classis confers upon him the right and authority not only to preach the gospel, but also after proper ordination, to administer the Sacraments, and to perform all tasks that belong to the office of Pastor and Teacher. May the King of the Church grant unto the brother His grace, enlightenment and power, and make him a blessing in Christ's church, and a power for breaking down the forces of darkness, to the honor and glory of our Triune God.

Done in our meeting in Chicago, Cook County, Illinois, September 23, 1869.

J. Schepers, President.  
J. R. Schepers, Clerk.

Chapter IV

My 43 years of service

My service as an ordained minister began October 10, 1869. On that day I was installed by Rev. J. Schepers, and preached my inaugural sermon on Psalm 51:14,15, as stated previously. I was then 29 years and 9 months of age, and dared not to think that I would be privileged to be active in this glorious work for so many years. When I became a minister our denomination consisted of only 18 churches. Only 12 years had elapsed since our people retraced their steps taken so rashly in 1849. The churches which existed in 1869 were: Grand Rapids, Graafschap, Holland, Niekerk, Noordeloos, Zeeland, Grand Haven, Chicago, Muskegon, Cincinnati, Pella, Paterson, Lafayette, Ridott, Wellsburg, Kalamazoo, Oostburg, and Vriesland. Only six ministers were available for these 18 churches. At that time I could not imagine that I would live to see our expansion to 241 churches with 176 ministers, and a Theological School and College with 18 professors and 400 students.

My first church in Pella was in a sad state, and there were many strained relations. My predecessor was Rev. Koopman. I am reluctant to go into detail concerning the unpleasantness. Rev. Koopman came to our church in Pella from the Reformed Church, and initially was very popular and gained many new members for the church. A new parsonage was built, a large brick house, but very impractical. While it was being built, conditions in Rev. Koopman's family went amiss, and the press of circumstances caused him to leave the church and the denomination. Many who had come into the church during his ministry left again. In such a confused situation, and with the parsonage only partly completed, I assumed the pastorate.

The population of Pella was a mixture of all sorts of people, and the church was not an easy field of labor. At that time the town was divided and confused religiously. I was told that on one Sunday religious services were held in 17 locations, and that with a population of 3,000, practically all of them Hollanders. That was the result of erroneous views of the Covenant and other deviations in doctrine. I considered myself fortunate to be able to remain within my own circle, and to remain aloof from all of those deviations. But sometimes, when I preached, and there were curiosity seekers in the audience, the pious were pleased, but others shrugged their shoulders about the simpleton, for they felt that I knew nothing about Chiliasm.

It is not strange that there were occasions when I felt that I must contradict some ideas which were voiced in the church. One member was quite impressed with witchcraft. Others were controlled by their feelings rather than faith. Thus there were two men who held extreme and opposite views on this subject, and were constantly bickering about it. The feelings-man would come to me to complain about the faith-man, and then I had to tell the weak brother that feelings must be the fruit of faith, and not vice versa. Later it became evident that the man with the strong faith also had his weakness. He came to complain about the potato beetle, which was then coming into the area. He told me that he would not dare to fight it, because it was God's judgment against sin, and we may not fight God. I asked him whether he had a plow and a harrow, and what he used them for. Of course he said that they were used to prepare the soil and to combat weeds. I asked him whether he did not believe that there were many thorns and thistles in life as a result of sin, and pointed out that if he did not care properly for his ground a potato blight might well result, while if he made use of the means he would be using the gifts of common grace, and might expect a blessing upon his labors; also that the same holds true with respect to spiritual life. He was soon convinced of the truth of this statement.

I also had the following experience with an elder. He asked me what I thought of the words of a poet in which he stated that the righteous shall inherit the earth. I answered that I would not dare to voice an opinion. This only served to make him the more eager to obtain my view. I told him that I would give it on condition that he, being older, would first give me his view, and he agreed. He told me that he believed that God's children possessed all of earth's goods by God's grace. I contended that this view was erroneous; in the first place because this was not stated in the text, which did indicate what they would inherit in the future, but not what they now possessed. Further, I judged that he was in error because some obtain earth's goods dishonestly, and not by God's grace.

Now he insisted on hearing my view, and I told him that was expressed in Peter's words: "Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." The believers will inherit and dwell on that earth. There will be no more sin upon earth, but it will be pure as heaven. They will go to heaven to inherit the earth, and delight in it. I added that the believers will then have a body like the glorious body of Christ, and they will go from heaven to earth as speedily as the angels. The man could hardly believe his ears, but we remained good friends.

This same man once said to me: "Dominie, you occasionally make mention of your personal experiences, and the people like it; you ought to do it oftener." I said: "My dear brother, I wouldn't dare; it would soon become old stuff. But I may not do it either. I must proclaim the Word; preach the Christ and not myself. If on occasion I do refer to my personal experiences it is not to be taken as a rule for the life of others. The touchstone for our faith is the Holy Scripture, the inspired Word of God. In that Word we will find the various leadings of the Holy Spirit."

The people were really willing to hear me, and from the beginning of my ministry I felt that I must guard against presenting my own experience as a model for others; all instruction and application must be drawn from the Word. I must have a fair understanding of the topics on which I preached, and there were many passages which I feared to use in preparing my sermons. I did not approve of risky ventures, and felt that I must step cautiously. And yet I had to revise my estimate of myself quite often in later years. The ministry is such an important matter that I often wondered how they dared to send me into the field. But it was done, and I had to make the best of it. I have often been amazed that people were willing to listen to me. The Lord never puts to shame His people that hope in Him. On the other hand, I did possess some courage, because I soon began to write articles for De Wachter, and early became involved in the life of the church.

Our people, who were not very demanding, thought I was someone to reckon with. I was wholeheartedly interested in the entire denomination; the service of one church was not sufficient for me. The consistory of the Pella church thought that the expense of attending ecclesiastical gatherings was too great, but I said: "Brethren, if that is not possible, I must leave." I needed the communion with all of our people, and I went, in spite of the cost.

The people of Pella heard my preaching for two years, and I will never forget my first church, which esteemed me so highly. After I had preached my farewell sermon on Ephesians 6:14 many were in tears and found it difficult to leave the sanctuary, and I felt very small. I shall never forget that esteem, and in later years, when some difficulty arose, it seemed to me that I should never have left Pella. And yet at the time I felt that I must go to Kalamazoo.

I decline a call received from Lafayette, Indiana, which I received October 24, 1870, and also the first call from Kalamazoo, received January 15, 1871. But when they called me again in June I felt that I must accept, and thus Kalamazoo became my second church, and I its first minister.

We became acquainted in a very unusual way. I was traveling with my wife from Pella to Grand Rapids, and we were delayed in Kalamazoo by high water. I said to my wife: "If you don't object I am going to walk into the town to see whether I can find any Hollanders." Walking along South Burdick Street I saw a man in his garden and asked him: "Are you a Hollander?" He answered: "Yes." Then I asked him: "Are there many Hollanders in this town?" He said: "Yes, quite a few." "Then there must be some Holland churches." "Not churches, but one church" he answered, "but there are several Cocksians who no longer attend our church." "Cocksians", I said; "I have heard of them in the Netherlands, and are they here also?" "Yes, there is one; his name is Hendrik De Kok." I said: "Well, there was a Hendrik De Kok in the Netherlands also, and he caused considerable commotion. Will you tell me where this De Kok lives? I should like to meet him." He pointed out the house, and I went there, without any awareness of my identity on the part of my informer. After a short conversation with De Kok he took me to the home of an elder, Hendrik Vander Velde, where we remained for the night. This acquaintanceship led to my receiving two calls.

After two years in Pella we went to Kalamazoo, where I was installed September 10, 1871, by my former instructor, Rev. R. Duiker, and preached my inaugural sermon on 2 Corinthians 2:16. This church was established in the year that I entered the ministry, and I was its first minister, but remained only 16 months. Were conditions unfavorable? No, not at all; everything was favorable, and I was blessed in my work. But it seemed that the church in Holland needed me.

They called me first in May 1872, when I had been in Kalamazoo only 8 months, but I did not want to go, nor dare to go. I didn't want to go because the church was troubled in many ways, and I didn't dare to go because Rev. F. Hulst had preceded me. He was possessed of much greater ability than I, and I judged that I would not be able to satisfy the Holland church. Therefore I did not consider the call, but immediately declined it.

A few months later I received a second call from Holland, delivered to my home by the brethren, who exerted considerable pressure, urging me to accept. This really became a matter of prayer, and I felt ashamed because I had treated the first call so lightly. I was forcibly reminded of the casting of the nets into the sea. Holland was a much larger congregation than Kalamazoo. My heart fainted within me, and I took the call letter into my prayer closet, and said to God: "If I must go to Holland, give me the courage and the inclination." The Lord gave it, and I accepted the call.

But now some complications arose. My wife and I had agreed to make a trip to the Netherlands to visit my mother and other relatives. She had never met my family. We had one child; another lived only 26 days. It seemed to us that this was the best time to go. We consulted the Holland consistory, the Classis, and my wife's parents, and all were agreeable. But Holland requested that I be first installed, so that I would be their minister in fact, and so it was done. The Sunday before Christmas 1872 I was installed by Rev. S. Baron; preached my inaugural in the afternoon on Ephesians 3:8, and a farewell in the evening service, based on Philippians 1:27,28, and the next morning we traveled to Grand Rapids, to bid farewell to the family there.

While in Grand Rapids we received word that the road to New York was blocked with snow, and we could not go immediately. I preached in Grand Rapids on Christmas day, New Year's eve, and New Year's day, and on January 2nd, 1873 we started for Paterson, New Jersey, having been instructed by the Classis to install Rev. F. Rederus in the Paterson church. We also visited in Hackensack, and saw a few American friends. We embarked January 18, and arrived in the old fatherland and in my birthplace, where we met my mother, brothers and sister. Jacob returned as Rev. Noordewier with a wife and child. We remained three months, with much pleasure, and I preached in various places. But the time for our return journey was approaching rapidly.

I must make mention of one thing, to my shame. Our mother was not very clear on the doctrine of grace; she seemed to rely more or less on her works. I had intended to discuss this matter with her, but I departed, her debtor in this respect. It seemed presumptuous to broach this matter to her. I sincerely regret this, because I never had another opportunity. Alas, how weak we are.

In May 1873 we returned to Holland, Michigan, to begin our ministry there. There was much work to be done, both in and outside of the congregation. There was much unrest within, and people came to the consistory with all sorts of problems. The consistory met every week, and they came to the meetings with their troubles. They would not or could not follow Christ's rules for conduct, as found in Matthew 18. The consistory attempted to handle these matters in a more orderly fashion. Many who came with complaints against their neighbor were asked whether they had gone to their brother to discuss the matter privately, and the usual reply was that they had not and would not; that is the consistory's work; and other subterfuges. There was little self-discipline and discipline of the Spirit, and Matthew 18 and Lord's Day 31 were not practiced.

Thus the consistory had much unnecessary work, and set out to improve conditions. The consistory told the plaintiffs: "You must first admonish your brother in private; if necessary take one or two others with you, etc." That gave the consistory some relief, and later we changed to monthly meetings, with no more difficulty than formerly at weekly sessions.

I soon became counselor for several other churches, and from time to time I was obliged to assist in settling some unpleasant problems. At one time we went to a neighboring church, met at 2.00 P.M., and returned the next morning after daybreak, having had no sleep, and without solving the problems.

I was instructed to purchase "De Wachter" from my elder C.Vorst, for the denomination, and did so. De Wachter, established by brother Vorst, with Rev.D.J.Vander Werp as editor, now became the property of the denomination, with Rev.G.E.Boer as editor. I was appointed associate editor and administrator. All denominational funds were also sent to me. Thus I had an abundance of work, also to keep peace in the congregation. Moreover, our old parsonage shook so severely in a strong wind that we were forced to flee to a neighbor's house one morning at 3.00 o'clock, to save our lives.

However, our work was blessed, and we remained in Holland five years. During that period the church of Lafayette, Indiana called us twice, and we accepted the second call, Nov.13,1877.

Before we leave Holland I must tell you about an unusual event. In those days it was quite common for believers who had not yet made profession of faith to present their children for baptism, and to reply to the questions in the formulary even as those who were members in full communion. There were some who felt that this was not as it should be, but for many this had been the custom in the old country, and custom is strong. Those who were opposed to this custom sometimes used strange methods. Thus it happened that a young man came to the consistory requesting membership as a baptized member, and asking that he and his wife, who was a professing member, be permitted to have their child baptized. According to the custom of those times this was permissible. I talked for a while with the young man, who was my catechumen, and then asked the brethren of the consistory whether they had any questions. One of the brethren then asked him whether he was certain that he had made a covenant with God. The man did not know how to answer this fairly profound question, and then the elder said: "If you do not know, how can you bring your child into the covenant?" He continued: "It would be better if your wife's father would present your child for baptism; it can then be brought into the covenant in that way." I was amazed, and the young man was forced to depart without having succeeded in his plea. I indicated my displeasure, and asked the elder whether the child, born of a believing mother, was in the covenant, or whether we had to bring it in. Also whether the ignorant father could not do it, but the converted grandfather could.

I could not understand it, and was dumbfounded to find that we had such an elder. I also thought of the value of the good intentions of the pope and the priests, but said: "It is too late to discuss this matter now; we must postpone it until the next consistory meeting." Only this, that he must understand that I could not submit to such a view of the covenant. But at the next consistory meeting the matter ended abruptly, because the elder said that it was not true that he had made such a statement, and when one of the brethren insisted that he had indeed said it he put on his coat and left the meeting and the church. Thus we had some stormy times, but I remained with the church five years, and not without a blessing.

From Holland my way led to Lafayette, Indiana, and I began my ministry there Jan'y 6,1878, with a sermon based on Zechariah 6:15. While I was in Pella, Lafayette had honored me with a call, which I declined. This time I accepted their call, although the congregation was smaller, and the salary less. Before we left for Lafayette I resigned from the administration of ecclesiastical funds, etc. I now came into a congenial small church, which appreciated my ministry, and liberally supplied our needs. And yet, I was not entirely at ease, because the change was so great. To come from Holland, where I had an abundance of work, to Lafayette with so much less to do, gave me a feeling of melancholy.

One might say that this was very foolish, especially if one knew how to study. But I hardly knew what that meant, and I felt as if I were outside of the ecclesiastical life. For the rest I worked there with much pleasure, with the blessing of God.

However, wherever we may be, we encounter some strange things, especially in this land with its varied population. I organized a catechism class with several married men, all living



near the church, and there was one man who was very much taken with the idea. He thought it would be a wonderful opportunity to find out what made the new preacher tick. I was apprised of this, and given to understand that he was quite opinionated. We were discussing the three things necessary for our salvation, and now the poor fellow thought he had a chance to sound out the dominie. He said: "Well, dominie, we read that we must know how great our sins and miseries are, and no one can ever know that. Both cannot be true. What is the answer?"

He thought that now he would gain his objective, for soon it became evident that he did not know. Because I knew what the know-it-all had in mind I asked him: "Don't you know the answer?" He really did not know, and said: "No, dominie." Now I was ready for a bit of teasing, and said: "Don't you know that? I am sorry to hear it. I thought you knew all about it." I suggested that we take a week to think about it, in an attempt to solve the problem, and then came the answer that I expected. He said: "No, dominie, we are here to learn, and you must clear this up for us." I said: "Yes, brother, but you must not be so hasty, and must not expect too much from me. I don't know everything, and it could be that I was not clear in my mind on this matter. Let us think about it for a week, and see whether we understand it then."

Now he really thought that I was embarrassed about the question, and said: "No, no, you must solve it for us; that's why we are here." I said: "Well, if it must be, we will see what we can do, but it seems to be a difficult question, for we read that we must know how great our sins and miseries are, and I agree that we cannot become aware of their magnitude." I purposely dragged out the discussion, and asked him whether I might ask a few questions. They were: "Was this catechism written by intelligent people?" He thought they were intelligent. Then I said: "If we accept this we must nevertheless agree that an intelligent person can sometimes do a foolish thing, and perhaps this was one of those foolish things, to write or say something that no one can ever find out."

He had no answer for this. I said: "I'm sorry about that. I thought that you would surely know the solution." Thus I tried to make him feel ashamed. I now began to talk about his old cabinet, its doors and keys, etc., and asked him whether we also needed a key for this problem. He did not know. I said: "Did the writers mention anything other than that we must know how great our sins and miseries are?" "Yes, two other things, namely how we may be delivered from our sins, and how we may thank God for such deliverance." "Are these three things related?" He said "Perhaps." I said: "Not perhaps, but certainly. The writers of those three things had more sense than all of us put together, and they knew very well what they were saying. They knew that no one knows exactly how great our sins are, but that we really must know. That may seem strange to you, but it is clear as crystal. If we can only find the key for the words "how great". Imagine someone who is quietly and slowly convicted of his lost state, and who confesses it in secret, not daring to talk about it. But he believes that he is lost, and must needs have Jesus if he is to be saved, and his heart goes out to Him. Think also of one who has lived a very sinful life, and is suddenly halted on his sinful way and pursued by the curse of the law and the terrors of death and hell, and in desperation he flees to God, and eventually finds refuge in Jesus. Both of these men know how great their sins and miseries are. They are so great that they must have Jesus. That is the true criterion. Lost in ourselves; to Jesus for deliverance; and it follows naturally how we can show our gratitude to God for such deliverance. It has been said that there is an evangelical conversion and also a legal conversion. However that may be, we may never separate these three parts, and the knowledge of sin must bring us to Christ for deliverance, while the deliverance through Christ must lead us to gratitude to God. Now our fathers knew very well that no one can know how great our sins and miseries are, and yet they saw clearly that this is a requirement, but in connection with the two following parts. No conviction of sin leads to salvation unless it brings us to Jesus, and all knowledge of sin is sufficient which teaches us to choose Jesus as the only Savior and to serve God. What do you think of it?" He said: "It is probably true", and he had been punished a bit for his conceit.

Except for a few of such trifles I spent two years there with much pleasure, but I must tell you about a case of ignorance and dullness. We had celebrated the Lord's Supper according to custom when I met a member of the church with whom I felt called to discuss the Sacrament. I asked him: "Didn't I see you at the Lord's table?" "Oh, yes, dominie." "Is there a reason why you attend?" "Yes, dominie, I have hopes that it will serve to promote my conversion." "Are you unconverted?" "Yes, dominie." I said: "Do you not know by this time that the Lord's

Supper was not instituted for our conversion, but for strengthening our faith?" The poor man did not know, although two faithful ministers, Jacob and Jan Schepers, had preceded me in that church.

Although I was serving a good church which exerted itself to make life pleasant for us, we left there after two years, to return to the church in Kalamazoo which we had left seven years earlier. As I have mentioned, our first service in that church lasted only 16 months, and when we were in Holland I often thought that was really too short, and then I felt inclined to serve them again if they should ever desire it. (My wife felt that they would call me again.)

During the seven years following our departure things were happening in Kalamazoo. My successor was candidate E. Vande Vries, during whose ministry the church expanded. But after he left they were unfortunate in having a former missionary from the Netherlands, C. De Best, preach for them and live in their parsonage. But when his credentials and additional information obtained from the Netherlands showed that he was not licensed to preach, he departed and began to preach in a hall in the city. That led to division and schism, and caused much trouble in the congregation. With the approval of Classis I was chosen with a large majority of votes, without first presenting a nomination to the congregation. I was called, and this presented me with no small problem.

Kalamazoo's congregation was torn by strife, poor and in difficult circumstances, and I was serving a church which appreciated my labors. And yet the door had been opened which made possible what I had desired from time to time, and which my wife believed to be certain to occur. Now it was up to me to make a decision. (Since I have mentioned my wife I feel that it is my duty to say that she never tried to influence me either to accept or to decline a call. In this respect also she was a noble woman.) I soon accepted the call, trusting that the Lord would use me to repair the breaches, and we were not put to shame.

We came to a group of forty disheartened families, who were also in financial straits. They could promise to pay me only \$500 annually, and the runaways mocked them, saying that they could not feed us. But we were of good courage, and all worked out well. I always remained cheerful, even when the people were under a strain. Quite a number of families had followed De Best when he left, and during the first period following our arrival attendance at worship was rather small, but it improved gradually. I judged that we ought not to make much ado about those who had left us, but ought to await developments.

For the time being I preached three times on Sunday, and once during the week, which was also De Best's schedule. We gained members, and he gradually lost. Before long he discontinued the mid-week meeting, and we did the same. Later his Sunday evening service was eliminated, and I began catechetical instruction instead of the evening service. The further history of De Best is so wretched that I prefer not to speak of it. In our congregation we could see progress. The salary was increased, the church building was painted and equipped with new pews, and after 5 years and 4 months we numbered 100 families, and they were strengthened. God had shown us that He wanted to use us to repair the breaches.

However, in spite of the fact that our work was prospering, something occurred which I could not understand then and cannot fathom to this day. There was an elder who did not want me and had not voted for me, according to his own testimony. In itself that is not unusual, but this case was different. From the beginning of my ministry he worked against me, and in an underhanded way. I talked to him in private several times, and asked him: "Why do you do it? I surely haven't given you any cause. You are alone in this, etc." I spoke to no one about the matter; since I had no ground for my suspicions, I remained silent.

As a young preacher I received many calls. On the occasion of one call I received an anonymous note, urging me to go. Ordinarily one would not save such a missive, but I thought of the man mentioned above, and so I saved it, and declined the call.

The following call brought a similar note in the same handwriting, and with the same content. I put it away with the first note, and declined the call. When a third call came, there came also another note in the same handwriting, threatening us with fire and death if I had the temerity to decline again. I showed this note and the other two to my wife, and she became concerned and wanted to leave at once. I said: "No, I am going to decline the call, but

I want to find out what is at the bottom of this." I showed the three notes to one of my deacons, and together we went to the Registrar's office, where the handwriting of the woman that I suspected would be available. I asked whether we might see it, and the clerk immediately produced it. The similarity was so striking that there was no room for doubt. Then we saw another sample of her writing, which was equally convincing.

Then I went to the Prosecutor's office, told him about the case, and asked whether I could count on his help if I needed it. He said: "Certainly; immediately?" I said: "No, I will inform you at the proper time." He said: "I am ready for you any time." The fact was that I did not want to make it a court case, but I had my reasons for making it appear so.

I went to the woman's husband -- the elder mentioned previously -- of whom I believed that he was familiar with the case, and told him: "We are going to have a special consistory meeting. I have, since our arrival here received three anonymous letters in the same handwriting, and think that I know the source. This thing must stop." The man seemed a bit bewildered, for his first words were: "Hast thou found me, o my enemy?" I answered: "No, I never sought you; how then could I find you?"

The consistory met, and the woman was asked to appear. The consistory was convinced that she was the writer, but she denied it, and both declared that they were leaving the church; and they departed. I told them, however, that this was not the end; that they must beware of any further acts, and their children also, with respect to my children, etc., and we let them go. Although they lived nearby, and the man had passed the parsonage daily on his way to work, from that day on we did not see him or any member of his family for months. I do not recall ever seeing the woman again. The consistory thought it best, since they had resigned their membership, and I had said that I would not make a court case of it, to let the matter drop. The judge would probably have sentenced her after comparing the handwriting, but it was not so easy to bring the matter before the church. I was told that the woman, who did not know that I had decided not to take the matter to court, was sure that she was going to state prison, and thus confined herself to the house.

Some time later there were a few people in the congregation who thought that the man could be reinstated, because he had not written the notes. Some came to the consistory, to request that a Classical committee be invited to discuss the matter. The consistory granted the request. I left it to them, as I did not want to get involved again, and committed it to God, Who in His good time would judge. The minutes of the consistory will reveal how the matter was settled, and God saw to it that I received and accepted a call.

In later years that family experienced much trouble, but I will not condemn them, but leave it to the Lord. It has always remained a riddle to me how that man later was again elected to the eldership. I think that I can surmise the reason why those notes were written, but have no witnesses to prove it. But I am convinced that I was in that woman's way, and therefore also in his way. The consistory was also of that opinion, but they had not gone into the matter before I came, and afterward it was too late. But eventually it will be cleared before God's tribunal.

Our way now led from Kalamazoo to Fremont. But first I must mention that on August 24, 1884, I gave a memorial address in Kalamazoo, in connection with the 15th anniversary of the church, and my 15 years in the ministry. This address was based on 1 Samuel 7:12 and Romans 8:32. It was my privilege to preach my farewell sermon in Kalamazoo with the words of the apostle in 2 Corinthians 11:11.

The Fremont church began in 1882, and many of its members came from the Reformed Church, because Free Masons were accepted in that church. I was their first minister, and arrived May 8, 1885 in a church of 88 families. The large majority in the congregation was financially encumbered, and many improvements were required, but there was steady progress. I worked six years and six months in that scattered and peaceful church, with much pleasure and many blessings upon my labors. The congregation grew, and when we left it had grown to 130 families, and the church of Reeman had been born.

An unusual circumstance in our ecclesiastical life was the occasion for our departure from this congenial church. We were training men for the ministry, but did not have a building for this purpose. The Synod of 1890 decided to take steps to obtain a building to serve as Theological School. Since 1876 it had been necessary to make do with a rented hall, but this was becoming burdensome. The Synod charged the Trustees, at that time eight persons, with the execution of this decision. I had the unmerited honor of being one of the trustees since 1876, when we began our school with one professor. Now the trustees had to deliberate as to the method to be used. We needed a piece of ground, and we especially needed money. The question was: how to get it. Our people were accustomed to contributing hundreds, but we needed thousands, and how were we to obtain such a sum? I voiced the opinion that we ought to get a man who would visit our people in their homes, and the brethren asked me whether I had anyone in mind who could and would do this work. I could not suggest anyone, but felt that this was the thing to be done.

After much discussion one of the brethren said: "Why cannot Rev. Noordewier do it? He feels that someone ought to contact our people, and the idea is good; I move that he be appointed." All the brethren supported that motion. This was entirely unexpected; I had never thought of such a thing. It was a big undertaking, and hardly suitable for a minister. I had a church, which I should have to leave, and that was a difficult matter. To enter upon another way of life did not appeal to me, and yet I knew that someone must do it. I was happy because the Lord had blessed our people so greatly that we needed a building, and was convinced that they could and would contribute to the cause. But it is understandable that this decision laid a burden upon me.

My thoughts multiplied within me, and the Lord knew what I must do. I sighed, and looked from one to the other of the brethren, but could not see that any of them would be better able to do it. Then I made the suggestion: "Let the brethren provide preaching services for my church for a period of four months, and the congregation give its approval on those conditions, and I will do it without compensation during the summer months. I will do my best, but you must make the arrangements with Fremont." That suggestion was adopted and arrangements were made, and I went to our Eastern churches for two months, and then to the Western churches for another two months. The dominie had turned collector; something I had never expected to do.

It worked out fairly well, but when the four months were completed I made my report to the trustees, and told them that I must return to my church. The fall season was at hand, and the catechism classes and family visiting were awaiting me. I realized that the work of collecting had to be continued, but my church needed me. The brethren knew that the work must not be jeopardized, and they wanted to retain my services, but they also knew that I was not minded to sacrifice my standing as a minister. One who believes that he has been called to the ministry cannot give it up.

In order to retain my services the trustees decided to make arrangements with the Home Missions Committee to have me called for Home Mission work, and also to continue my task of collecting. This was approved, and I received the combined call for the period of one year, at a salary of \$900, without a parsonage. This was a difficult situation for me. I had become a minister before we had a school, and was glad to know that we had advanced to the point of needing a building. With thanks to the Lord for His goodness shown to His people, and for the fact that He had placed me in the ministry, we contributed \$500.00.

It was known that I loved the cause, and I knew that it would involve many things, some unpleasant, if I accepted the call. I had to leave a good church that esteemed me, and there would be no financial gain. Indeed, I would have to put up with numerous inconveniences. Further, at the end of the year I would be out in the cold. I would have to deal with many kinds of people, some miserly, and talk to them about money and giving. I would constantly be away from home. But, although I knew that the work would not be very pleasant, I found it impossible to decline, because I believed that God in His Providence had led me in this direction. He would cause the work to prosper, and would also care for my family.

Thus I accepted the call, and bade farewell to the church in Fremont with a sermon based on Proverbs 16:9: "A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps." During those days I was very conscious of God's leading.

So we went to Grand Rapids, which was to be our home for some time. The trustees were much occupied with selecting a suitable site, and finally found it, at the corner of Madison and Fifth Avenues. The late Leendert Benjamins was a valuable counselor and helper. God prospered us. I told the brethren that I must have help in the work of raising funds, for delay paralyzes the work. The late Rev. Langereis was engaged to help me in Classis Holland. It worked out so well that we were able to dedicate a fine building in a good location in September 1892. Everything worked out above expectations, and we were able to do more than Synod thought necessary. It had suggested a maximum expenditure of \$15,000.00, but the collections were good, and we built at a considerably higher figure. The Lord was with us in all things.

When we came to the end of the year for which I had been called, I said: "Brethren, now you are rid of me again." Because of my wife's illness I could not continue as home missionary, and so notified the Committee. I announced my availability for calls.

The combined churches of Vriesland and Overisel immediately called me, as well as Richland, Sheboygan, Eastmanville, and Prinsburg. I declined all; some because of requirements for my ~~family~~ family. Finally, Kellogsville called me, and I accepted that call.

Now I must tell you that on a collection trip one meets with some unusual experiences, some pleasant, and others rather disagreeable. One learns especially how many people love money, and how many strange, and sometimes impious reasons are given for not contributing. As I traveled I would speak in the various churches to explain the reason for my visit, and visited some of the well-to-do folk in their homes. On such occasions I thought it appropriate to mention 2 Corinthians 9, but that did not always meet with favor.

As I spoke in one church I saw a man in the audience whom I knew to be quite well off financially, and I went to visit him in his home. I talked to him about our school, and asked him to make a contribution. But instead of a gift I received a severe verbal trouncing for my talk of the previous evening. No word of mine made the slightest dent in his armor, and I received nothing. Sometimes I met very pious folks, some of them members of the consistory, on whom I could not make any impression. Then I would call upon God: "Lord, how is this possible. Such misers office-bearers in Thy church!"

On one occasion I visited a man who had been pointed out to me as being very wealthy. I went to see him with the local pastor, and spoke to him about the good cause, but he said, among other things: "Dominie, last night you spoke about this matter and took an offering for it, and at such times I am accustomed to doing what the Lord tells me to do. That is the end of it, for so I did last night." I answered: "I am sorry to hear you say that, for then I must conclude that you are serving a God Who cannot calculate." That puzzled him, and he wanted to know how I came to that conclusion. I said: "Well, that is not so strange. I can figure it out for you. If you were the only contributor to last night's collection (and I am sure that you were not) you still would not have contributed according to ability. And that is God's criterion." Thus the miser hides his love of money under a cloak of piety. These are but a few samples, but I will stop here.

As stated above, I had again declared my eligibility for a call, and after declining several I accepted the call to Kellogsville, five miles south of Grand Rapids. (At this time, considerably less, because of the expansion of the city.) When I announced my availability during the Fall of 1892 my name was placed in nomination, but Mr. S. Koster was chosen. However, things were soon in a bad state, so that the Classis had to intervene, and decided that Rev. Koster must accept the first call that he received. In less than a year, the church at Kellogsville was torn by strife, the pastor departed, and we came in.

In September 1893 I began my ministry there with a sermon based on Psalm 4:7: "Many there be that say 'who will show us any good?' Lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us, o Lord." I was not able to bring back those who had left, for the Classis decided to approve the request of this faction to be organized as a separate church, and I had to abide by that decision. That church is now known as Cutlerville. I labored in the Kellogsville church in peace for three years, and in the Fall of 1894 I celebrated my 25th anniversary in the ministry there with a sermon based on Colossians 1:25-29.

In 1896 I exchanged Kellogsville for Jenison, whose earlier call I had declined. When they called me in May 1896 I did not feel free to decline. However, they planned to enlarge the parsonage, so we remained in Kellogsville another three months. We began our labors in Jenison on September 20, 1896, and remained there 11 years and 3 months.

When we came, the church was weak because of the many troubles that had plagued them, and the results were still felt. These after-effects gave me considerable extra work, even in connection with some of the brethren in Classis, who saw the condition in Jenison in a wrong light. Generally speaking, I was permitted to serve this church with great pleasure. It grew constantly, and many came to profess their faith.

But there was one matter that required change. In former years, members of our church who had been baptized but had not yet made profession of their faith, although in all other respects they lived an exemplary life, were permitted to have their children baptized, and to reply to the formulary questions even as those who were members in full communion. Many were accustomed to that in the old fatherland, especially in the province of Groningen, the old home of most of the Jenison folks. However, in our denomination there was a constantly increasing opposition to this custom. Although I had also been raised in those circles, and previously did not know any better, I began to share in that opposition, and felt that this custom could not be squared with the Scriptures nor with our formulary which had been in use for many years. Most of my congregation could see no wrong in the custom, and now it became my duty to combat it, slowly but constantly.

At every meeting of Classis we were admonished because of the slow progress. I stressed it in catechism classes and worked especially with married folks, and prepared a question and answer book dealing with the subject. I read the draft of it to the consistory, most of whose members shared the same erroneous ideas, especially the older folks who had been raised in the province of Groningen. After reading the draft I asked: "What do you think of it?" None dared to offer any objections, but it was difficult for many to agree to it. They knew that it had to be done, but asked me what I intended to do with it. I answered that I expected to publish it and distribute it among the members of the church. After I had completed eight years in the ministry of the Jenison church the decision could be made by the consistory that one or both parents must be confessing members if they expected to present a child for baptism.

During our pastorate in Jenison many things happened in the parsonage, things that I shall never forget. The parsonage had been enlarged for our benefit, for I arrived with a wife and six children. On March 31, 1901 my dear wife died. She had been suffering for many years, and was dependent upon us in every way. Our two daughters nursed her faithfully, and she was very patient. Neither she nor we expected that she would live to a great age, but when she departed in the hope of eternal life I had lost the dearest possession on earth, and was very lonely. Our two daughters were capable of handling the housekeeping, but they were adults, and they, as well as two sons, were married in the space of one year. My son Tonnis and his wife came to live with me in the parsonage, and this continued for three years. It worked out well, although there were difficulties.

Then God gave me another wife, the widow of Rev. P. Bakker, to whom I was married December 26, 1905. We lived in the large parsonage, and rejoiced in God's goodness in granting this pleasure to two old people.

Thus 11 years and 3 months passed in Jenison. In November 1906 I received a call from the church in Bemis, South Dakota, and consulted with my consistory about it. I said: "Brethren, I have a call from Bemis, and I'm ten years older than when I came here. If I am now getting too old, or if there is any other reason which would indicate that I should leave, please tell us, and we will go." Some laughed, and none seemed to feel the need of a change, although one man remained silent. But many urged us to stay as long as we were able to continue, and we stayed. I had also thought that we ought to remain there as long as I could do the work, but God's way was not our way, and the unexpected happened.

Our way led to Firth, Nebraska. They asked me whether they might place my name in nomination. I replied that they ought not to do so, but to call another man whom I suggested. They did call him, but he declined. When I saw my name included in the next nomination I wrote to

them: "Please, do not call me", but they did call me nevertheless. I received the call, and knew that for many years they had struggled with difficulties, and many members had moved to other places. This call caused me much difficulty and much struggle, but I had to accept it, although I wanted to decline. It troubled me, but I said: "Wife, we are going to Firth", and accepted the call of the small, disturbed, and far-off church, to the surprise of many, and not to the joy of my wife and children. But the deciding factor must be what we believe God's will to be, and during the first days of 1907 we departed for Firth in good spirits, to see what God's plan for me would be.

On January 6, 1907 we arrived in the little town of Firth, and the congregation escorted us to the parsonage, where everything was in readiness for a royal welcome. The congregation was happy because it again had a minister after a short vacancy, but it was high time if the church was to survive. Therefore many of the members were pleasantly surprised as they realized that God was watching over them. Knowing that the church had suffered because of internal strife and the removal of some to other places had weakened it, I could hardly rejoice with them, but faced the future with some misgivings.

The following Sunday I was installed by my predecessor, Rev. E. Vanden Berge. The congregation was very small, and that seemed strange to me. But the installation sermon was as strange as I have ever experienced, and it was repugnant to me. I was displeased and disheartened, and related this feeling to my expectations for the little church. A few of the members realized that the church was not in a flourishing condition, but most of them had little understanding of its condition. In the installation sermon I was praised openly, and the congregation was urged to be very thankful because it had received another minister so soon, and a good one at that. But we heard not one word with regard to our office as Minister of the Word. My heart fainted within me.

I preached my inaugural sermon, based on Judges 3:20, : And Ehud said: 'I have a message from God unto thee. Then he arose out of his seat'. My topic was "The Message of the Minister of the Word". First, the message must be derived from God's Word; second, how is this message to be received by the congregation; third, applying the message to this occasion. Its prime application was that we must all bow before that Word, as my experience taught me very soon.

I began my work with many misgivings, for I saw at once that the condition of the congregation left much to be desired, and that the trouble seemed to be centered in the consistory. It was very difficult. I did not know how to proceed in order to help them, and especially to work for the continuing existence of the little church.. It required much pondering and prayer, and I was filled with anxiety for the church, more than they ever knew, and at times I feared that I would perish with my last church. I had entered upon the ministry in more than one church while it was in difficult circumstances, but had always surmounted the troubles. But in this church the outlook was very dark. It had been sorely neglected, and this became evident especially during the first summer, when the Modern Woodmen held their annual picnic in Firth. It lasted two days, and was a regular vanity fair.

Of course, we cannot expect anything different from the world. The town was flooded with people, but the worst thing was that we saw our own people attending these things. Fathers and mothers came with their children from miles away to enjoy those vain pleasures. We heard that most of our people were there, and we were scheduled to celebrate the Lord's Supper the following day. I paced the floor in perplexity and prayed for light to show me what I ought to say and do. One of our members who felt as sad about the matter as I did, came to visit me, and to suggest that we could not celebrate the Lord's Supper under these circumstances. I did not dare to make such a decision without the consistory, and felt that we must go through with it. The following morning I talked to the consistory, straight from the shoulder. There was no word of contradiction, but there was some acknowledgement that the thing was not right.

It now became quite evident that there was a serious falling off among our people; also, how wretched the leadership had been during the past several years. We experienced a miserable Sunday, and attendance at the Lord's Supper was very irregular. Many were ashamed, and that day I spoke to them severely, connecting it with my inaugural sermon 'I have a message from God unto thee'. They had been neglected, and the line of demarcation between church and world had been obliterated. There were some God-fearing persons who were much concerned, but many were asleep, and had to be awakened rudely. I did get a hearing, and things began to improve.

But there was more to come, for conditions in the consistory were not good. That was sad, especially in such a small church, where it is difficult to obtain office-bearers. We had one elder who operated a meat market, and kept his market open on Sunday. One of the deacons told me about it, and asked what we could do about it. I told him: "Next week we will have a consistory meeting, and then conduct Censura Morem in preparation for the Lord's Supper. It would be well for you to voice your objection at that time." During that week I went to the meat market to buy meat, and asked the son who operated the store on Sunday: "Do you have the shop open on Sunday?" He answered: "Yes." "Don't you know that this is wrong?" "Yes, I know that it is a sin, but I do it anyway." "But, my boy, what must become of us when we do a sinful work and admit that it is wrong, and say at the same time: 'I do it anyway'?" He said to me: "You better quit your talking; as long as I am here the shop will be open."

I knew now that I had an elder who sat in the church on Sunday as an office-bearer, and permitted his son to operate a business on that day. I awaited events at the next consistory meeting. The complaint was voiced at the consistory, and the elder said: "I'm sorry that the brother is bringing this up. I had intended to ask the brethren whether we could continue." We said that it seemed strange to us that he did not know that this was wrong. If we are to rest from our daily work every seventh day, it ought to be clear that we may not conduct business on Sunday, especially an office-bearer. He then stated that he would close the shop on Sundays, and the consistory left it at that.

I told him how his son had spoken to me, and also asked him whether his wife sold milk on Sunday. But he said the latter was not his affair; we had better talk to his wife about that. I also asked him privately whether he had made a deal with a cattle dealer on Sunday morning, but was never able to get a Yes or No to that question.

When the minutes were read at the next consistory meeting, the clerk had written that the brother had confessed guilt. The elder referred to that minute, saying that he had never confessed, and never would. (He had stated that he would close the shop, and this had been recorded as a confession of guilt.) The matter came up at every consistory meeting, and we discussed it so long that the man became angry, and resigned his eldership and his membership. Eventually this was accepted, for there was little knowledge of or feeling for discipline. I once asked an elder whether anyone had ever been disciplined, and his answer was: "No, dominie."

Following the discussion of the aforementioned matter at the consistory meeting, I was walking in the street and met a group of boys who looked at me mockingly, and started to sing: "Butcher shop closed on Sunday." I stopped a moment, and said: "Boys, who taught you that nice song? Sing it again." But they remained silent, and I did not hear it again. I will not speak of the foolish and mocking remarks the man in question made to all who would listen, for that would be a sad story.

At another time an elder said to me: "Dominie, I think our congregation is still too large; we shall have to get rid of some if we are to have peace." I merely said: "That's possible", and immediately began to watch his actions, in order to determine what he meant, and what he planned to do. He was the treasurer of the consistory, and there was one deacon who refused to deliver the money received for minister's salary to his house, but brought it to the consistory (as some others also did). Now this elder made a complaint against the deacon at the next consistory meeting. The deacon became very angry, called him some uncomplimentary names, and dashed out of the meeting. I was amazed, and thought that we would now get to the bottom of the trouble. The church is too large, and the deacon must leave. After he left, I said: "Brethren, this must not be. We must call a consistory meeting for next week, ask the brother to meet with us, and attempt to straighten this out. This was done, and the deacon wholeheartedly confessed his wrong before the consistory, which included the offended elder. The consistory accepted this confession, but the offended one was not satisfied. He resigned his eldership, and the membership of himself and his wife.

The consistory judged that the first resignation ought to be accepted, but after much discussion both remained as members of the church. From that time on we experienced rest and peace. I remained five years, and must say that at the end of that period we had an amenable group of people. But I was getting older, and my zest for living and laboring had received a jolt, and I began to long for a period of rest and closer contact with our children. I informed



the consistory, but they would not hear of it; they insisted that I ought to remain with them, since the church was now experiencing a formerly unknown peace. However, they realized that they would have to acquiesce if I persisted in my desire.

I asked them to endorse my request to Classis for emeritation, and they would not refuse my request, although it grieved them. Thus Classis Pella granted me honorable emeritation, effective October 1912, forty-three years after I was installed as minister of the Pella church, and now I received emeritation in the same church building. It was an impressive moment for me.

We remained in Firth a few more weeks, as we had bought a lot in Grand Rapids upon which to build a house. We preached our farewell sermon in November 1912, based on 1 John 2:18: "Little children, it is the last time." We experienced the utmost friendship in word and deed, up to the last moment before our departure, and I have never had any regrets in connection with my ministry there, and believe that I have been a blessing to them, although I did not want to go there.

After a short visit in Chicago with our daughter and son-in-law, Rev. J.R. Brink, and a few days with our son Albert and his family, we went to Grand Rapids, and on December 21, 1912 we moved into our own home at 617 Bates Street, and became members of the First Church. This is the same church from which we went to Pella in 1869.

I thought it well to relate these things in connection with my ministry October 1869 to November 1912, and thanksgiving for making this possible is due only to God and His grace. He knows how imperfectly I carried out His commands, and what purposes I have served. To participate in the life of the church was my delight, and throughout my life I wrote articles for De Wachter. I also published a few small articles, and was for many years a curator of our school. Since 1881 Professor Hemkes and I, together with some others, edited the Yearbook, and until the present I am the Synodical Treasurer.

I will record here that my brother Tonnis, previously mentioned, is no longer in the land of the living upon earth. My only remaining brother Eye lives with me in Grand Rapids. Now follows the obituary notice of my brother Tonnis.

Today, August 7, 1913, our dearly beloved husband and father, Rev. T. Noordewier, fell asleep at the age of 69 years, trusting in his Covenant God.

A. Noordewier - Sijpkens  
C.M. Noordewier  
A.J. Noordewier

The consistory of the church at Meppel published the following:

Thursday, August 7, 1913, our much esteemed senior minister and brother, Rev. T. Noordewier, departed this life at the age of almost 70 years, trusting in the assurance of faith. During a period of 33 years he served the church of Meppel with loving devotion and unabated zeal. May our faithful Covenant God comfort the sorrowing widow and children, and may He give grace to the church to follow in the steps of this pastor, whose memory will be a blessing in our midst.

For the Consistory of the Gereformeerde  
church

J.C. Brussaard, President  
H. Timmer, Clerk

Meppel, August 12, 1913.

The reader will forgive the reference to my brother, as I now relate something about my life as a retired minister.

Chapter V  
My retirement years

I requested emeritation. Why? Let the statement speak which Classis Pella presented to me in response to my request.

L.S.

Classis Pella of the Christian Reformed Church declares that Rev. J.Noordewier, who served the church at Firth, Nebraska since 1908, was granted honorable emeritation at his request, supported by the consistory of Firth. This emeritation is effective October 1, 1912, and is granted because the brother states that his age (73 years) prevents him from doing what he would and should do.

The Classis prays that the Lord may richly bless him in the years that remain on earth, and that he may then enter into the rest that remains for the people of God.

May the consistory and congregation of Firth fix their eyes upon the great Shepherd, Who never deserts His flock.

Pella, Iowa, September 17, 1912.

A.J.Brink, Stated Clerk

This certificate of emeritation indicated, indeed indirectly, but not directly, that I could no longer serve the church. That is why it reads: "because the brother states that his age (73 years) prevents him from doing what he would and should do." I was still able to do what the church and the consistory expected of me, and they were desirous of having me remain with them, but I was no longer able to satisfy myself, and furthermore, we old folks were so far from our children. God had given us six children, all living, but we were 750 miles away.

If it had been necessary for the church to support us, neither the Classis nor I could have felt free to take the step, but the Lord had provided for our needs. Thus I felt that I might rest from my labors, and ~~to~~ establish our home nearer to our children. I could still preach here and there when invited, but I was relieved of the care for the church. Thus I found time to write this sketch, and still I was able to preach forty times in 1913, and fifty times in each of the next two years.

In 1916 I received an invitation from the consistory of Lafayette, Indiana, to come with my wife; to preach for them a few Sundays, to administer the Lord's Supper, and to participate in the 50th anniversary of the founding of the church. We traveled to Lafayette, and on the anniversary day we found that several former ministers had been invited -- B.Mollema, B.H.Einink, H.M.Vander Ploeg, and D.H.Kromminga, as well as M.Schans, who had accepted their call. All of these brethren participated in the festivities, and we spent an enjoyable time in the midst of the church that I had served with so much pleasure.

In May 1916 I was invited to preach and administer the Lord's Supper in Cleveland, West. This time my wife again accompanied me, for we traveled from Cleveland to New London, Pennsylvania, to visit our son Johannes and his family. We remained there over Sunday, and then returned to Cleveland for another preaching engagement. We were lodged with A.Reitsema and his wife for a few days, and then went to Detroit to preach there one Sunday, and came home on May 30

But there was more activity. We also had an invitation from Pella, my first charge, to meet with them and participate in the celebration of the 50th anniversary of their founding, August 9, 1916. The program indicates my part in the services. There were two other former ministers; the others who had served them had passed away. I was the oldest, nearly 76 years old. I had the pleasure of speaking to my former church on "The Church as God's Elect."

The following week they organized a Mission Fest, at which I was asked to speak about Home Missions. These were pleasant days, and I also preached in Galesburg the following Sunday.

In November we were in Holland, Michigan, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of my former church in that city. Thus the year 1916 was a busy year, for I had various other preaching engagements.

Toward the end of 1916 the First Christian Reformed Church on Bates Street elected me to the office of elder. I was then 77 years old. This added to my duties, and in addition to my work as an elder I preached 25 times in 1917 and 40 times in 1918. During the latter year the congregation suffered a grievous loss in the death of its beloved minister, Rev. Peter Ekster, and I was then asked to conduct the funerals which occurred in the congregation.

According to custom I retired as elder on New Year's day of 1919. I had reached the age of 79 years, and was rejoicing in good health. I still contribute articles for De Wachter from time to time, and still function as Synodical Treasurer. These things are a blessing in old age, for they permit me to retain an active interest in the life of the church. I also proclaim the Word of God occasionally, but not as often as in former years.

On April 27, 1919 I was honored with the task of installing Rev. E. J. Tanis as the pastor of our church, preaching on 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13. I am often surprised to receive so many preaching requests, since our Theological School is here, and in addition to the professors there are about 20 students who have preaching license. And when I look at our Yearbook I find a list of 51 ministers who have passed away, and I am still among the living.

How mysterious are God's ways. I think of so many who were talented and strong, and we thought they could have labored so effectively, and yet the Lord took them. These are some of the unsolved mysteries in God's dealings with man, and we believe that He will reveal them in eternity. His decrees are sovereign, and we believe that His supreme wisdom controls all, but we are not yet able to understand it. We have many vacant churches that are anxious to have a minister, and yet the Lord took six men out of our small circle this year. This ought to be a sobering thought for all of us.

Although I have retired from the active ministry, I may and must keep active, and on December 9, 1919 our church elected me to another term as elder, although I hope to reach my 80th birthday on the 27th. That sobering thought of which I spoke is applicable to me also. Now I have come to the end of my notes on my 80th birthday, and I am amazed at God's leading in my life, and am ashamed. I have responded so imperfectly to His grace and mercy, and it behooves me to cry: "Lord, have mercy." Oh, how little adversity I have experienced. I did indeed suffer the loss of a wife by death, and that was a painful loss, but the Lord gave me a second wife, and we have already had 14 pleasant years together. My six children, all of them of my first marriage, are all living, and my oldest son and his wife invited all to their home to commemorate God's goodness on my 80th birthday.

When I think of my humble beginnings; of the fact that all of my children are blessed materially; that one of my sons is a minister in the Presbyterian Church, and that my wife and I may live comfortably in our own home, with God's blessing, I may exclaim: "Who am I, and what is my house, that Thou hast brought us hitherto?" And what a wonder of His grace that He rescued me from my life of vanity, making me His child and heir, and calling me to the ministry of the Word at a time when our church in this land had existed only 12 years. When I think of the little training that I received, so that I used to weep and wonder what would become of me, and then recall that I was privileged to serve the church in the ministry for 43 years, I am amazed at God's goodness.

I review once again my entry into the ministry among the small and despised group that returned out of the Reformed Church, and then I stand amazed at its growth, -- more than 40,000 souls, divided into 240 congregations, with 178 ministers, having its own Theological School and College with 16 professors and 400 students, and exclaim: "He that built all of this is God!"

Moreover, our people already have a large number of Christian schools, and more are coming constantly. We have carried on missionary labors among the Indians for many years, and are preparing for foreign missions. There is mission work among the Jews, and the work of benevolence for T.B. and mental patients. And now I say to my fellow ministers: "Be humble before God, and you will be strong in Him Who called you to His service."

During my ministry among our Dutch people we were quite isolated from the American world around us, but that has changed, especially in recent years. Then we spoke the Dutch language,

but that is declining in the majority of cases. As a denomination we are increasingly using the language of this country. Quite a large number of churches now use the English language ~~exclusively~~ exclusively, and others partially. Our youth is being educated almost exclusively in the English language; in our daily conversation we employ the English, and our people are represented in all of life's activities. We have been cast into the midst of the American world and life, and this has its dangers with respect to the religious life.

The total number of Reformed people in this land is small, and the un-Reformed surround us on all sides. Pernicious winds from institutions of higher learning blow in our direction. May our Theological School and College remain true to the confessions. May God give the school many young men who fear Him. Young brethren, remain lovers of God's sovereign grace. Preach the doctrine of grace faithfully, and it will be well with you. Be servants who need not be ashamed. Recognize the foe, and fight him, knowing that you are then serving your Sender. The battle is the Lord's. Be true to His Word and will. I have finished my work upon earth, but you are in the midst of the struggle, and the gospel was never popular in this world; but especially in these days the gospel of the cross is being attacked on all sides and in various ways. May your life's motto be and remain: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." So be it.