

Chapter 16



HOPE AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Editor's Introduction

THINK IT NOT STRANGE THAT A FAITHFUL church of Jesus Christ has a strong interest in Christian education. Hope's interest is not and never has been for the church to establish, own, and operate Christian schools. Her history demonstrates her support of the principle of *parental* (parent-owned-and-operated) schools, rather than *parochial* (church-owned-and-operated) schools.

Nevertheless, Hope is and always has been committed to honoring article 21 of the Church Order of Dordt: "The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant."¹

Chapter 16 presents Hope consistory's active support of Christian education in accordance with the requirements of article 21.

Hope church's support of Christian education is further demonstrated by the many members who have devoted themselves to teaching in Protestant Reformed schools. The list below of current members of Hope church who have taught, are teaching, or are preparing to teach confirms this.

1 Church Order 21, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 387.

Name	Place	Dates
Annica Bosveld	Studying at Grand Valley State University for elementary education	present
Shari Bosveld	Heritage Christian School	1990 to 1992
John Buiter	Adams Christian School	1956 to 1957
	Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School	1957 to 1960
	Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School	1962 to 1996
Alyssa De Vries	Completing secondary education program at Grand Valley State University	2016
Marilyn De Vries	Free Christian School	1968 to 1972
Nathan De Vries	Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School	2015 to present
Tom De Vries	Loveland Protestant Reformed Christian School	1962 to 1964
	Free Christian School	1967 to 1972
	Loveland Protestant Reformed Christian School	1979 to 1989
	Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School	1989 to 2009
	Adams Christian School	2015 to present
Richard De Vries	Mount Vernon Christian High School	1989 to 1995
	Adams Christian School	1995 to 1997
	Covenant Christian High School	1997 to present
Susann Grasman	Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School	2002 to present
James Huizinga	Adams Christian School	1967 to 1971
	Covenant Christian High School	1971 to 2012
Alex Kalsbeek	Heritage Christian High School	2007 to 2013

Name	Place	Dates
Calvin Kalsbeek	Adams Christian School	1973 to 1982
	Covenant Christian High School	1982 to 2011
Gladys Koole	Hull Protestant Reformed Christian School	1978 to 1979
	Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School	1979 to 1982
Ronald Koole	Hull Protestant Reformed Christian School	1979 to 1986
	Loveland Protestant Reformed Christian School	1986 to 1995
	Heritage Christian School	1995 to 1996
	Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School	1996 to present
Harry Langerak	Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School	1964 to 1969
	Covenant Christian High School	1969 to 2009
Joel Langerak Jr.	Studying at Calvin College for secondary education	present
Gayle Lotterman	Covenant Christian High School	2014 to 2015
	Heritage Christian School	2014 to 2015
	Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School	2015 to present
Helen Medema	Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School	1966 to 1969
	Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School	1990 to 2008
Joel Minderhoud	Covenant Christian High School	1995 to present
Julie Schwarz	Heritage Christian School	1992 to 1997
Daniel Van Uffelen	Heritage Christian High School	2001 to 2011
	Covenant Christian High School	2011 to present
Helen Veenstra	Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School	1953 to 1954



Past, present, and aspiring teachers at Hope back from left: James Huizinga, Alex Kalsbeek, Tom De Vries, Annica Bosveld, Gladys Koole, Gayle Lotterman, Dan Van Uffelen, Cal Kalsbeek, John Buitter, Harry Langerak, Joel Langerak Jr; front: Marilyn De Vries, Helen Medema, Alyssa De Vries, Shari Bosveld, Julie Schwarz, Susann Grasman, Joel Minderhoud, Ronald Koole

Mother Hope and the Rearing of a Son in Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School

Prof. David J. Engelsma

This son of Hope Protestant Reformed Church was eight years old when Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School began educating the children of Hope church in the fall of 1947. He was entering the fourth grade.

With other boys and girls who were members of Hope church, I attended the Christian Reformed school in Jenison, Michigan, for three years—grades one through three. Upon the institution of Hope school in 1947, I became a student there from grades four through nine. I graduated in the early summer of 1953. My teachers were Miss Jessie Dykstra, Miss Della Vander Vennen, and then Miss Alice Reitsma in grades seven through nine. These teachers signed my report cards.

My last year at Hope was 1953, the year of the schism in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Good friends in church and school disappeared in the summer of 1953. Some I have never seen again—a regret. From time to time, I give thought to suggesting a Hope school reunion of all who attended, or graduated from, the school in or prior to 1953.

Birth of the School

With regard to the forming of Hope school, the first reference in the minutes of Hope church to the movement to establish a Protestant Reformed Christian school for the children of Hope church is dated in May 1943. At that time there was already a “board of the Protestant Reformed School Society.” The consistory of Hope decided to “give the board our moral and financial support.” The consistory also decided to take three collections a year for the proposed Protestant Reformed Christian school. In addition, the offering at the worship service on Christmas Day in 1943 was designated for the as yet nonexistent school.

During the years 1943 to 1946, Hope church took collections for both Jenison Christian School and for the Protestant Reformed school, which was in progress. In May 1947 Hope’s consistory discontinued taking collections for Jenison Christian School and designated all Christian school offerings for Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School.

Showing exemplary gratitude for the Christian instruction the Jenison Christian School had given the children of Hope, the consistory of Hope in 1946 permitted the Jenison school board to canvass the Hope congregation for funds to purchase a new school bus, even though plans were well under way to establish a Protestant Reformed Christian school.

Indicating the zeal of the members of Hope church for Protestant Reformed Christian education of their children, the consistory minutes of April 1938 include this cryptic decision: “A motion to comply with the request to distribute the questionnaire for our Christian *high school*” (emphasis added). Already some nine years before the establishment of a Protestant Reformed Christian grade school, there was interest in Hope church for a Protestant Reformed high school. This was some thirty years before the institution in the Grand Rapids area of Covenant Christian High School in 1968.

The commitment of the members of Hope church to Protestant Reformed education of their children already in 1942 or 1943 and their establishment of the school in 1947 are striking and especially commendable in view of the small size of the Hope congregation in those years. In 1943, by which time a school society and board had

already formed, Hope church consisted of merely approximately fifteen families. When the school began in 1947, Hope was only twenty-four families, with a total membership of 112 souls.

Despite her small size and limited financial resources, Hope was the first congregation in Michigan, indeed in all of the territory of Classis East of the Protestant Reformed denomination, to establish a Protestant Reformed Christian school. Only Redlands, California, in all of the Protestant Reformed denomination formed a Protestant Reformed Christian school earlier than Hope.



Hope School board (c. 1950/51) comprised mostly of members of Hope church; back from left: John Lanning, Melvin Engelsma, Dick Kooienga, Joe King, G. Ten Elshof, Gerrit Moelker; Ted Howerzyl, Gary Korhorn, Maynard Veenstra, Dewey Engelsma, John Kalsbeek Sr.

Hope's strong concern and willingness to sacrifice for a school are the more fascinating in view of the fact that most, if not all, of the members of the church had very little formal education. My father was typical. He had only an eighth-grade education in the small, dingy, one-room school at the corner of Riverbend Drive and Kenowa Avenue. One teacher taught all eight grades, with the help of a strong stick to encourage both good behavior and diligent study. Upon my father's graduation from this primitive institution of learning, my father's father put an end to my father's schooling, so that young Dewey could plow the fields behind a team of horses in the farm country of River Bend.

It is doubtful that Mr. Richard Newhouse, original president of the Hope school board, had had even eight grades of education in the Netherlands, whence he had emigrated to the United States.

Grace in the Birth

Rejection of common grace played a powerful role in the establishment of Hope school. The fathers and mothers of Hope church were convinced that the worldview of common grace—which became the worldview of the Christian Reformed schools by decision of the Christian Reformed synod of 1924 in place of the worldview of the antithesis of scripture and the Reformed confessions—deeply and adversely affected Christian schools and education. I note in passing that it is highly unlikely that those fathers and mothers ever used the sophisticated term *worldview*, although they had a good grasp of the reality. Those members of Hope church were also convinced that the confession by the Protestant Reformed Churches of particular grace, implying the *antithesis*—with which word they were thoroughly acquainted—between the holy church and the totally depraved world, required distinctively Protestant Reformed schools as well as churches.

Such men and their wives esteemed the education of their children and the other children of the church highly and were willing to sacrifice for their education, if only the education would be Reformed according to scripture and the creeds. That our fathers at Hope church, a congregation of about thirty families, actually began plans to build a school just seems incredible. Did they know what they were getting into? Were they really counting the cost? Was it perhaps a vain dream? Bear in mind that the congregation was composed of mostly ordinary, factory wage earners and farmers. But the decision had been made to build a school no matter what the cost. Our fathers were motivated by the divine mandate to instruct their covenant children. *John Kalsbeek Sr.*

Although the words *worldview* and *antithesis* were not used, the “basis” of Hope school in the original constitution, which was adopted by the board in March 1946, set forth the realities of these words: “The training of the covenant child[ren] in the school as well as in the home and in the church must serve to prepare them to follow their lifelong calling to reveal the glory of their God in a life lived from the principle of regeneration by grace.”

Even though I was only at the most a third grader at Jenison Christian School at the time, I remember reporting to my parents activities that were strange to me and that my parents frowned on and attributed to the pernicious influence of the theory of common grace. Perhaps the disturbing activities were certain chapel talks or the showing of certain movies. They were certainly not the gross evils arising from common grace that are accepted in Christian Reformed schools today. The staff of Jenison Christian School in the early 1940s, under the supervision of the principal, Peter Bouma, was conservative.

Speaking of Mr. Bouma, some forty-five years after my attendance at Jenison Christian I was asked to give a chapel speech at a Grand Rapids facility for the elderly. Sitting in the front row of the audience was Mr. Bouma, whom I recognized. After the speech, I greeted him warmly, informed him of my relation to him many years before, and spoke with him of my teacher in those primary grades at Jenison Christian, Miss Ann Bolthouse.

Distinct in my memory is a sharp, even heated, debate we Protestant Reformed children had on one occasion with our Christian Reformed bus driver, as he was driving us home after school down Wilson Avenue to the Riverbend area. The issue was common grace. This brings home to me how thoroughly we had been instructed concerning the evils of the theory of common grace already at the young age of seven or eight. We could and did argue the doctrinal issue with an adult. When I reported this exchange to my father that evening, his response was, “We must have our own school.”

Through the passing of the years, the members and especially parents in Hope Protestant Reformed Church had become very conscious that the doctrinal differences which had caused denominational separation in 1924 were surely permeating the various subjects taught in the existing Christian school.² Mr. and Mrs. Dewey Engelsma

At the time the men of Hope church, and the women also, were at work establishing a school uncorrupted by the theory of a common grace of God. This work was not only mental and spiritual, but also intensely physical. Well do I remember the men of Hope church at work in the spring and summer of 1947 putting up a red brick school building with their own hands. Working men all, and most of them living from paycheck to paycheck, they devoted their evenings after supper and Saturdays to the erection of a school building that they would not otherwise been able to afford. Especially on Saturdays, we small children would accompany our fathers to the grounds of the future school, the land just off Wilson Avenue, a little north of Riverbend Drive. This is where the present school, now much enlarged and enhanced, stands.



I never view the present school without seeing its original, smaller form—just a few rooms—and the founding fathers of Hope themselves mixing cement and standing on ladders laying the bricks. Prof. David J. Engelsma

2 “History of Hope School,” in *Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School 25th Anniversary Booklet 1947–1972*, 6.

We know from the history of Hope school that much of the work in building the school was done by volunteer labor. Zeal for the building reminds one of the Jewsíbuilding the wall of Jerusalem in Nehemiahís day.îdohn Kalsbeek Sr.

Each member must fulfill a total of two days donated labor in periods of one-half or more at a time.î ³

In those days, the school building stood directly behind the white, frame building that was the place of worship of Hope church. The physical juxtaposition of the two buildings said something, *loudly*, about the close, important relation of church and school.

Letter received from Hopeís consistory asking to use the schoolís toilet (churchís outhouse torn down).î ⁴

Those experiences as a child in the actual life of the covenant with regard to the rearing of covenant children are, no doubt, part of the reason I not only have, and never had, any trouble with the strong language of article 21 of the Church Order of Dordt, but I also thrill to this language, and have always preached and exhorted the grand calling of the language: “The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant.”⁵

Thus I will be able one day to look my own and my wife’s fathers, and the other founding fathers of Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School, in the eye (if we do such things in heaven), as also to give account of my ministry to the Judge (which we must surely do).

³ “Gleaned from the minutes of the beginning years,” in *ibid.*, 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Church Order 21, in *Confessions and Church Oder*, 387.

Humble Beginning

Education in the new building began in the fall of 1947. There were fifty-two students in grades one through nine. Two teachers taught the children. Miss Jessie Dykstra taught the lower grades. Miss Della Vander Vennen taught the upper grades. Miss Vander Vennen having left for the newly established Adams Street Protestant Reformed Christian School, Miss Alice Reitsma soon became the principal of Hope school and taught the upper grades.



Hope faculty in 1952-53 from left: Agatha Lubbers, Alice Reitsma, Jessie Dykstra

We can be certain that many prayers, beseeching the Lord's blessing and success for this bold project, were heard. But the founders persisted, believing that the Lord would bless their cause and endeavor. — John Kalsbeek Sr.

A small, humble beginning of the now large, impressive institution that is Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School!

Yes, we organized a society. We raised funds. We toiled hard to erect a building with two classrooms. We donated time and toil and finances. We struggled with government agencies for permission to build at a time when there was a ban on all but the most necessary building projects. We approached them for the right to buy critical materials when a war denied these to many. We persisted and sought without discouragement to hurdle the unexpected obstacle of being required to have a registered architect or building contractor supervise the building of our school and that after we had already erected a goodly part of it. We committed the matter of teachers to [God]. But He is the one Who in covenant faithfulness gave us all this and opened the way every time. He kept us faithful and confident. He supplied our every need from the night we organized the society which He put in our hearts to bring into being.⁶ Rev. John A. Heys

How true to the way in this world of the kingdom of God, always and in every form! God loves to make something out of nothing.

Culture in the Country School

Miss Reitsma especially had influence on the spiritual, educational, and, yes, cultural development of this farm boy in the upper grades of Hope school. The area of Hope church and Hope school was considered the “sticks” in those days by the more civilized inhabitants of the city of Grand Rapids. We knew.

Alice Reitsma brought culture to those “sticks.”

By her scintillating teaching, she opened up the wonderful world of study and learning to this student and others.

⁶ J. A. Heys, “Joy of Covenant Faithfulness,” in *Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School 25th Anniversary Booklet 1947–1972*, 2.

Alice Reitsma first initiated the annual all-school programs. I remember the very first one was entitled *Dur Only Com - fort*, with the three divisions of misery, deliverance, and thankfulness. It was rendered in First Protestant Reformed Church at Fuller and Franklin. As one of our ministers remarked to me after the program, It was so good it made one weep. And I might add that they are still the highlight of the year; still just as inspiring. John Kalsbeek Sr.

Miss Reitsma introduced her students to the beauty of classical music. Previously, our tastes in music—other than love for the psalter, our songbook at worship on the Sabbath—ran to country music and stopped there. Slim Whitman and Johnny Cash were the peak of our musical mountain. When Miss Reitsma announced that the last period on Friday afternoons would be devoted to listening to classical music, we rough, country boys glanced at each other with scorn disfiguring our faces.

How ignorant we were!

To this day I cannot hear the strains of Verdi's "Triumphal March" from Verdi's *Aida* without being transported back to the little Hope school in the early 1950s on a Friday afternoon, where first I heard the piece, indeed heard *of* the piece, and was moved by it. I see the portable record player on the teacher's desk, with Miss Alice Reitsma presiding over what today would be called "music appreciation hour."

Pronounced was her promotion of literature. I see and hear her still, dramatically reading aloud to the class Longfellow's epic poem, *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie*, with tears streaming down her cheeks.

Less effective was her effort to apply the Reformed religion, indeed the *Protestant* Reformed religion, to politics. But she made the effort long before the appearance of the Moral Majority or similar religious political movements in the United States. At the time of the presidential election of 1952, when her student was an eighth or ninth grader, Miss Reitsma prevailed upon me (imposed her will upon me would

be closer to the truth) to give a speech to the regular meeting of the Hope school PTA urging that association to take the lead in promoting the candidacy of a Protestant Reformed man for the presidency of the United States. (I wonder how that speech was recorded in the minutes of the PTA.)

The man? Her pastor and hero, the Rev. Herman Hoeksema.

I gave the speech. Miss Reitsma had written the better part of it.

Hoeksema was not elected. He did not run. The Hope PTA had not been galvanized into political action by my speech.

When in seminary, some ten years later, I was tempted to inform Hoeksema how close he had once come to the presidency. Wisely, I refrained. Hoeksema was ever critical of Abraham Kuyper’s abandonment of the ministry for political office.

Spiritual Power

And then there was Alice Reitsma’s direct and powerful influence upon me, and Hope school’s influence through her, to pursue the ministry of the gospel in the Protestant Reformed Churches. One afternoon the vivacious teacher took this young, farm boy aside and admonished him to consider the ministry of the gospel as his calling from God. She did not convince me on the spot. But she introduced the thought, which never thereafter disappeared. God used her admonition, as well as other means, over several years, to convict the boy, then a young man at Calvin College, that he was called to the gospel ministry.

Habits and Attitudes				
Personal Traits	1	2	3	4
Effort				
Punctuality				
Neatness: 1. Work				
2. Desk				
3. Self				
Initiative				
Social Traits				
Courtesy				
Cooperation				
Obedience to: Teacher				

Handwritten note: You are a good student. Keep on trying. Coming as a teacher? back some day as a teacher?

Another student reports that Miss Reitsma also encouraged and admonished some of her students to become teachers in the Protestant Reformed schools, as is evidenced by what she wrote on this student's ninth-grade report card.

Church and school!

Specifically, Hope Protestant Reformed Church and Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School!

More completely, church, school, *and home!*

With regard to church and school, the church was instrumental to produce the school, as article 21 of the Dordt Church Order envisions. The school on its part brought the truth preached and taught by the church to bear upon all the rearing, learning, and living of the covenantal children of the church. Thus the school has been a support to the church.

Whether as a minister or as a soundly Reformed layman or woman, the students of the school, in various degrees, became lively, competent, faithful, confessing members of the church and knowledgeable, strong, courageous citizens of the kingdom of God.

And still are becoming such members and citizens!

By the covenantal grace of God, still powerful and beneficent in and through Hope Protestant Reformed Church after one hundred years!

There is little doubt that Hope school has been uniquely blessed. And, just as significant, Hope school has been a blessing to our community. Distinctive education must and does produce a distinctive product. Our students are given a heritage, a distinctive view of the whole body of knowledge and experience, which can be acquired in no place other than a Protestant Reformed school.⁷ Jon Huiskens

⁷ Jon Huiskens, editor's preface, in *ibid.*

