

SPECIAL FOCUS

When for one reason or another a particular school comes to mind, one is likely to see in his mind's eye an image of the school building. Or he may think of the teachers — for good reason, since it is indeed the teachers that make a school. Perchance he might even think of the principal. But how many of us think of the school's Board members? Members of the Board take care of the school's finances; they hire the teachers; they see to it that the building and grounds are properly maintained; they make bus routes and try, sometimes in vain, to keep one step ahead of old vehicles. But who notices? Once a year the Board members conduct a meeting of the School Society. They're noticed then — and probably criticized for not being able to keep tuition down. Once a year a Board member or two takes a small part in the graduation ceremony. A moment of visibility. Oh, and often their picture will appear in the school yearbook. Apart from that, their work is behind the scenes. Few people even know who all the Board members are. And only their wives know about all the hours which go into the work. Fitting it is, therefore, that we make them, somehow, the object of our "special focus" in the Perspectives.

We decided to do that in two ways. First, we asked Mr. Jon Huiskens, who has himself served on a school Board, to write a short article about his father, who was a Board member for a whole lot longer — in our school in Edgerton, Minnesota. Second, we asked Mr. Edward VanEgdom, who has served many years on the Board in our school in Doon, Iowa, to reflect on his own work in the cause of Protestant Reformed Education. So, we have for you this time a tribute to a Board member (Mr. Henry Huiskens), and reflections by a Board member (Mr. Van Egdom). The picture below is of Henry and his late wife Wilhelmina.

Recollections of a Father's Service

Jon Huisken

My first reaction to the request to write this piece about my father's long-term service as a school board member was that there was really nothing much to say other than "Yes, he did, and he did so well." I knew that he served often as a school board member, many times simultaneously while in the consistory. But, what his thoughts were about serving, what his problems were in serving, I really didn't know. You see, he never complained about all the hours he put in, and he never brought school board business home to the dinner table. He kept all that in confidence, as he did his consistory work.

But, having lived in the same community as he, and having taught in the same school as I was trained and of which he served as school board member, I knew that I could reconstruct, at least, the environment in which he served and, in that way, give you some idea of what it was like for him to serve on the school board of the Free Christian School of Edgerton, Minnesota.



First, you ought to know that we lived in a small community (Lake Wobegon South). And, to be separate in this kind of a community was to be the subject of ridicule. He lived with a lot of that — ridicule. Why start this small, two-room school when there is a plenty-good-enough local Christian school with separate grades and teachers for each grade? Why do you insist on providing inferior education to your children, because inferior it just had to be? Why did you give this school such a dumb name, the Free Christian School — no tuition there? And, then, there was the ridicule of a more personal nature, often coming from his family or from those who knew him well — your children are never going to amount to much if you send them to that little school.

Secondly, he had to live with a lot of strife. Some of his years in the school board were during the 1953 split. For a time, both groups continued to send their children to the same school and men from both groups were in the school board, both trying to maintain or gain control. The culmination of all this was two separate graduation ceremonies — one for us and one for them.

Thirdly, the school always had to live with limited resources. This was true for financial resources, but it was also true for personnel. It was always a struggle to stay alive. Teachers were often secured at the last moment (I signed there in the last week of August, fully intending to finish college, until I learned that if I didn't teach, there would be no school that year). That's still true today. When Joanne and I visited the school again this past summer, the difference between the resources of our local Michigan schools and this school were immediately apparent. I know that finances were always a nagging problem. And I know that many times he had to dig a little deeper to keep the school afloat. One thing, in this regard, that stands out in my mind: He could never understand why some churches turned them down when they asked for a collection to be taken for them. That hurt him then and to this day.

You might conclude from this that he dreaded every minute of his service. Not so. We never heard him complain. He always willingly served. The cause was right; the need was clear. There simply was no question about what he must do. ■■■

“... forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”
I Corinthians 15:58b