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Hillegonds, William C Oral History Interview: Retired Faculty and Administrators of Hope College

Conrad Strauch Jr.

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LIVING HERITAGE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Rev. William Hillegonds

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Hope College Archives Council
Holland, Michigan
1978

INTRODUCTION

The Hope College Living Heritage Oral History Project consists of a series of interviews conducted during the summer of 1977 by Nancy A. Swinyard, and the summer of 1978 by Conrad J. Strauch with persons who, in years past, were members of the faculty and administration of Hope College. Upon the completion of each session, the taped conversation was transcribed and then edited by both the interviewer and the interviewee for clarity. While accuracy is desirable, the viewpoint of the interviewee is maintained. Some alterations were suggested by the interviewer during the interviews and in later correspondences, but the researcher will discover discrepancies between the interviews themselves and with published sources of information. Therefore, the researcher must be aware that these differences exist, and seek to understand the perspective from which all statements were made. Tapes of all interviews are stored in the Hope College Archives.

No claim is made that the information contained within these transcripts is absolutely accurate. No two people share identical viewpoints, and the separation by time from the interviewee's experiences on campus can sometimes intensify this divergence.

Without the support of Dr. Jacob E. Nyenhuis, Dean for the Humanities, and Mr. William K. Anderson, Vice President for Business and Finance, this project would not have become a reality. Dr. Elton J. Bruins, though busy with his own pursuits, willingly lent his guidance and support. The success of this project can be attributed to the efforts of the interviewees, each gracious, receptive and cooperative.

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PREFACE

Interviewee: Rev. William Hillegonds

Interview I: July 10, 1978

Chaplain's Office, Dimnent Chapel, Hope College

Interviewer: Mr. Conrad Strauch, Jr.

REV. WILLIAM HILLEGONDS

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH AND SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

Rev. William Hillegonds was born on February 2, 1923 in Chicago. In August 1946 he married Elizabeth Ann Romaine, they have two sons, Paul and Tim. He graduated from Hope College in 1949, Magna Cum Laude. From Hope he went to Western Theological Seminary where he received his BD in 1951.

Then Rev. Hillegonds moved to New York where he served two churches. From 1951-1954 he was at the First Reformed Church at Chatham, and from 1954-1960 he served the Brighton Reformed Church at Rochester. In 1960 the Hillegonds moved back to Holland, Michigan where Rev. Hillegonds served the Hope Church until he came to Hope College in 1965.

Upon his arrival at Hope College he served as College Chaplain, the position he held until his retirement on August 8, 1978. Throughout his career at Hope he served on two committees, the Religious Life Committee and the Campus Life Board. Also he found time to continue his graduate work, receiving his STM Summa Cum Laude from the University of Dubuque in 1971. After his retirement Rev. Hillegonds will be serving as Senior Pastor of the 2nd Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

This interview was conducted during the closing weeks of Rev. Hillegonds time at Hope. Consequently he was unable to look over the transcription of our interview because of the lack of time. In this interview he looks back upon his years of service and willingly expresses his views on such matters as; the chapel controversy, establishing the Student Church, the development of the Chaplain's Office, his ties with the Religion Department, his experiences of the late 60's and 70's, and finally his student days here at Hope after the Second World War.

INTERVIEW I

CONRAD: When you came here in 1965 what kind of condition was the chapel service in?

HILLEGONDS: There was already in '65 a clamor that the regulations needed to be changed. When I came people were expected to attend chapel twice a week, everybody, freshmen through the senior class. I don't think chapel became a problem, a real problem on the campus until the student body outgrew the seating capacity of the chapel. It became necessary then of course to come up with another plan that would allow half the student body to attend one day and half the student body to attend another day. So I think that changing the chapel requirement because of space limitations; and the fact that the faculty had changed added to the problem. The old guard was getting old or dying off or retiring and new people were being brought to the campus from other traditions who weren't accustomed to attending morning chapel. Those faculty didn't show regularly at 8:00 A.M. and I think that said something to students too. When the chapel was large enough to accommodate everybody on campus the faculty used to enter through the south-east door and sat together in the first four or five pews and the students saw that and so there was generated a kind of community atmosphere.

So when I came there was a clamor to change chapel. When they were going twice a week the students began to say why go at all? But I didn't think we could get rid of compulsory chapel with one fell swoop. So we decided to do something else, we came up with a plan whereby freshmen were required to attend twice a week, sophmores once a week and junior and seniors were excused from compulsory attendance. And we even said that if a freshman or a sophmore found it against his or her religious scruples, or against his or her theology or something.... that if students found

compulsory worship something they could not tolerate, they could come down here and ask for an exemption. So it was very easy to get out of chapel. But even that didn't please the students, and there was a lot of criticism, a lot of continuing opposition to compulsory chapel. So somewhere along the way it was abolished altogether. That was done by a decree of the Religious Life Committee, the faculty, and finally the Board of Trustees. They saw how futile it was to try to keep living something that had had its day. So that's where we are today. A small group attends a noncompulsory chapel, which is available five days a week.

CONRAD: Did you find a sharp drop once it became voluntary?

HILLEGONDS: Oh sure. Which only says that students weren't choosing to attend anyway. We were encouraging lying. People would say they were there and they weren't there. We were encouraging, it seems to me, taking the Lord's name in vain. Kids would do almost anything and everything to let us know that they weren't enjoying it. I can remember one day for example when a couple of students were sitting in the front row. The choir had just sung a beautiful anthem and these students had rattled newspapers all during the time the anthem was being sung; so as soon as the thing was over (I had a robe on that day for some reason, maybe we had a visiting dignitary who was speaking and it was kind of a formal thing) I jumped off the chapel platform and grabbed those two people and literally bounced them out which suggests that I was at the end of my tether, that I had had it, that I just couldn't see people taking God's name in vain that way, making a mockery out of something that was intended to be beautiful and meaningful.

So I was kind of glad to see the thing go, but not before they tried all sorts of other things. For a little while students could attend on any day they wanted to attend and they dropped a little card in a box that was later registered. People were conducting pools I understand. In other words,

the card had a number and if the hymn was that number the student won five bucks or something like that.

CONRAD: So it had become a total mockery?

HILLEGONDS: Well I wouldn't say that everybody felt that way, but it was tough. It was tough for a visiting minister or a faculty person to see the last ten rows of the chapel jammed with people while in the rest of the chapel there weren't enough people to hit with buckshot.

CONRAD: How did you view the whole question of suspending students, I know the Anchor covered those very carefully.

HILLEGONDS: I felt that if students weren't willing to assume responsibility for asking for an exemption, then maybe there was reason to suspend persons who wouldn't do at least that much. In other words, it was a school requirement. And after all some of us finally have to say, "Hey, that's the law. We can't get around it." I think we tried to do everything we could possibly do to make it easy for people to get out from under something they saw as restrictive. So I felt at the time that maybe a gentile slap on the wrist was necessary, for the sake of those who were doing it even though they didn't want to do it. It was because of that suspension thing that I suggested that we give exemptions. It was because there were people who felt that compulsory worship isn't the way one should worship at a school like ours.

Of course the burgeoning new views of the late 60's had something to do with this too. Students didn't want to be treated as children any more. There had been already a breakdown in parental authority. Students wanted to name their own game. They wanted to decide if they should attend class or not. Taking roll, that began to go out in those years. Compulsory class attendance also began to go out. "Hey I should be able to say whether I go to class or not."

CONRAD: Do you think that having chapel at eight in the morning had something to do with the lack of attendance?

HILLEGONDS: Oh, sure, sure. And there were a few times when we seriously considered doing it at 10:00. But my feeling was that it was better for fewer people to attend chapel at 8:00 than for a larger number to attend at 10:00. Early morning is the time to give the day over to God rather than at 10:30 when you have to give the day over to God in retrospect or something like that. It probably should have been tried, but then we also ran into this. We were a little hesitant about what students would say to us if we made them begin school at 8:00 in the morning. We didn't want the Lord to get pinned with that one. That was another reason. And while I name it second I'm not so sure that wasn't as important as the other. My thought always was to begin school at 9:00 with chapel because I think that more and more the students I know on the campus are nocturnal animals they get up late because they go to bed late. Lights are still on at three or two-thirty in the morning, people begin studying at 11:00 sometimes. So we thought about that, but you see that begins to interfere with labs in the afternoon, it begins to interfere with varsity athletic teams who practice at 3:30 or 4:00, so no matter which way we turned we bumped our noses.

CONRAD: I have heard that the American Civil Liberties Union began to get involved in this whole thing. Was that an important move?

HILLEGONDS: No it really wasn't, it was like a lot of thunder which didn't bring any rain. A few of the students; no, one in particular (who is still by the way a very different person, he is still in rebellion and I'm not going to say if this is a qualitative thing or not, that's not for me to say), the one who is still in rebellion against society was the one who led the charge at that point, a fine young man. He felt that every pressure ought to be brought to bear to get the college to change the name of the game at 8:00 in morning. So he threatened to bring in the Civil Liberties Union. It never came off. I think there was a letter from somebody in Grand Rapids and the

President fired back a letter saying, "We welcome anything you want to do in court." and that was the end of it. In other words, a threat was met by a threat and it was all over. We thought we could handle it ourselves. You see we thought we were open to anything that made a lot of sense, and was good for students as well as the traditions of the college, and some of the alumni; because when you talk in terms of community it's not only the students on the campus you've got to include, community goes beyond the people who live here.

CONRAD: That's all I have on that particular area, do you have anything else?

HILLEGONDS: I can just say this. I think that I was liked in those days, I guess I want to say I've always been liked, but I think I had good relations with the students and it hurt them as much as it hurt me to see some of the things that went on; like hymnbooks disappearing, liquid gunpowder being dropped on the platform so that a person going up the platform would begin to go up in smoke as he touched the liquid gunpowder with the heel or soul of his shoe. It was something that not one of us enjoyed going through. I guess what I'm saying now is this, I wish we had been able to clean it up a little bit so that the end came with a little more dignity. Chapel disappeared under a cloud of nastiness, and I'm sorry about that, as others are I'm sure.

CONRAD: It's sad it couldn't end on a better note.

HILLEGONDS: Yeah, it did serve a purpose for many, many years. We don't have a sense of community on this campus, and when I was a student here everybody could get into the chapel which helped to create that community feeling. The president when he had an important announcement to make got up there and made the announcement. The faculty was at the front of the chapel. So that you did have a sense of belonging to something you could see, reach out and touch. We don't have that now, we have a Community Hour which nobody goes to.

That was one of the things which lent cohesiveness to the college community which went with the loss of chapel. So it's too bad we couldn't have laid the corpse to rest with a little more beauty, a little more solemnness, rather than with cheap rhetoric, and nasty comments, that was my feeling.

CONRAD: Do you think the Student Church you started helped to bring some of that cohesiveness back?

HILLEGONDS: Well it really couldn't because the Student Church never could be a church, in the sense of having children baptized, and grandparents laid to rest. It couldn't be a church in the sense of touching all ages, the joys of all ages as well as the sorrows of all ages. No it really couldn't replace it.

Maybe it was meant to do that in part, I'm sure that was one of the things that motivated our establishing a student church, but it could never do it. It was a part time church in that it was here only when the students were on campus. Faculty would never join, they would come occasionally but what would they do all the weeks students left?

Another reason for the student church was the students weren't going to church, that was anti-institution day, the late '60's. Students were beginning to be against everything, from the ROTC to the Christian Church. And they were against wearing "go to church clothes" on Sunday, they had a thing about that. The Student Church became the place where people came as they were dressed and sometimes they weren't dressed very formally at all- it became that kind of place.

Also it was a church where students had a share in saying what was going to go on from the beginning. There was a Board of Trustees and they decided where the money should go that was received by way of offerings. They decided who the preacher was going to be. They decided the format of the worship service. None of this was completely up to them because I was always

the advisor and I'm kind of a strong guy. I'm sure that many times they didn't get their way and I did, but the idea was there. That sort of fit in with the temper of the time.

CONRAD: Did you expect as big a turn out as you got, you held the first one in Mulder Chapel and they said it was over flowing, so it appears you didn't expect such a turn out.

HILLEGONDS: Now you see again, not many students were going to church then. I suppose in part that was due to the fact that the student body was beginning to be a little different in make-up. We were getting students from more non-church families. Then again when students came from very church-ed families some of them decided now was the time to take a vacation from God and they were beginning to be free to do that. The old compulsions had begun to break down.

We went to Mulder Chapel because we thought that would accommodate the number which would come. Art Jentz was the first preacher and we did have to haul chairs from everywhere to accommodate the people. So for the next Sunday until now, the service has been held in Dimment Chapel.

That's an interesting phenomenon too because when we first started the Student Church, once it got rolling that first semester, we would have seven or eight hundred students there. Now we very seldom have more than 375 or 400 because you see church is not a bad word any more. Students aren't fighting the church. They sort of enjoy dressing up and going to church and worshipping with grandmothers and grandfathers and little babies. So we've wondered at times whether worship on Sunday mornings isn't something we ought to discontinue. But again it's hard to do that while there are still 375 or 400 students coming to worship upstairs. It's a service we perform, and it will be performed I guess as long as there is a need. Once the need becomes less obvious, then we'll bag it I'm sure.

CONRAD: That's the reason I don't come here any more.

HILLEGONDS: I've always felt really, that to take four years of a young person's life out of a church setting is not so good. In other words, maybe the best thing is for young people to keep their identity with the Christian Church. But when there is a refusal to do that, then you see I think we are under an obligation to provide something. That's why it goes on.

CONRAD: How did the student have a voice in the organization?

HILLEGONDS: The Student Church began because I had the idea, and I said to Art Jentz, "Let's have a service next Sunday." That's how the Student Church began. "Let's get organized and try it." Well then when we had that turnout I knew immediately that I couldn't be the guy who determines what's going to happen every Sunday.

There was a student on campus at the time, Wes Michaelson. Wes was President of the Student Congress as a junior, so he had one year left. He came in and he wondered if he should run for reelection as Student Congress President, that had never happened before. So I said, "Well I think we ought to do something with the Student Church and I would welcome your involvement in that. I guess I would ask you to help me put together, let's call it a Board of Trustees, would you be willing to do that?" So he said, "Well that is something new, and that's something different." Wes hadn't had a very formal church background either, he came from a rather loosely knit Baptist Church and he was beginning to think in terms of structure a little bit more. So he and a few others sat down with me and we organized the Student Church on the basis of a Board of Trustees as its governing body, of which he became the first president. We tried to get as many women as men involved.

Then of course because it was such a growing thing and because things were happening upstairs, we ran into trouble with the local Classis of the Reformed Church. Students wanted to be admitted into the Christian Church

through the Student Church. In other words, here they had brushed shoulders with Christ and they wanted to stand up before their fellow students and say, "Hey, it's been a meaningful encounter I've had." They didn't want to go to the local church on the corner where they had no built in affirming community. So we had a real argument with the Classis and finally the Classis said, "Since you're not a church you can't do that." So we had to turn that off. There were a couple of occasions when I did it on behalf of a church somewhere. Say someone had his baptized membership in the First Presbyterian Church of Arlington, Virginia. I would call that minister and say, "He wants to make confession of faith, would you mind if he did it here. Then he can become a member of your church." And there were ministers who allowed that to happen.

On a couple of occasions people wanted their children baptized, they were married students who went to Student Church. We were forbidden to do that, and I think rightfully so on both counts (confession of faith and baptism) because we were wrong. But you see how a need sometimes gets in the way of rules. So I tried. I really tried to accommodate the wishes of the Classis, except at the point of Holy Communion. They also told us that we shouldn't have Holy Communion. I said, "Hey, that's pushing it too far. I think that that's something that we should be allowed to do since you have Communion at church camps, men's conventions and what not." And they agreed that that should be done. So we've always been allowed to have Communion, except that we have to tell the classis when we are going to do it. They still do feel that they have a right to look in on what happens here religiously.

CONRAD: Does the organizational part of the church still exist?

HILLEGONDS: Well there is no Student Church anymore. We stopped using that title or that name, though it does slip in once and awhile. What we do now is simply say, Sunday morning worship is just a continuation of the chapel

program, it's just Sunday morning worship rather than Wednesday morning worship, rather than at eight it's at eleven. The Ministry of Christ's People staff which is really a staff made up of students which assists the chplains, they've been helpful in structuring the programs of what happens on Sunday morning; I almost slipped and called it the Student Church.

CONRAD: When did the change occur?

HILLEGONDS: Oh gosh, that was in 1971.

CONRAD: Why did you change it?

HILLEGONDS: We were having all that trouble with the Classis, and again I guess I want to go on record saying the Classis was right, the Classis had every right to ask us to stop doing what we had begun to do because we weren't an organized church. However, I also want to go on record saying that that was an example of where a need really wasn't being met by existing rules. I suggested at the time that maybe the Reformed Church in America should do something with their constitution to allow for campus churches, but that never happened. So when we knew that we couldn't be a church we sat down and decided to do something about that and that's when the Ministry of Christ's People was put together.

CONRAD: How did the Ministry of Christ's People develop?

HILLEGONDS: There was a similar program going on at Western Michigan University. We asked the chaplain there to come down and talk to some of our students who were members of the Student Church Board of Trustees. A few of the more articulate, better informed students, sat down with me and wrote a constitution for the Ministry of Christ's People, which was quite a document; I think that should be in the Archives somewhere. Then we said that we were going to have four paid positions, we were going to pay \$250.00 a semester to four students, one who would be responsible for worship, one for evangelism, one for interpersonal relations or personal growth and one for social ministry.

So four students then were named to the Ministry of Christ's People staff, they were to assist the Chaplain in the work of this office, and carry on a program of their own.

CONRAD: Has that organization continued till today? I know my *freshman* year it was well known but it seems to have died down.

HILLEGONDS: Well it's still around, students are asked to apply for positions. The salary has gone down, I think we now pay \$125.00 a semester because we found that that was almost a full time job. If you're going to pay \$500.00 you almost need more time than students have to give. There are now five people I think signed up for next year who will serve with Pete and whoever the new Chaplain is, as M.O.C.P. staff for that amount of money per semester.

That money by the way comes from the students. We've often wondered how to get our story out. We have offerings on Sunday morning, all of the money, practically all of it, goes into missions; like Bread for the World, CROP, this, that and the other thing. Also, the Chaplain's Office has a budget which amounts to \$7500.00 and out of that budget we pay our student secretaries, and we pay the M.O.C.P. people. That's where that money comes from. So in a sense students are paying students because that \$7500.00 comes from your tuition, out of the general budget of the college.

CONRAD: Did you also work to establish any other kind of religious organizations on campus, like small groups?

HILLEGONDS: Yeah, sure. You see one of the responsibilities of the M.O.C.P. staff was to do that. The person responsible for personal and inter-personal growth was responsible with the Chaplain's Office to establish small Bible groups, and that's always been the case. But who is to say that a student shouldn't organize his own group. And in recent years Navigators, and more recently Inter-Varsity, have come along to establish their own Bible groups.

Another one of the reasons for M.O.C.P. was to try to keep the campus from

becoming fragmented religiously. In other words, the I am of Paul, I am of Cephas, that kind of thing. We hoped that we could provide an umbrella big enough so that everyone could get under it, and sense that there was some kind of oneness involved in what was going on. But in the last few years it hasn't been possible to do. National groups have come in and wanted to do their own thing which is perfectly ok. They've been very good about it in that they have tried to maintain contact with us so that it isn't one group fighting another. Too much of that goes on among Christians anyway. And thus far it's been good, there's been lots of cooperation. I guess the Navigators are a little more distant than the other groups. But even they occasionally will stop by and say, "Hey, is there something we can do together?" Or, "We're going to do this, we just want to let you know ahead of time." Which we appreciated.

CONRAD: Maybe it was good to keep this as a central office?

HILLEGONDS: Yeah, but here again you run the risk, in saying what you just said, of getting people to feel that maybe you're trying to control. I've always thought that it would be a great thing if the Navigators on campus would have the office down at the other end of the hall as their office. Give an office to each one of these groups. But as soon as you do that you see you suggest to somebody, "Ah, the Chaplains are trying to get us in their roost, trying to put us under their thumb, down in their building." Really that's not what we have in mind. Again it's just the idea of giving the impression that we're in this together and that it's not who can have the most Bible Study Groups or who can do this thing or that thing, but how we can help each other become the best kind of religious community we can have on this campus which is partly secular.

CONRAD: Let's move to your office as Chaplain. When you came here the Chaplain's Office didn't involve very much, just planning chapel services

and organizing different programs. But now you've developed it into a complex office involving not only that but counseling and other things. How did this all happen?

HILLEGONDS: I guess if I had only done what my job description called for I would have spent an hour on the job and the rest of the time out fishing, if I enjoyed fishing. There really wasn't much of a job description, you hit it, plan chapel services, and sort of be a liaison between the college and the church - but what did that mean, write letters to churches, visit churches, it was never described. It seemed as if it was thrown together during someone's lunch hour.

So what I did was to create my own job description really. I guess I had some expertise in counseling, that's what I had done some studying in. So that became a large part of what happened during the day. I would be here every afternoon and sometimes two or three nights a week doing counseling. And that's still a large part of what goes on in the office here after 12:00 noon. Pete and I both did quite a great deal of it last year. Although with two people there wasn't as much as there had been the year before. That also was a bit touchy because we didn't want to be in competition with the Counseling Center. Our feeling is that we do pastoral counseling, but that doesn't mean that everyone who comes in is a Christian and appreciates pastoral counseling. It doesn't mean that we pray with everyone who comes in.

We have tried to distinguish what goes on here from what goes on in the Counseling Center. We've always said that's a little more professional than what we do. We've used words like, conversation instead of counseling. We've tried to get out from under the charge from over there that we are cutting in on their turf. We've tried to do a lot of marriage counseling, pre-marriage counseling especially, which they don't do over there. And whenever someone came in with a serious problem bordering on the pathological we would refere

them to somebody in town, after first telling the people over there. So again I think it's been ok. There's been a few problems sometimes, but for the most part it's worked out well.

CONRAD: You mentioned that you did a lot of marriage counseling. Have you received a lot of turn out from the campus for those programs?

HILLEGONDS: We've never had trouble filling our groups. Last year we had four groups, Pete and Becky, and Libby and I shared the responsibility for that. We tried to run two the first semester and two the second semester. I also had a group to do with people whose friend or engaged partner was off on another campus or at home, you see everybody doesn't fall in love with somebody here. Those were quite successful too. In fact I found that sometimes the singles group, as we called it, had in it more honest people than the couples group. It is easier to talk about Johnny at home than when Johnny is sitting right there. These different groups have been very successful, they really have.

Of course that has meant that when you get to know couples at that level you're asked to marry those couples. Through the years those groups, plus other contacts I've had with students have produced scores, and scores, and scores of weddings. I married Dave James and Ruth Johnson on Saturday, I think that made my 151st wedding.

So I guess in answer to that previous question, there wasn't much of a job description so I created one. I don't think it's ever been set down what the job of the chplain is. I think we are struggling with that now in looking for a replacement. What does this guy do? I myself think the Chaplain ought to do more with the church. I think that he should be free to spend more time cultivating the friendship of the Reformed Church.

CONRAD: Did you have much contact with the Reformed Church during your time?

HILLEGONDS: No. And I look back upon that with a little remorse in some

respects. I guess, at the beginning I felt very strongly that the church shouldn't have too much to say about the college. I felt that the college is not a church and that there should be a great deal of freedom; freedom to explore, freedom to fail, freedom to question God. And that we didn't have to be too close to any creedal outfit that would say, "Hey, this is what you've got to believe." But in doing that I lost some friends in the church and I lost some respect on the part of the church. That's why I'm insisting that they at least consider giving the new man some time to cultivate the friendship of the church again. If for no other reason than there's a huge body of people out there of perspective students and we're going to be in trouble getting students. Let's face it that's one of our big problems. What does the future hold in a shrinking market? Do we know what the economy is going to be like? So I think that every contact which has potential for interesting people in the college, both as givers and as providers of students ought to be chased out.

CONRAD: How do you view the tie between the college and the Reformed Church?

HILLEGONDS: When I came to the college President Vander Werf was the president of Hope. I think that he was the man for the time. He was what we needed; we needed new faculty, we needed money, he saw that we just had to have a student center, that we had to have a science building and we had to have a lot of other stuff. He was from the University of Kansas, that's where he taught chemistry for a long time and was head of the department. He knew that money is an important commodity. So he changed the bylaws of the college a bit so that there were fewer church people on the Board of Trustees and more money people, not that church people don't have money. We had a lot of ministers and others who didn't know where the money was, they had no way of getting money. He got the Bob Mats, the Dick DeWitts and the people who had money. And along those lines, I don't think you have to

be a member of the Reformed Church now to be a member of the Hope College Board of Trustees. Of course there must be a certain number of Reformed Church people on the Board. But for the rest they can come from all different places. I don't think that is such a bad idea. I think that through the years that I've been here the connection between the college and the church for that reason and some other reasons has become loser.

At one time all of the faculty were members of the Reformed Church, it was sort of implied that when you came to teach at Hope College you had better get your butt in a Reformed Church pew. We're struggling now to get Christians. The provost is a member of the Episcopal Church, the registrar is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church, Dr. Wettack, one of the deans, is a Methodist. That tended to loosen the ties between the church and the college too, and has made the church a lot more suspicious of the college. At one time it looked very certain as a place because the president and all the faculty were all members of the Reformed Church. That isn't the case now. And so it is a little more threatening to the church to have the college this way.

That's another reason why I think the chaplain ought to have a little more time to go out there and say, "Hey, there's nothing to be afraid of. We're still trying to do our job in a Christian setting. So don't be afraid of us, don't send your young people to Wheaton or to Bob Jones, or Grand Rapids' School of the Bible because your afraid that if they come here they are going to become heretics. We may not shove it down their throats, but trust us."

CONRAD: Would you say this has changed? I've heard that under Dr. Van Wylen the church has been a little more relieved.

HILLEGONDS: Yeah, but I think there is still some suspicion. There probably isn't as much now as there was because I think Dr. Van Wylen really is trying

to give the college a more "Christian face," and I think honestly so. And he's not being phony about it. I think there's less suspicion. I think he says the words a little better than Dr. VanderWerf said the words. I'm not sitting in judgment by saying he says the words better because that doesn't mean he's reading from a script or doesn't believe it, Dr. VanWylen is a very committed Christian, of Reformed persuasion. Cal had been out of the Reformed Church for a long time, he had been a Congregationalist, and his wife had been a Quaker. So that kind of intimate feeling that he's one of us wasn't there. Then he did what he did to the Board of Trustees and that also made people out there wonder what the heck was going on here.

CONRAD: Yes there is the charge that the college has not been remaining true to the Reformed faith.

HILLEGONDS: I think it's a more exciting place now than it was when I first came. Not because I've made it so, but I think there are a lot more things going on which raise the religious question a lot better than when I first came. I think Christianity is a topic of conversation, even though it is ridiculed, it's not taken for granted anymore. It's something that people talk about, fight with, have lover's quarrels over. That's my feeling anyway.

CONRAD: Getting back to your job when you first came here, then you were also teaching a course in the Religion Department. How did you view your time in the Religion Department?

HILLEGONDS: Well, I loved that. I was very, very sorry when that connection was broken. I taught a course in Old Testament one semester and a course in the New Testament the second semester. Then the Religion Department was upgraded, some more people were brought in, they changed the format of the course offerings, and there wasn't a need for a man like me. So like Bismark I was dropped.

And I also got in trouble with the Religion Department, I think. At

the beginning I advised students that if they were pre-ministerial students not to take Religion as a major. That didn't go very well with the department, especially with a couple whom I won't name. I guess that was kind of foolish on my part. I thought that maybe since they were going to take all that stuff in seminary they really should do more psych and soc, and maybe even some art and music here. Then of course the program was changed too, which means that you can have a good religion major and a strong minor in some other stuff, now that wasn't always the case.

So for that reason and also for the other reason that the department was strengthened and they didn't need a part-time teacher, I no longer taught in the Religion Department. I lost something when I was denied the right to teach because I think I was a good teacher. Then I tried philosophy for a couple of semesters, but I'm not a philosopher so that was washed down the drain too.

CONRAD: How did you view the tie between you and the Religion Department once the two were severed?

HILLEGONDS: There never was a very close tie, unfortunately. I don't know whether that was my fault or the Religion Department's fault, probably the fault of both of us. In other words, I felt that I didn't want to get too close to that department because that would ruin my standing with the psychologists and the sociologists. So it was probably more my fault than the Religion Department's fault.

Looking back I regret that I didn't have closer relations with that department. I think we could have done somethings together. That would have meant better things for the college. But the Religion Department did its thing and I did my thing. Once in awhile we got together and talked, but we could have talked more often. I'll assume the responsibility for that. That was one of my mistakes. Although in the last year we've talked a lot more

than before.

CONRAD: Did you feel that you had a good relationship with the other departments on campus?

HILLEGONDS: Yeah, I think so. I was asked to come in and guest lecture by profs who were in other departments. Always one of the sociologists would ask me in. Frequently the psychologists would ask me in. Once or twice the English Department asked me in for a series of lectures. I guess I had the idea that the Chaplain should be a man for all departments, but I guess in becoming a man for all departments I lost somethings too by not being a man for the Religion Department very often, or a man with the Religion Department.

CONRAD: Something that interests me is what went on in the 60's on Hope's campus. I've heard that you were active in the student questioning of the period, helping them to cope with the questions that arose during their school years. Generally how did you view the students of the 60's?

HILLEGONDS: Well it's always easy to look back, I wish it were possible for us to can our feelings when something goes on so that later on we could open it and see how it really felt or smelled. Those were different days, and now I'm not going to rehearse what you already know. Those were the days because of the Vietnam War, those were the days because of the Supreme Court ruling- the '54 ruling, those were the days because the college was actively recruiting blacks.

Our Black community is a fraction of what it was during the late 60's and early 70's. We had Blacks that were very aggressive, very hostile, very suspicious. We had strikes on the campus, we had mass meetings in the chapel, we had late night sessions trying to keep the peace. The Blacks always felt that their Black House was under attack. I'm not coming down very squarely on anything, maybe you have more direct questions.

CONRAD: Yes I do. Referring back to the problem with the Blacks, Dr.

Hollenbach talked about the problem with the militants, did you as Chaplain have much to do with keeping the peace?

HILLEGONDS: Yes, I had good contact with the Blacks, they would never want that to be known because every whitey was somebody to be mistrusted, especially if he was over 30, which I was. One of the most militant Blacks on campus in those days wrote a column for the Anchor. A couple of weeks ago I preached at the First Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor and there he was in church. He threw his arms around me as if we were long lost buddies. There were some Blacks that I had real contact with. I think that on occasion I was used to temper somethings, to soften somethings.

There were some Blacks who hated my guts, and with them I couldn't do anything. They didn't trust anybody, especially a religious person. You see the Blacks were very anti-religious. They had lived with this happy fish fry business for so long that they were mistrustful of the church, of those Christians back home who said, "Don't worry about what's going on now, someday you'll be in Beulahland with a white robe," that whole thing. Many of them saw me as part of that, "let's not talk about earth but let's get everybody ready for heaven," syndrome. I guess with some Blacks I had an open door and I walked in and out and they knew there was an open door here and they walked in and out, but there were some Blacks with whom that couldn't happen. Other people, particularly some of the people in the English Department had far better relationships with some of the Blacks than I did, for example, Dr. Reedy.

CONRAD: Another aspect was the Vietnam War question, how did you get involved in that?

HILLEGONDS: I think two things really brought about all of the hectic activities of the late 60's and early 70's. One was the Vietnam War, if students were going to go off and get their head shot off in Vietnam they should have some

right to determine what they were going to study here, the other was that they counted heads and found that there were so many of them. There were more young people between the ages of 14 and 24 during those years than ever in the history of the United States, totally. And they saw the 600,000 people at Woodstock, Holy Cow! And they did a pretty good job of keeping the peace there. These 600,000 people passed the word out that they could change the world and they tried. Plus the fact that if they could have their heads shot off they should have something to say about what is going on here.

We tried to be in the middle, we tried to listen to people on both extremes, a difficult position to be in. We could have gone wild and become very much anti-war and alienated all the people on the right, but we didn't. I tried to stay in the middle saying, "The war was a dam fool mistake, but that we were fighting it. And let's remember that we still are citizens of two kingdoms, but the Kingdom of God takes precedence."

What we did was to open a draft counseling center that was under the auspices of this office. We had trained draft board counsilors tell people what their options were. We helped them write their draft board if they felt they were conscientious objectors, in the true sense of the word. When students decided to tear up their draft cards, and there were a few, we stood up for them. We went to the federal court in a couple of occasions; one in Minneapolis and one in Grand Rapids to testify to the integrety of the students involved.

CONRAD: Did many students come to see you during this time about it, I would imagine the Christian dilemma of war really hit them.

HILLEGONDS: Yeah, sure. This is one of the reasons why maybe in the last few years the job hasn't been as exciting as it was then. It wasn't that people were cutting classes, and going on strike, etc., etc., so much as the nature of the questions that students were asking. "How can we change

the world to include the rights of minorities?" How can we get out of this dasdardly bad war in Vietnam?" "Chaplain I love my country. My father and mother are on my back, they don't want to see me wearing that symbol of the peace movement. I love my country, but yet I don't think I could fight in that war. What am I going to do?" Or, "Chaplain, we've got a chance to change the world, I just don't want to go to work in my father's insurance office. Help me, what can I do? I want to quite school, I want to go start a commune somewhere." Did everyone come in to talk about that stuff? No, there were still plenty of the, "I can't get along with my roommate" stuff. But they were generally asking bigger questions than I found students asked me anyway, I don't know about others, last year and the year before.

I remember the night they had the first lottery on this campus. In other words, the draft was reinstated. I had a son on the campus then who was a sophmore. He got number 24, I think, which meant that he was on the way as soon as he got out of school. This place was like a morgue that night. You can imagine the questions. "Where am I going to go?" "What am I going to do?" "Running to Canada or conscientious objection are options."

It was tough for me to say, "I don't think you have any right to be a conscientious objector. You don't come off as being that way to me. It seems to me that you're trying to get a way out that isn't legitimate." It was tough. It was also tough finding somebody who really was a CO who couldn't get it from his draft board because his draft board didn't trust him. So the Vietnamise War caused all sorts of problems. Problems and opportunities.

I remember during the Vietnamise War students wanted to march in the Tulip Time Parade and they wanted to bust into the parade. I said, "Hey, I don't think that's going to do you any good, I don't think that's going to do the movement any good. I think we should go through the authorities." So

we had the city attorney down in the room right across the hall. We met with 30 students. It was decided that the city would give them a permit. Then they courageously marched in the Tulip Time Parade, they were booed and applauded. But they *did* it according to the book, not by disobeying the law by busting into the parade. This was another case of our kind of being in the middle.

We tried to make students understand that their parents fought in a different kind of war than they were. Trying to explain that their mothers and fathers experienced a different kind of war. So they shouldn't lay too heavily on them with criticism that they are too patriotic. It was a crazy time, a crazy time.

CONRAD: Do you think a lot of that spilled over into the academic world?

HILLEGONDS: Oh sure. Those were days when students were so intimately related to things going on in the world, because their own lives were on the line in some cases, that they didn't want to study irrelevant stuff. They wanted the real stuff and it was tough to get people motivated in Intermediate Spanish. It was tough.

I think another area into which it spilled was the whole problem of authority. This made them begin to question the authority figure. The teacher became less a person who stood in the front of the classroom and dispensed information and more of a fellow traveler, a co-student or something like that. There were some profs who sat on the floor in a circle with their students and tried to get feelings from them who made asses of themselves, simply because they were better lecturers than that kind of counselor, and there were some profs who did a great job sitting on the floor getting out the feelings of students.

CONRAD: So, do you see much of a change from that whole period?

HILLEGONDS: Yeah, the pendulum has swung back, not all the way, it never does

swing all the way back to what it was. You never do go back to where you were, "You never go home again," in Thomas Wolf's words. It's begun to swing back; dress, the position of the faculty, grades are important because they have to do with a job and jobs aren't that plentiful - the right jobs- that is grad schools don't have that wide a door anymore. It's begun to swing back. Parents for example have a little more to say about where their kids go to school. It costs so much today, maybe they have a little bit more to say because they write the checks.

It's not back to where we were during the fifties, but it's partly back. We have queens who get coronated. You see that was totally out for awhile, that was just laughed at. May Day was kind of a farce, it was the kind of thing you poked fun at. Other things were more important than that kind of stuff. Frats were out, but not sororities so much on this campus. Frats were a thing of the past, they were gone. There weren't very many people in them, but they've bounced back recently.

CONRAD: Well I would like to go back to when you were a student here, what kind of campus did you find when you returned from the war.

HILLEGONDS: I can't say what the typical student was like because I don't think I was a typical student. I was three years older than the typical freshman. I came back wanting to get an education, to get the heck out of here and to get to seminary so that I could go out and save the world. I had no time for freshmen formals, bennies and stuff like that. I got around to being a little more of a student than I was in the beginning, I became President of the sophomore class and played varsity baseball. But I was interested in getting to know as much as I possibly could get to know because I wanted to get out of here and get into the seminary and get going in something I had been forced to postpone for three years.

It was a kindergarten compared to what it is now, we were spoon feed.

I mean you had to dress for dinner, and a little house mother rang a little bell and you sat down to eat and you couldn't leave, you even had assigned places at the table. You wouldn't think of cutting a class without a good explanation or handing in a term paper late, even though there weren't that many term papers. I think it's far tougher today. That's why comparative grade points are so ridiculous. I was magna cum laude here, and that's silly, I couldn't do that here now. When I hear what students have to do I'm surprised they don't break more often.

CONRAD: Usually you hear people telling how much more difficult it was?

HILLEGONDS: It was a lot easier. It was a lot of feeding back to the prof what he feed you, if you had a good retainer, which I did, then you could give it back to him. John Hollenbach was the first prof of the new deal, I thought. There were some others who were good, don't misunderstand me. When John Hollenbach came he was the first of the new kind of professor, the think-tank kind of guy, he made you stretch.

CONRAD: Did you have any contact with Dr. Hollenbach?

HILLEGONDS: Oh yeah, he was one of my favorite profs. I never did well in his class, but he was one of my favorite profs. I think I rather enjoyed feeding it back, it was allot easier and I had that kind of mind, but he wanted a little more. He was the first of a new breed of cat on this campus. One of the first none Reformed Church people to come here, Dr. Hollenbach. I have a great deal of respect for that man.

CONRAD: That was the period when the faculty and students started coming from all different backgrounds rather than primarilly the Reformed tradition.

HILLEGONDS: That's right.

CONRAD: Did you see that change bring about a change of the whole campus?

HILLEGONDS: Why sure. It became more cosmopolitan. There was far more give and take between students. People were from different backgrounds now. When

I was a student here there was one Black on the campus, or maybe two. They were from southern Illinois, they were the scared Black kind, the Uncle Tom type. This was an unreal world you see, this was not the world. Once and awhile you would bump into somebody who would admit to being an agnostic, but you didn't get any real atheists. No one was hostile to the Christian faith.

But now it's different, it's more like the real world. I think the college has grown up. Though on the more difficult days we wish we could get some more of that peace and quite back. Of course in many ways we are going back to the old ways, the area of academics though, which we were talking about, is much tougher.

CONRAD: In what areas would you say we are going back then?

HILLEGONDS: I guess I'm saying in attitudes towards education, dress, security. I think we're going back.

CONRAD: Do you remember anything about the administration at the time?

HILLEGONDS: We talk about the federal government becoming more complex and having more of a buerucaratoc mess; well, when I was a student I think the president had one secretary, that was it, that was the administration. Then he hired a business manager because you see new dining halls had to be opened and he couldn't be working on that too. And a counseling center, you had a favorite prof and if you had a problem you went to him. The college is just a different place.

There has been more than a proliferation of courses, there's been a proliferation of deans, committees; Good Lord, committees! When somebody wanted to make a change back then you had coffee in the morning and decided what the change would be. Now you have committees and boards. I'm not knocking that, with more people it takes more people to supply the service. It's as simple as that. But you ask about the difference, there's a big

difference.

It was more of a small family, today it can easily be a community of strangers where a person can get lost. It just isn't that homey type of place that America was, maybe during the 1850's or something like that. It's different. And I think for the most part it's better the way it is because it's more like the world.

CONRAD: Well this would be a good place for us to stop. Thank you.

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