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Dr. Edwin G. Mulder: A Life Dedicated to Christ

By Sara McMullin

To say that the Dr. Edwin G. Mulder has had a positive impact on the lives of many people around the world is an understatement. From his humble beginnings in Iowa to fighting for human rights in South Africa, Mulder has impacted those around him.

Edwin George Mulder was born to Gerrit and Etta Mulder on March 25, 1929, in Raymond, Minnesota. Mulder's parents were devout Christians and dedicated to provide their five sons with a Christian education. This involved the family regularly attending services and Sunday school at their Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in Prinsburg, Minnesota, and enrolling the boys in Christian schools. In 1937, Mulder's father passed away and Edwin and his mother, Etta, moved to Parkersburg, Iowa. His mother became a live-in domestic, and he began working in a restaurant to pay for his meals and roomed in a private home. His brothers were in the service.

After completing his education at Parkersburg High School in 1947, he enrolled at Central College of Pella, Iowa. This decision was heavily influenced by two members of Mulder's high school. One was a teacher greatly respected, John VandenHook, who had attended Central College and thoroughly enjoyed his experience there. The second was a fellow student who enrolled in Central and urged Mulder to enroll there. While Mulder had originally planned to attend Calvin College, he took the advice of these individuals, enrolled at Central College, and promptly fell in love with it.

As a young man, he was fascinated by history—greatly intrigued at what could be learned by viewing the lives, decisions, and resulting events of people in past generations. It was no surprise, therefore, that he majored in history. His passion for the subject is as strong today as it was when he was a student, although



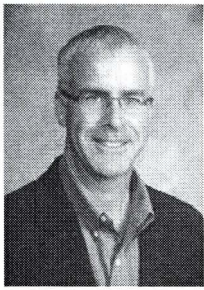
his interest has shifted more specifically towards the history and current state of the church. In addition to his history major, he also completed a second major in philosophy. He was attracted to the study in part by his desire to gain insight into the problems of the world and possible ways in which such issues could be resolved. Mulder graduated from Central College in 1951.

The next significant event to occur in Mulder's life was his marriage to Luella Rozeboom. Luella had transferred to Central when she was a junior, and he was attracted to her from the first time they met. After graduating, Luella was hired as a school teacher in Zeeland, Michigan. Mulder had planned to attend New Brunswick Theological Seminary, but upon discovering that Luella had an opportunity to teach in Zeeland, he decided to attend Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. The young couple was planning to be married, so there was no question that he would attend seminary as close to his future wife as possible. They were married in 1952.

After completing his work at Western Theological Seminary in 1954 and being ordained, Mulder began what was to be a lifelong ministry in the Reformed Church of America (RCA) as a pastor, president of the

(continued on page 2)

From the Director



One of the best things about the Joint Archives of Holland being located at Hope College is that we are continually exposed to undergraduate students seeking internship opportunities. Our latest intern, Sara McMullin, came to us as she sought to complete an English requirement and to see what it might be like to be an archivist or librarian, if only for a semester. Well, after processing one of our many archival collections, she caught the “bug” and has decided to pursue a degree in librarianship or archives in the future. We asked her to write an article for the *Quarterly* about one of the Reformed Church in America’s most loved pastors and leaders, Dr. Edwin G. Mulder. I hope you enjoy learning more about this Western Theological Seminary graduate and local church leader.

Geoffrey D. Reynolds

Edwin G. Mulder (continued from page 1)

General Synod, Minister of Evangelism, and General Secretary.

The English Neighborhood Reformed Church in Ridgefield, New Jersey, was his first pastorate. Founded in 1770, the church was filled with a rich history that permeated the air and provided an environment in which he was able to flourish in his faith. He states that working at the English Neighborhood Reformed Church was an “unbelievable experience.” It taught him to “walk the walk” along with “talking the talk.” He served at the church from 1954 to 1957. The lessons gleaned from his time spent with that congregation proved to be immensely valuable in helping him develop as a Christian leader.

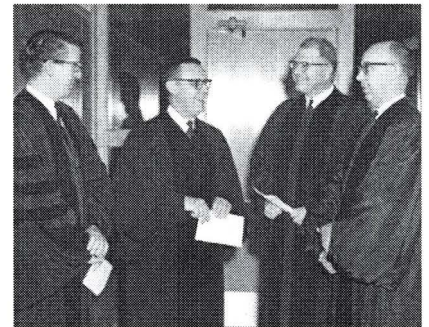


Senior at WTS, 1954

In 1957, Mulder accepted a call to Christ Memorial Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan. It was a difficult move to make. The fledgling congregation was in need of a strong leader who could provide the spiritual guidance and vision necessary for the success of the church. Mulder had committed his life to carrying out God’s will, and he and Luella knew that they were meant to be at Christ Memorial Reformed Church.

After returning to the Midwest, the couple soon realized how blessed they were to be given the opportunity to assist in molding Christ Memorial as a church. Mulder comments that the congregation was composed of the most wonderful people he has ever met. Individuals from all walks of life were welcomed into the church. It was a place of loving acceptance that offered people a chance to start a new life in Christ. It was a body of believers that dedicated themselves to acting out Christ’s commands to love others without exception and discrimination. This love for all people was something that Mulder held very dear and dictated the way he lived his life and treated his fellow human beings.

In 1963, Mulder left Christ Memorial Reformed Church to accept the position of Minister of Evangelism of the RCA, a role that he occupied until 1968. During those years, over 600 congregations participated in a program called the Preaching, Teaching, and Reaching mission. It was also a time when a program called Adventure in Mission was launched. It was a program that targeted young adults to become involved in evangelism.



Mulder (2nd from left) as Minister of Evangelism for the Board of North American Missions, 1964

He then returned to the east coast to work primarily with young adults at Marble Collegiate Church in New York City from 1968 to 1970. The time Mulder spent in the metropolis was dramatically different in comparison to the years he had spent serving at various churches in less populated areas. Being in the heart of the city brought a whole new dynamic to the congregation and atmosphere exuded by the church. The individuals Mulder worked with tended to be professionals ranging in age from 20 to 35 years old. Similar to Christ Memorial Reformed Church, the group of young adults was a very accepting group that was strongly centered in Christ. In fact, the ability of the group to welcome and foster faith was so strong that roughly 400 people joined, both from in and outside of the congregation of Marble Collegiate Church. Mulder organized a number of retreats and arranged for multiple speakers to come in and talk to the young adults. These and other events worked to provide a spiritually enriching environment for all parties involved.

After serving at Marble Collegiate Church, Mulder moved on to pastor at Second Reformed Church in Hackensack, New Jersey, from 1970 to 1979. Here,

Mulder learned what it was like to pastor a congregation located in a congested urban community.

He returned to serve Christ Memorial Reformed Church from 1979-1983. One of the most significant periods of Mulder's life began in 1979 when he was elected as



President of 1980 General Synod

president of the General Synod. Sitting down with the then current secretary of the General Synod, Dr. Arie Brouwer, discussion began concerning the responsibilities and tasks Mulder was expected to do in his position as president.

Two African-American members of the RCA's Black Council, Sarah

Hall and Earle Hall, had visited South Africa to alert RCA members of the horrible acts being committed though apartheid. These leaders urged that the president of General Synod should be sent to South Africa and report the suffering and pain caused by apartheid to the Reformed Church in America.

Mulder agreed to travel to South Africa. The following two weeks marked one of the most intense and life changing times of his life. Mulder recently described it as "the most traumatic experience of my life." He was faced with an onslaught of vivid images involving the cruel and unfair living conditions and treatment of South Africans based solely on the dark color of their skin. Possibly the most horrifying aspect was the reality that the church's adoption of apartheid was at the root of the majority of the atrocious acts being committed against the non-whites in the country.

Pain surrounded the discriminated people. They were assigned specific areas for living that were completely cut off from the land inhabited by individuals of fair skin. Mulder was exposed to the corrupt health system when a black South African suffered an accident and had to wait hours for a "black" ambulance because he was denied the use of a nearby "white" ambulance. Families were torn apart when, in order to have any chance at supporting their families, black individuals were forced to seek employment long distances away from home. Whites profited greatly in a financial sense as they exploited the black citizens, indifferent to the immeasurable distress it was causing the families. Such occurrences were part of daily life in the country and the sheer horror of it all was overwhelming to one who had no idea as to the extent of the hurt the people were suffering.

Yet, despite the atrocities the black members of South African society were facing, they were able to maintain countenances of peace and love. Mulder remarked that without their kindness and gentle hearts, violence of a huge magnitude would be inevitable. As it was, the black individuals who hosted the pastor welcomed him graciously into their homes, knowing that he was there to help, unlike so many of the other whites with whom they came into contact. Understanding that Mulder presented them with the possibility for change in their lives, they made sure to make the most of the time spent with the white American pastor. In his *Memoirs of South Africa*, Mulder relates the following statement given to him by his hosts: "We want you to experience South Africa first hand... You will be staying in our homes, not some hotel. You will be eating our food, traveling our roads and worshipping in our churches. You will be one of us." And as much as his background and skin color allowed him, Mulder did indeed live like one of them. He, too, was treated poorly and looked down upon simply by associating with the black citizens of the country. As a Caucasian RCA pastor, he was viewed suspiciously by some as they could not imagine him coming to South Africa for any purpose other than to further exploit them. This was due largely to the fact that members of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC)—a denomination formed solely by white South Africans—had only ever treated them horribly. The DRC worshipped in elaborate churches while the DRCA/DRMC (Dutch Reformed Church of Africa/Dutch Reformed Mission Church)—composed of black South Africans—were forced to gather in poor settings due to their lack of monetary funds. It was heartbreaking to see how a church could justify such intolerable behavior.

Upon returning to the United States, Mulder was filled with a fire to bring the heinous actions resulting from apartheid to a halt. The most well known "resolution" to the issue can be seen in the Belhar Confession, adopted by the RCA in 2010. The fourth and newest confession held by the RCA emphasizes racial equality, holding the belief that all of God's children belong to the body of Christ, no matter what the color of their skin might be. While this looks good on paper, actually living out the words of the confession is not such an easy thing. Discrimination and pain still runs rampant in South Africa, and while the situation has slightly improved since Mulder's time in the country, society has an indeterminably long task ahead of them to bring peace and unity to the people of South Africa.

Mulder would go on to serve the RCA as General Secretary from 1983-1994, when he retired. After retiring, however, he returned to Marble Collegiate Church and worked there until 2009. Today, he is enjoying retirement in Holland, Michigan, with his wife and friends.



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*Western Theological Seminary groundbreaking, 1954
(left to right: senior class president Ed Mulder, Jacob Blaauw, John R. Mulder,
E. N. Freyling, Irwin Lubbers and George Mennenga)*

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