

The Rev. Gradus C. Aalberts

Following his graduation from Western Seminary, Grad and I were married on June 8 in the Harlem Reformed Church, at West Olive, Michigan. Grad's cousin Rev. Gradus A. Aalberts officiated at the wedding.

A few days later we left Michigan for our future home in Iowa. On June 30, Grad was ordained and installed as pastor of the First Reformed Church of Ireton, Iowa. Ireton is a small town located in a farming community in northwestern Iowa. The church membership consisted of about 25 families. During the years of Grad's pastorate, the church membership was doubled. It was also well on the way to becoming a self-supporting congregation. Our three years there were filled with many blessed and happy experiences. Our first child, Nola, was born there on February 19, 1941.

In the fall of 1942 the Women's Board of Domestic Mission contacted Grad, offering him the position of director of the Winnebago Indian Mission and pastor of the Winnebago Reformed Church. He was familiar with the field, having served there on a summer assignment. He felt led to accept this challenge. In November we moved to Winnebago, a small community in Northeastern Nebraska. Living on the Mission compound, were staff members who were responsible for community outreach. Some were engaged in supervising children who were being cared for at the mission.

The church was located on the main street of the village. This was a multipurpose building, with a small library and recreational area. It was in need of repairs and inadequate for the needs of the community. An Army Chapel from the Lincoln Air Force Base became available. This was purchased, dismantled, brought to Winnebago, and reconstructed. Men from the congregation and volunteer groups from churches in the area, helped in this project. The chapel became our house of worship. The old building was renovated and became the community recreational center.

Grad became vitally interested and involved in the life and problems of the community. He served as president of the school board and mayor of the village for a number of years. His special interest was representing the Indian people in their cause for equal rights and opportunities.

It became increasingly apparent that the Mission's caring for

orphaned and neglected children was serving a vital need in the community. Our Child Care facilities were no longer adequate to meet the standards set by the state. Therefore, in 1953-54 a home was built to accommodate 60 children.

During these years of service at Winnebago our family circle became complete with the arrival of Marlene in December of 1944, Janice in October of 1947, Karen in July of 1951, and Carl in June of 1954.

It was a blessing to see spiritual growth in the lives of many of the Indian people. There were also disappointments as some with promise fell by the wayside. One of the men who accepted Christ into his life had been an alcoholic. It was a thrill to witness his growth in the Christian faith.

It was difficult to leave the Winnebago field, when in 1957 Grad accepted the position of Director of Indian Work for the Minnesota and Minneapolis Council of Churches. This involved working with Indians from various reservations in different states, who were relocating in the city.

This too, proved to be an enriching experience, giving us an opportunity to work with many people from different tribes, helping them in their adjustment from reservation living to city life. Many found it difficult to obtain work, housing, and a church home. During our stay in Minneapolis, Grad was appointed to serve on the Governors Indian Affairs Commission for the state of Minnesota.

In the spring of 1964, the Winnebago Reformed Church and the Board of North American Missions issued Grad a call to return to Winnebago, to become pastor of the church. After much prayerful consideration he accepted the call extended to him.

Returning to the Winnebago field after almost seven years was a difficult adjustment. Many changes had taken place in our absence. Church attendance had dropped considerably. The spiritual life of the congregation was lacking. The building was in need of repair, consequently the church was completely renovated. Much time was spent in calling on families and individuals, giving spiritual guidance and direction to those in need. Every effort was put forth to rebuild the life of the church and increase the attendance at worship services.

On April 23, 1970 after a brief illness, Grad was called to be with the Lord. An autopsy revealed that he had died of a rare

form of cancer. It was cancer of the adrenal glands which spread to the outer covering of the heart, causing it to thicken and harden, so the heart could not expand or contract.

Funeral services were held on the 27th of April. The tribe requested that he be buried in the Indian cemetery. They gave our family four plots on a hillside overlooking the community he had loved and served.

His death necessitated changes in the life of my family and me. The General Program Council offered me a position as dormitory supervisor of high school girls at Annville Institute, Annville, Kentucky. I felt God's leading and guidance in this. I accepted the position. In August, Carl and I left for Annville. Carl was a junior and completed his high school education at Annville Institute. I enjoyed the years at Annville. Working with high school young women proved to be a definite challenge. To serve the Lord in this capacity was a very rewarding experience. The work at Annville continued until last summer. At that time the Board of Trustees made the decision to discontinue the high school program.

In November I moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan where I have a live-in position at Fulton Manor, a Christian Retirement Home.

To have served the Lord with Grad for 30 years was a blessed experience. His deep faith in God, his sense of humor, and his love for his fellowmen, continue to inspire me and the members of our family.

Auriel Aalberts