

NATIONAL
BANK

CONGRATS

GRACE

COLLEGE

NOW

ACCREDITED



DR. HOMER A.
KENT, JR.

THE PASTOR-TEACHER • THE RELUCTANT LEADER • THE NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLAR • THE GENTLEMAN'S GENTLEMAN • THE QUIRKY QUALITIES • THE SUSTAINER

STEWARD OF GRACE

by *KERITH ACKLEY-JELINEK*

THE PASTOR-TEACHER

After graduating from Bob Jones University in 1947, Dr. Homer A. Kent, Jr. came to Grace Theological Seminary where he earned his M.Div., Th.M. and Th.D. “I came to find ... a truly biblical theology, a careful teaching of the Scripture. Not just courses about the Bible ... but where we studied what the text said. And at the same time, a school where there was a vision of the need for a ministry to others, to put to use what we were being taught.” Later, in his inaugural address, Kent would tell his audience that this engagement was the kind of teaching and atmosphere he wanted to ensure would continue.

While working on his M.Div., Kent began teaching at Grace College. In a 2007 interview he explains how his ministry call became fulfilled through teaching. “I had given my life to the Lord for some kind of career ministry, and in those days you thought in terms of ... pastor or a missionary. But when I graduated I was still a bachelor and my phone was not ringing off the hook for churches anxious to hire a bachelor preacher. Dr. Herman Hoyt (BD 50, ThM 39, ThD 46) who was the dean of the seminary and the college asked me if I would teach English composition.” Soon, Kent was teaching first and second year Greek, and in 1953, he married Beverly Page of Long Beach, Calif.

Not long after, Dr. Alva J. McClain, president at the time, called Kent to his house one Sunday afternoon and asked him to consider becoming a teacher as his ministry. After that, Kent never looked back. “I discovered that not all the best Christian leaders were pastors or missionaries; in fact, there was one man named Martin Luther who was a college professor, and that was pretty respectable I thought, since he made quite a mark on the world.” During the McClain presidency, Kent became the assistant dean of the seminary under Hoyt. When Hoyt became president, Kent was promoted to dean of the seminary. He served in that role for 14 years before he was appointed as president in February 1975.

THE RELUCTANT LEADER

When Kent accepted the presidency after Hoyt’s resignation, Grace Chairman of the Board, Dr. Kenneth B. Ashman (BTh 38, BD 51), knew it was with a bit of reluctance. Kent was zealous for the Word of God — not for administration. The Board worked extensively with Kent to persuade him to become Grace’s next president. They were convinced he was the best man for the job, citing his exceptional qualities of “spirituality, high moral convictions, doctrinal soundness, denominational acceptance, academic excellence, good judgment and a sweet reasonableness necessary for a leader.”

KENT

Steward of Grace



A FAMILY MAN / Dr. Kent with his wife Beverly (center), daughters Rebecca and Katherine and son Daniel.



THE RESIDENT PRESIDENT / Dr. Kent could often be found writing in his office, teaching in the classroom or talking with students on campus.

And perhaps it was because Kent never aspired to the presidency and did not jump at the chance when offered (numerous times), that the Board believed that, with Kent, they'd have a leader entirely dependent on the strength of God. In his inaugural address, Kent confirmed just that: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13)." For Paul, this truth was no excuse for diminished effort. It was not an escape from his own responsibilities. But it was a simple, unashamed and powerful statement of his faith, that God always enables His servants to do what He wants done."

THE NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLAR

Kent is a New Testament theologian and a prolific writer. From 1967 to 1973 he served as a translator for the New International Version. He has authored 21 books, many of

them in-depth, exhaustive commentaries on New Testament books.

Over the course of many years, Kent translated the New Testament from Greek into his own translation. It was part of his discipline to translate one or two verses a day. Previous pastor of the Grace Brethren Church of Columbus and Grace's Chairman of the Board Dr. Jim Custer (BA 60, BD 63, ThM 77, DD 91) calls him "one of the best Greek exegetes alive today." But even with his superb intellect, scholarship and credentials, Custer says Kent "would consider it an honor if you wanted to have a cup of coffee with him. That's just the man he is."

THE GENTLEMAN'S GENTLEMAN

If Hoyt was a taskmaster with a commanding presence and tenacious temperament, Kent

was a team player, with a calming spirit. After Kenneth Briggs, the religion editor of The New York Times, visited Grace in 1980, he aptly described Kent as "unflappable" in his article "Evangelical Colleges Reborn." Custer describes him as a meek man: "He was always consistently 110 percent of the time reflective, gentle, kind. He had no interest in promoting Kent." Kent's humility was and is perhaps his chief quality.

THE QUIRKY QUALITIES

Besides his graciousness, some of the most endearing and admirable qualities about Kent are his methodical organization, his unwavering self-discipline and his attention to detail. Nancy Weimer (BA 75) who has been the administrative assistant to the past two Grace presidents and to current President Dr. Ronald Manahan (MDiv 70, ThM 77, ThD 82) says Kent

MAY 4, 1979

Margaret Thatcher becomes England's Prime Minister

JANUARY 20, 1981

Ronald Reagan elected 40th President

AUGUST 12, 1981

IBM introduces first personal computer (MS-DOS)

is unquestionably the most organized person she has have ever known. "When writing a book he would plot out how long it would take him. He would assess the due date and then work backwards determining how many chapters he would need to write each week or month and then how many verses that meant he had to translate each day. He never missed a deadline. Never."

Ron Henry (BA 58, BD 62), dean of admissions and professor under Kent's presidency, remembers when Kent told him one day how he'd gone through all of his grade books and tallied up how many students he'd taught over the years. "He taught for fifty years," exclaims Henry. "I don't even know where all my grade books are," he chuckles. But in all of his radical planning and mindfulness of the details, it was never exasperating to others. It was always a gift and, at the very least, amusing.

THE SUSTAINER

The combination of Kent's organization, scholarship and graciousness made him a steward of Grace College & Seminary. He wanted the school to continue to grow, to maintain its sound financial footing and to provide the kind of education for young people that would equip them to answer God's call wherever it would lead.

After Kent's appointment, the college was granted accreditation by the North Central Association (NCA) in March of

1976, after what Kent says was a difficult twenty-year pursuit. This significant achievement was quickly followed by many others. The seminary began offering two new master's programs: Master of Arts in Missions and Master of Theology in Missions. In March of 1978, after the Chester E. Cooley Science Center was completed, the college began a nursing program and six tennis courts were constructed. Kent witnessed the highest enrollment of the seminary to this day. In 1980, there were 447 registered students. The college enrollment was at 893 — up 17 percent from 1978.

In 1982, Dr. Lawrence J. Crabb, Jr. was hired to create and grow the Department of Biblical Counseling in the seminary. That same year the seminary also received accreditation by the North Central Association. This accreditation proved critical as graduates began experiencing hiring difficulty, specifically those who wanted to serve as chaplains in the military.

Grace also remained in the black every year except Kent's last. The school's financial difficulties resulted in a decline in enrollment. The college landscape was shifting. Grace College was fighting to establish itself as a liberal arts college rather than a precursor for those who wanted a Bible degree from the seminary. Further, although the seminary used to be one of the primary institutions offering advanced Bible degrees, other colleges were beginning to establish seminaries

and graduate degree options in order to attract a greater market share. During much of Kent's administration, there wasn't even a line item in the budget for marketing the seminary.

As Grace began to struggle financially, the Board decided it needed a fund-raiser. The Board approached Kent with the fundraising need. "Kent thought seriously and decided it wasn't him and where he was comfortable," recalls Weimer. After coming to a mutual decision to end his presidency, Kent announced his resignation on May 11, 1985, at the annual recognition banquet for faculty and staff, and he expressed his desire to finish his ministry at Grace in the classroom teaching. When he retired in 1999, he'd served Grace for 50 years. That same year, Grace named its newly built residence hall, Kent Hall, in honor of Dr. and Mrs. Kent's service. *



A PASSIONATE PARTNERSHIP /
Dr. Kent kisses his wife at his inauguration.

AUGUST, 1980

New graduate programs in Biblical Counseling

JUNE, 1981

Grace rejoins the Mid-Central College Conference

JUNE, 1982

Regional accreditation achieved for the seminary

KENT *Steward of Grace*



THE CRUX OF IT

Dr. Jim Custer (BA 60, BD 63, ThM 77, DD 91), former pastor of one of the largest Grace Brethren churches in the country, is one of Kent's protégés and biggest fans. While a student at Grace College he visited the Kent household weekly to take voice lessons from Mrs. Kent. This gave him a chance to observe the godly values of Dr. Kent's private family life. Custer often teased their three children that he was their "adopted older brother."

"To know him is to love him. We Brethren are passionate about the Word and very concerned that we be faithful to the Scripture. Sometimes that excites an exaggerated ego, a dominant aggressiveness that's not pretty. It can seem to be harsh, unkind, unsociable, ungracious. Kent somehow missed that gene. Somehow that never found a place to grow up in his personality. When we get to the Bema seat judgment and the believers are awarded for their works, I'm going to find a wheelbarrow and help him carry his awards over to his apartment."