



A M B S a l u m n i n e w s

66 years at AMBS

Summer 2002
Volume 8 Issue 1

For two-thirds of the history of AMBS, Virgil Claassen has directed business and finance. For one-third of AMBS's history, Erick Sawatzky has directed field education and Virginia Nussbaum has assisted in a variety of offices. We haven't tried to count how many students studied here during those years, but there's no doubt that many who read this newsletter will know Virgil, Erick, and Virginia.

As we introduce a new design for the alumni newsletter, we take a look backward with these three and with Karl Koop, who also is leaving AMBS this summer. Join me in saying "Thank you" to these devoted friends of AMBS and servants of the church.

Mary E. Klassen
Editor

Four members of the faculty and staff who are leaving AMBS this summer have a combined tenure of 66 years: Virgil Claassen, director of business and finance, 29 years; Erick Sawatzky, director of field education and associate professor of pastoral ministry, 16 years; Virginia Nussbaum, administrative assistant to admissions and the registrar, 16 years; Karl Koop, associate professor of theology and Anabaptist-Mennonite studies. In May, these four were

invited to share reflections at Forum; here are excerpts.

Challenges

Virgil Claassen: When I began [in 1973], I had a manual typewriter and an adding machine that just added and subtracted, didn't do percentages. Month-end balancing of the books took about two days and I would run through two adding machine tapes. I bought a desktop digital desktop calculator soon after I got here for \$345. In 1982 we purchased two computers, two printers and two desks which cost \$17,000.

During my time I worked with 11 presidents including acting and interim presidents: Erland Waltner, John Howard Yoder, Joe Hertzler, Marlin E. Miller, Henry Poettcker, Lloyd Ramseyer, J. Winfield Fretz, Gayle Gerber Koontz,

Willard Swartley, Gerald Gerbrandt and Nelson Kraybill. Of

course the worst experience was the death of Marlin E. Miller in 1994. During my last conversation with him he joked about how I came to work early and he

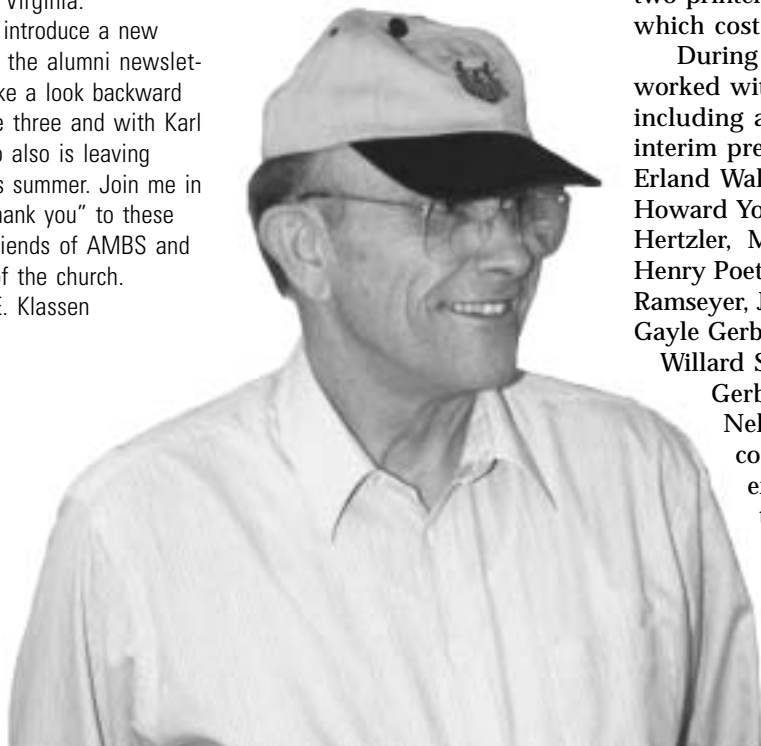
worked late at night and between the two of us we just about had the seminary covered 24 hours a day.

Karl Koop: It was a terrifying experience to walk into Room 116 for the first time in the fall of 1997 to begin a lecture in Anabaptist History and Theology, and also to begin teaching Systematic Theology the next semester. There were big shoes to fill in teaching these classes.

Humor

Erick Sawatzky: When I came to AMBS as a student in the fall of 1969, the campus was run by pillows. That was the year "community" was the big word, and we started the year with some trainers who were to help us build community. Imagine John Howard Yoder, Millard Lind and J.C. Wenger walking around campus carrying pillows [at the directive of the trainers].

Virgil Claassen: I've kept a list of buzz words that have been used on campus. It all started when I overheard several students talking. Each student used the term "personal agenda" several times. I thought to myself, if they couldn't use that term, could they even carry on a conversation! That was the



Virgil Claassen sports an AMBS cap, one of the gifts he received after 29 years of work managing the AMBS business office.



Erick Sawatzky was named associate professor of pastoral ministry by the AMBS board at its June meetings. He is discontinuing his teaching role because of health reasons and was honored at the annual faculty-staff celebration (above) and at a special service of prayer and celebration with faculty and staff.

Alumni Gifts

In the 2001-2002 year, alumni contributed \$262,080 to AMBS. This represents gifts from 490 alumni, including 26 who were first-time donors.

The special project selected for the calendar-year-end appeal was equipment for setting up a smart classroom with videoconferencing equipment. To this project 44 alumni gave \$3,976.

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AMBS Alumni News is published three times a year by Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. It is intended to keep alumni informed about each other and AMBS.

Please send suggestions for articles or information about alumni activities, honors, publications, to: Mary E. Klassen, editor
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Mary Lehman Yoder
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Marilyn Rudy-Froese

66 years at AMBS (continued)

birthplace of my list of words.

(See back page for more about Virgil's list of buzz words.)

Virginia Nussbaum: In my first job, I worked for Jacob Elias, dean, and Erick Sawatzky, director of field education, and my office was in between. They talked to each other through the open doors of my office, sometimes telling jokes to each other in Low German. Since then I've worked with the administrative vice president, director of communications, business manager, registrar and director of admissions and financial aid. Now Nisha Springer and Randy Miller talk to each other through the open doors of my office.

Gratitude

Karl Koop: I am grateful for the students who were gracious and forgiving of me. While professors teach, students also contribute significantly to the formation of the professor. Student responses often serve as affirmation and as corrective. Students, in my opinion, are profound teachers of professors. For this kind of education for which I am getting paid, I am very grateful.

Virgil Claassen: I've especially enjoyed the international people from all over the world who have come to campus and also the international students. Last year when we started our summer work crew there were people in the group from India, China, South Korea, Thailand, Belize, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, Canada,

Japan and the U.S.—a true United Nations work force.

Virginia Nussbaum: I've worked with many wonderful faculty and administrators and seen many wonderful students come, grow in ministry, and go on from here to minister. I've been blessed with many good working relationships and many good friends.

Erick Sawatzky: This is not a transition I wish to make [leaving classroom teaching for health reasons], but the time has come. I've enjoyed the classroom; I've enjoyed students a lot. I've enjoyed my time at AMBS. I thank you very much for our time together. ●

In Memoriam

Howard H. Charles

Howard Charles, professor emeritus of New Testament at AMBS, died March 16, 2002, at his home in Goshen, Ind. He was 86.

Students and colleagues remember Howard Charles most for his careful, diligent study of the Bible



and his gentle, humble spirit through which he inspired many to become

pastors and workers in the church.

"Howard knew and loved the inductive method of Bible study," Loren Johns, AMBS dean said. "He could have made a name for himself in the academy, but chose instead to give himself to the church through his teaching and through his extensive writing—writing that formed, informed, and enriched generations of Mennonites."

Erland Waltner, president emeritus of Mennonite

Biblical Seminary, said, "Howard inspired many seminarians to become students, teachers, and preachers of the Word. Helping students to ask the right questions of the biblical text, he became a trusted and beloved mentor to so many. While well aware of contemporary biblical scholarship, he gave himself to a teaching and writing ministry within and for the church, still a worthy calling." ●

Other Deaths

Grant G. Noll (1964) died March 3, 2002, from complications of Progressive Supranuclear Palsy at Lititz, Pa. He pastored churches in Chicago, Ill.; Pekin Ill.; Hydro, Okla.; and Hague, Sask.

Eleanor Loewen died March 20, 2002, in Winnipeg, Man. She taught at William and Catherine Booth Bible College and Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg.

Alumni News

Masha Sternik (MATS 1995) teaches part-time at three seminaries in Moscow. She is married and has twin daughters. She writes that when she first began teaching after her studies at AMBS, she had no textbooks or dictionaries for her classes. For several years she was teaching two or three new courses each semester, "so by now I have taught on all the books of the Old Testament."

Carol Scott (MATS 2000) began a new position as organist at Stevensville United Methodist Church in Stevensville, Mich., in August 2001.

Jeni Hielt Umble (MDiv 1999) completed in six-year pastorate at Southside Mennonite Fellowship in May 2001, and became executive director of Church Community Services in Elkhart in July.

Xiyi Yao (MATS 1992) completed a Ph.D. in China Mission History at Boston University and is visiting scholar at the Institute of World Religions in Beijing, China. He and his wife, **Sze-wai Ho** (1989-1992), have a son, Evan.

Ronald Kennel (MDiv 1981) received the 2002 Justice, Peace and Service Commission peace mug award from the Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference, recognizing his leadership and participation in peace and justice events and activities. Ron is pastor of Clinton Brick Mennonite Church.

Charlene Epp (MDiv 1999) was ordained at Portland Mennonite Church on July

14, 2002. She serves as a chaplain at Providence St. Vincent Medical Center in Portland.

Edward Diener was involved in teaching in a Pastoral Training Seminar in Nairobi, Kenya, during the month of February 2002. Thirty pastors were in regular attendance. The program was under the leadership of Dove Christian Fellowship.

Will Stoltz (MDiv 1979) is in his seventeen year as a prison chaplain. He has been working at developing incarnational expressions of the Word that bring healing to returnees to they can talk out rather than act out their hurt.

Steven G. Schmidt (MDiv 1993) began pastoring Emmanuel Mennonite Church, LaJunta, Colo., August 1, 2001, after 28 years at New Creation Fellowship in Newton, Kan.

Bethan Theunissen (MDiv 1994) was ordained by the United Church of Canada on June 2 in Vancouver, B.C.

Gerald Studer (MDiv 1971) hopes to deliver almost all of his remaining collection of Bibles to AMBS in the late summer, a process he began in 1971. For more about the collection see *Mennonite Weekly Review*, May 20, 2002. The article is designated the "Top Story" of *Mennonite Weekly Review's* internet edition, May 14, 2002.

John Schrock (MDiv 1994) was ordained on May 26, 2002, at First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio.

Anita Schroeder Kipfer (MDiv 1998) was ordained on May 26, 2002, at Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ont.

D. Richard Miller (Th.B. 1955) received a Golden Seal Award, given by Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence for dedication in ending violence against women and their children. He has served more than 20 years in Fort Dodge, Iowa, with the Domestic/Sexual Assault Outreach Center Board of Directors.

Carmen (MATS 1996) and **Luke** (MATS 1995) **Schrock-Hurst** were ordained on January 19, 2002, at Pittsburgh Mennonite Church.

Jorge Vielman (MAPS 2001) serves as director of Hispanic services which offers counseling to Spanish-speaking people through the Center for Problem Resolution in Elkhart, Ind.

Kaye Ferguson-Patton, Tom Watt and **Brenda Ginder** were ordained at the Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, held at Purdue University, Lafayette, Ind. at the end of May. Kaye writes, "This is the highest liturgical service of our Conference and there were probably 2,000 people in attendance." **Tom** (MDiv 1999) serves DeSota United Methodist Church outside of Muncie, Ind. **Brenda** serves as associate pastor at St. Mary's United Methodist Church in St. Mary's, Georgia. **Kaye** serves as senior pastor of the Cooperative Parish of Roanoke, Ind. ●

AMBS News

Day scheduled to honor Erland Waltner

A day to honor **Erland Waltner** for his life of ministry in the church is scheduled for November 15, 2002, at AMBS. The events in his honor will include a dinner and a worship service. For information, contact mweidner@ambs.edu or see www.ambs.edu.

Great Plains director named

Lois Barrett (MDiv 1983) has been named director of the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary—Great Plains Extension in central Kansas. She will serve



approximately one-half time as administrator and one-quarter time as instructor for the program which offers masters-level theological education for people in the region.

Business manager begins

Jeffrey Miller began July 1 as business administrator for AMBS. Most recently he was fiscal administrator of the Division of American Indian and Alaska Native Programs at the University of Colorado Health Science Center in Denver.



List of faculty writings available

A list of faculty writings for 2001-2002 has been published on the AMBS web site. At www.ambs.edu, search for "Faculty Writings" with quotations marks.



The crocuses blooming on the AMBS campus in April were purchased with the Gertrude Roten Campus Landscaping Fund, established by AMBS alumni in 2000 to provide for flowers and other campus decor.

The crocus bulbs were planted in fall in the shape of a cross, replacing wooden stakes which had represented lives lost in the September 11 attacks.

A paradigm shift

Virgil Claassen, who is retiring after serving the seminary since 1973 as director of business and finance, has made note of buzz words in vogue at the seminary during this time. At a farewell event, he incorporated them into this statement:

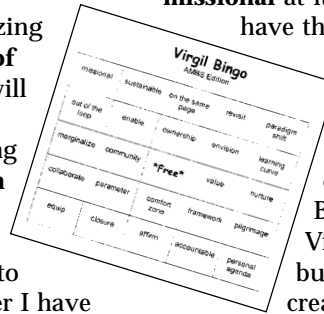
“So—after 29 years—I leave the AMBS community, realizing that I will be **out of the loop** as you will be **teleconferencing**. I will be facing a major **paradigm shift**. I will need to establish a new **benchmark** to determine whether I have achieved my goals. I will try to be **cautiously optimistic** as I reshape my

future. No doubt I will be pushed out of my **comfort zone**. Embarking on this new venture may very well become a **defining experience** for me as my **core values** may well be challenged. I trust that I will find things to do where my gifts can be utilized in a **partnering relationship** that will be **missional** at its core and have the depth that

ensures **sustainability**.”

See a game of Virgil Bingo with Virgil’s list of buzz words created by

AMBS Librarian Eileen Saner at www.ambs.edu/esaner/virgil.htm.



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Director search

AMBS is looking for an Associate Director of Alumni, who will serve in a one-day-per-week volunteer position, working with the AMBS advancement staff and the Alumni Association Executive Committee. If you are interested, send your resume and letter of application to Mark Weidner, 3003 Benham Avenue, Elkhart, IN 46517; mweidner@ambs.edu.

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