

KUYPER

College News

A Publication for Alumni & Friends



Raidel León, his wife Marcy,
and three children, L-R, Celia,
Philippa and Luca.

MY STORY

RAIDEL LEÓN

Raidel León grew up in the town of Jagüey Grande—just north of the Bay of Pigs, the site of the failed Cuban exile invasion of 1961. His father, a devout communist. His mother, a devout Christian. Being brought up between conflicting ideologies, his heart was pulled in different directions until, at the age of 15, the Gospel of Jesus Christ won the battle. This is his story.

I was born and raised in Cuba. My passport shows Havana as my birthplace, but I grew up in Jagüey Grande, an industrial town 90 miles southeast of Havana—Cuba's capital city.

My childhood is filled with mostly good memories. My neighborhood, marked by poverty, still provided me with a safe environment to play, socialize and grow. One could say it took

Alumni Profile

CLASS

2007

HOME

**Jagüey Grande,
Matanzas, Cuba**

CAREER

**Captain–Active Duty
Chaplain–United States
Air Force**

FAMILY

**Wife Marcy, and three
children: Celia, Philippa
and Luca.**

>> See **RAIDEL LEÓN**, Page 4

Inside this Issue

PAGE

02

President's Message

Journeying through
the pandemic

PAGE

03

Social Work Professor Retires

After 29 years at
Kuyper, Professor
Greg Scott retires

PAGE

07

Youth Ministry in Zambia

Kuyper graduate
is training youth
leaders in Zambia

PAGE

07

Low Default Rate

Kuyper's student loan
default rate is among
lowest in the country

JOIN THE CONVERSATION



KUYPER.EDU

Teach Us To Number Our Days

Psalm 90 has been my “go-to” Scripture passage during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic. It’s attributed to Moses and speaks of the meaning and purpose of our brief and often troubled lives—meaning and purpose not found through our accomplishments, but through God’s favor and unfailing love.

In verse 12, the Psalmist asks the Lord to “Teach us to number our days.” Perhaps you’re not so interested in counting your days, but you may be counting the days of the pandemic, which soon will exceed 365.

I’m sure you agree that this is not the point of Moses’ request. He is not keeping a tally of the days of his life, nor the days of wandering in the desert. Instead, Moses expresses God’s gift of life and the value he finds in it, however brief and even during difficult circumstances. And, he is requesting that God grants him a heart of wisdom and “makes us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us” (v.15).

That request—“make us glad”—has stopped me short. Glad for the days of this pandemic? For these challenging and troubling times in which we’re living?

Moses and the people of Israel were well acquainted with trouble and affliction. We read this throughout the Old Testament stories as expressed through the laments and petitions in the Psalms. These psalms have been rehearsed repeatedly by generations of God’s people, singing them on pilgrimages to Jerusalem, at the temple, in exile, during persecution, and in private and public Christian worship.

These laments and petitions do not go unanswered. Even as Moses cries out, “Relent, O Lord! How long will it be?” (v.13), he speaks with confidence, believing that God will provide a way forward. Amid trouble and turmoil, God will “satisfy us in the morning with unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days” (v.14).



As we continue to journey through this pandemic and into a new year, may we wisely reflect on our lives as gifts from God and with encouraged and glad hearts, express with confidence—that our help comes from God. He will provide a way forward as He establishes the work of our hands.

As you read this issue of our Kuyper News, may you be encouraged by the testimonies of Captain Raidel León (’07), Lloyd Ng’ambi (’10), Will Brouwers (’21), Ray Thomas and Professor Greg Scott. They express this same confidence and joy as they reflect on their days of service to God and others.

May God bless you with His favor in this New Year,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patricia".

Dr. Patricia R. Harris
President

Kuyper Community Notes

Births

Rob Schripsema and **Sheryl (Bos) Schripsema** (2008) welcomed home Colton Robert on May 1, 2020.

Dylan O’Brien Pahman (2009) and **Kelly O’Brien Pahman** (2007) welcomed home Callaghan on May 15, 2020.

Keith Crabb and **Kelly (VanderPloeg) Crabb** (2009) welcomed home Cooper Timothy-Allan on May 19, 2020.

Eddie Mercado (2016) and Hillary Mercado welcomed home Amelia Elena on September 5, 2020.

Nate Miller and **Jessica (Monroe) Miller** (2012) welcomed home Jeremiah on September 5, 2020.

As alumni, we invite you to get involved and stay in touch by calling the Alumni Office at 877.229.0941 or sending us an email to alumni@kuyper.edu with your contact information or the most recent news about you.

Marriages

Brad Sanford and **Bethany (Burns) Sanford** (2018) were married on June 13, 2020.

Kenton Loux (2020) and **Leah (Jueckstock) Loux** (2020) were married on August 9, 2020.

Professor Greg Scott Retires

For the past 29 years, professor of social work and social work program director, Greg Scott, has been, according to his students, one of Kuyper College's favorite professors.

Like many other Kuyper faculty members that “practice what they teach,” his academic degrees—a BSW from Valparaiso University and an MSW from Washington University—were only part of his teaching credentials. Together with his practitioner credentials—licensed as a clinical and macro MSW social worker with the state of Michigan, and experience—seven years at Bethany Christian Services and 13 years at Wedgwood Christian Services as a therapist, supervisor and program administrator are what made his teaching not only different, but extraordinary.

Scott started teaching part-time at Kuyper in January of 1991, teaching *Marriage and Family*, *Introduction to Sociology and Group Work in Management*. He became a full-time faculty member in 1999, developing social work courses and writing the documentation for Kuyper's social work program's initial accreditation.

“Various social work colleagues told me that a Bible college (RBC at the time) would never be accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE),” said Scott. “But in 2005, we became only the second Bible college in the United States (Philadelphia Bible College had been accredited in 1974) to receive that honor.”

According to Scott, he taught many social work classes during the years, from *Introduction to Social Work to Social Welfare Policy*, *Capstone*, *International Social Work and Introduction to Sociology*. Scott says, “My two favorites were *Individuals/Families and Social Work with Groups*. We had so much fun.”

Scott said that he's been privileged to have had in his classroom many fine young people. “From the very start, 29 years ago, some of them began to teach me how to teach. They helped me build the first bridges. From them, I learned teaching is a unique partnership,” he said. “It only really works when the teacher reaches beyond the student's outer image, looks into their heart, and understands and respects what they see. The student's role is to allow themselves to be seen, not just for who they are, or have been, but also for who they could be.”



Professor Scott teaching in Liberia, West Africa

According to Scott, he is very thankful to have worked with many excellent professors at Kuyper College. He explained, “They are not only colleagues, but friends. I also want to especially recognize the very gifted Judi Meerman, who I worked with for 17 years in the social work department, and Kelli Hoffman, who took her place and has been my closest colleague for the past two years.”

Over the years, Scott often traveled with his students to the Dominican Republic. “I took students to the Dominican Republic eight times during my time at Kuyper to learn about international social work—culture, diversity, poverty and social justice. These trips were always the highlight of my teaching,” he said. He also traveled to Liberia, West Africa, twice to help set up the first school of social work in that nation at the Mother Pattern College of Health Sciences.

Scott said that as he looks back, he does so with gratitude. “I entered a profession dedicated to assisting young people to achieve their potential, to help them reveal or find their best selves and find a career which honors the Lord. As I leave it, I am taking many of them with me. They will live on in my memories. I'll always remember the things we achieved together.”

To say Scott will be missed is an understatement. As he leaves Kuyper, he is looking forward to moving to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania to be closer to family and, as he said, “get back in touch with my Pennsylvania Dutch roots, hike the Pocono Mountains and maybe, teach as an adjunct professor at Lehigh University.”

Professional Development

Reuben Antvelink (2014) became student ministry director of New Hope Presbyterian Church in Kent, Washington.

Alex Brito (2005), in partnership with Esperanza Covenant Church, started the Esperanza Counseling Center in February of 2020.

Rachel (Grochowalski) Curtis (2011) began her role as director of Making Work Easier at Spectrum Health.

Betsy (Hochhalter) DeVries (2012) was ordained as a Minister of the Word in the Christian Reformed Church and is now serving at Community Christian Reformed Church in Kitchener, Ontario.

Julie (Farnsworth) Matthisse (2020) became a ministry assistant at Sunrise Ministries in Hudsonville in October.

Dani (Castle) Morse (2017) is the new social media coordinator at Words of Hope.

Kat Reynhout (2019) has a new role at the Autism Centers of Michigan as a behavior technician.

Ricardo Tavárez (2010) began his new role as executive director of New City Neighbors ministry.

a village to raise me. In hindsight, the community aspect is the most formative influence I received from my upbringing in Cuba.

When I was 9, my parents divorced, and my mother never remarried. From then on, our house became home to my mother and me, my older sister and her family—her husband and two kids, and my grandfather. Four generations under the same roof! But as crowded as it felt at times, especially when I had to share the only TV in the house, this living arrangement contributed tremendously to my social development. That environment taught me to share, understand and relate to people of all ages.

After my parents' divorce, my mom started going to a church in town. But my dad, a dedicated communist who did not believe in God and despised the church, had a firm grip on me. He did not want me to attend church with my mother. I remember his words regarding my going to church: "I want you to grow as a real man." So, when I was 7 years old, he introduced me to drinking. He was also instrumental in my developing a tough-macho character. As a result, at the age of 11, I experienced my first drunken night. When I turned 12, I was tough enough and ready to take care of myself in the mandatory, government-run, five-night-a-week co-ed boarding school system, which all Cuban children entered in the seventh grade.

Still, against my father's wishes, I began to accompany my mother to church for Sunday evening services. For safety reasons, I would walk her to church and back home every Sunday night. Since I would stay in church waiting for the services to end, I would hear the Gospel message preached while witnessing a different way of life in that community of believers.

Taken captive

Intrigued and somewhat inspired by ninth grade, I decided to read the Bible every day. That started a change in my way of thinking and my life. It seemed clear that I was on my way to becoming a Christian. One Sunday night, I responded to an altar call, and from then on, there was no doubt—Christ's love had taken me captive—I was baptized at the age of 15, the same day as my mother.



Baptizing a fellow officer



Celebrating the Lord's Supper during Sunday services

The battle with my father about Christianity was easier to fight as I became older. He would argue with me about God and other things, but he learned to respect my faith and the different lifestyle I came to model—away from alcohol and the so-called "tough-macho" crowd.

After I finished high school, I decided not to go to college since the "very selective" process—I was not a member of the Young Communist League—knocked me out of the only major I wrote in my college application—psychology. That same year, the church sent me to a small adjacent town after a hurricane had devastated the whole region. The group I led helped with anything that was available—hygiene products, baby clothes, construction and biblical materials. Six months into that work was enough for me to feel God's calling into the ministry.

Because of my grandparents, I had dual Cuban and Spanish citizenship. So, with a Spanish passport, I was able to leave Cuba and come to Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 2002, determined to study for the ministry.

Grand Rapids became my home for the next nine years. Initially, I was hosted by a Christian family that cared for me as a son while trying to learn English. I had only been in Grand Rapids for nine months, without a vehicle to drive or a legal job to sustain me. During that time, I felt the loneliness of being an immigrant—trying to survive outside of my language, culture and identity. It was then that Kuyper College generously opened its doors to me through an international scholarship.

Nourished and nurtured

My time in Michigan stretched me more than I can say with words—adapting to a new culture, language and weather made me reinvent myself. I was forced to evolve and learn life from a different perspective. Michigan taught me to see the world, not just through the lens of the people eager to help, but to see myself as a person who needed much help. Kuyper became a home that nourished and nurtured me academically, but above all spiritually and personally—there I was embraced as a family member.

“I learned that the most significant thing in pastoral care is not understanding people—how they think or act—but loving them as God loves them.”

I have warm memories of my relationship with the staff and professors. Their smiles and kindness instilled in me a sense of self-confidence that pushed me to succeed in a second language. And their ministry emphasis didn't undermine the needed critical thinking each college graduate is required to have to navigate the complexities of today's world. I consider myself very fortunate to have been shaped and molded by such a nurturing and defining environment.

After graduating from Kuyper, I studied at Calvin Theological Seminary and took my first call to Chandler CRC Church in Minnesota. After three cold winters, my family and I decided to seek warmer climates in South Florida. Not having many Reformed churches in the highly diverse and populated dense area of Fort Lauderdale made me venture into the specialized ministry of hospice and hospital chaplaincy. There, I served as the chaplain for an interdisciplinary team that attended patients in assisted living facilities and nursing homes.

Working with Alzheimer's and dementia patients taught me valuable lessons. Ministering to them, I learned that the most significant thing in pastoral care is not understanding people—how they think or act—but loving them as God loves them. As a hospice chaplain, I learned that being a compassionate Christian minister transcends our practice; it is entering into others' pain and suffering because we are, in the end, human beings like them.

The most tangible expression of that compassion is not intellectual compatibility with others, but companionship with others many refer to as the ministry of presence. I look back with mixed feelings at my years in the parish because I didn't always understand people. Such a disconnect made me feel somewhat less of a minister when I



Participating in a training exercise with a chaplain's assistant

should have devoted my energy to walking alongside them with love and compassion.

Expressing gratitude

For many years I had felt a need to express my sense of gratitude to this, my new country, and in some way repay the debt I owed for taking me in—when I had nothing to offer. Marcy, whom I met at Kuyper and was blessed to marry, and I struggled with the idea of joining the military as a tangible way of expressing my thanks. Not giving back to the U.S. in this fashion would have led to lifelong regret, which she did not want me to have. So, she agreed with my idea of applying, I did and was accepted in 2017. Now, I serve as a captain and active duty chaplain in the United States Air Force.

I am humbled by the opportunity to serve the United States military and the quality of the people I get to do it with, especially in Ellsworth Air Force Base, South Dakota, where we are stationed. Currently, I am on deployment with 332 Air Expeditionary Wing—the legendary Red Tails, to an undisclosed location in Southwest Asia. Shortly after my return to the States, we should be moving to our next duty station.

There is no doubt in my mind that military chaplaincy has sharpened the ministry tools Kuyper blessed me with years ago. A strong appreciation for hermeneutics and homiletics, a passion for people, and servant leadership—the hallmarks of our Reformed tradition. All of that has greatly helped me carry out my Air Force chaplaincy's duties and responsibilities with honor and integrity.



León, on right, with coalition partner chaplains from three nations

“Both-And” Generosity

*“Sell everything you have, give it to the poor...
Then come, follow me” Luke 18:22*

These are troubling words from Jesus. It’s difficult to know what to do with them. Should we sell off whatever we have to follow Jesus? Are we disobedient if we refuse?

The fact that Jesus says to “sell everything and follow me” to the rich young ruler speaks volumes. Possessing wealth isn’t the deal-breaker when it comes to kingdom service. Instead, it’s when

wealth possesses us that following Jesus becomes impossible—this was the man’s problem.



Giving is often framed as an “either-or” scenario that pits neighbor against family. We want to share

more generously with our neighbors, but what if there isn’t enough for our family? Understanding generosity this way naturally results in a tighter grip upon our wealth.

But from the vantage of Scripture, generous giving is not an “either-or” choice but a “both-and” opportunity.

Wealth is a gift from God to provide for our families and kingdom causes.

Jesus-followers make decisions about their wealth based on the priority of their relationships and the means available to them. Family members are included on the list of kingdom causes!

If you’re feeling stuck between a rock and a hard place when it comes to your giving, recall this reminder from the Apostle Paul: “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” 1 Timothy 5:8.

These are strong words by any standard; however, they underscore that caring for our household is also part of our ministry.

Jesus’ plan for you includes your wealth. For some, as with the rich young ruler, this includes parting with wealth to serve. But for others, it merely means giving generously to provide for the needs of the family and neighbors.

In My Words

WHEN GOD OPENS DOORS

Thirty-five years ago, I would have never thought I would be working for a Christian College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. But now, with two grown children, four grandchildren, and a wonderful marriage, I know that God had a different plan for me and has a sense of humor.



Ray Thomas

Director of Campus
Operations

My journey in life took me in many different directions along the way to Kuyper College. Part of it was easy, and other times it was not. I can now look back and see that God’s plan was for me to come to Kuyper.

When I interviewed for the director of campus operations position, I was not thinking about changing jobs. Yet, after quite a few interviews, I knew that Kuyper was where I belonged. I usually tell others: “If God opens a door for you, go through it and learn what you can from the experience.” So, here I am, working at Kuyper College at a job I believe God has been preparing me for over many years.

I am not a man of words but action. I was raised by a wonderful mother and a father who I will always admire for his work ethic. He would often say to me: “Your actions speak louder than your words.” He showed and taught me, by his actions, to always be kind to people, to respect people, and to work hard. He reminds me of the verse, “Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically” (Rom. 12:11). I am thankful every day to connect with students, to kindly serve them, and to speak into their lives.

Now with the introduction of *KuperWorks*, I work with many different students. I treat them with respect so that they will remember how they were treated and do the same for others when they go out in the workforce.

My goal at Kuyper is to show students that while they may not think God has a plan for their lives and may struggle along the way questioning the path they took, He knows what the future holds for all of us. I also tell them we would not learn much if God told us the direction for our lives from the start. So, I encourage them to hang on, don’t always take the easy road, keep their eyes focused on the Lord, and someday they will see clearly what He had planned for them all along.

“In My Words” is a feature of the Kuyper College News highlighting first-person stories by Kuyper College faculty and staff.

Youth Ministry in Zambia

In 2010 Lloyd Ng'ambi graduated from Kuyper College with a B.S. in Youth Ministry. Before coming to Kuyper, he had graduated from the Palabana Dairy College of Agriculture and from Zomba Theological Seminary—a school of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Church (CCAP). After ordination, he became a pastor serving as a CCAP youth synod convener.

Today, ten years later, Ng'ambi has helped and trained 800 youth leaders in relational youth ministry and effective Christian youth leadership all across Zambia and neighboring countries.

“And still, there is a great need to train more youth leaders,” said Ng'ambi. “Zambian Christian churches are looking for capable youth leaders who can holistically transform our youth through relational youth ministry. That is why I now devote all of my time to this call.”

Ng'ambi said that in his youth leadership training program, he uses many of the things he learned at Kuyper. “I never forget what I learned in my youth ministry classes from Professors Telzerow and White: the secret of good and effective youth leadership is about earning the right to be heard.” He also credits both professors with helping him see what youth ministry could be in Africa.

In his present position as a CCAP global youth worker, Ng'ambi is free to train youth workers in churches within his denomination and churches of any denomination that need help. “So far, we’ve been



Ng'ambi during a youth leadership training session

able to train youth leaders not only in Zambia, but also in Tanzania, Malawi and Zimbabwe,” said Ng'ambi.

According to Ng'ambi, the continued training investment in hundreds of youth workers is bearing much fruit. “Young people are now participating in the life of the church. The generation gap between old and young, always a big challenge in the African church, is now the story of the past,” he said. “No longer do young people see themselves as visitors or strangers in their churches, but vested participants in the life of the church. They are also becoming a blessing not only in their churches, but in their schools and communities.”

“It is no wonder I am grateful and praise God for the investment Kuyper made in me and the training I received at the College,” said Ng'ambi. “My work here continues to happen as a result of their work.”

Low Student Loan Default Rate Earns Recognition

According to the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, the national default rate for college student federal loans continues to drop. In a parallel report issued by LendEDU, based on the U.S. Department of Education data, Kuyper College is among the colleges in Michigan with the lowest percentage of default rates. Both reports were released this past October.

According to LendEDU, “A federal student loan is considered to be in default if payment is late by 270 days, or roughly nine months. A payment that is three to four months late will typically trigger default. The consequences are steep for either. Federal or private student loan default will damage your credit score, while also possibly leading to the garnishment of your tax refund, Social Security benefits,



STUDENT LOAN DEFAULT RATES

9.70%	4.40%
NATIONAL AVERAGE	KUYPER COLLEGE

or wages. In the most severe instances, you may have to deal with a debt collector, lawsuit, or even the U.S. Marshals if you continually ignore the issue.”

The present default loan average is 9.70%, while Kuyper’s default rate stands at 4.40%. In an email to Agnes Russell, Kuyper’s director

of financial aid, Mike Brown, LendEDU director of communications, said: “Kuyper College has been recognized in LendEDU’s annual report on student loan default rates for having one of the lowest default rates not only in Michigan, but the entire country as well. Your school is known for creating an environment where the burden of student loan debt repayment is much less compared to almost every other campus in the country. Congrats on the recognition, great work!”

“During these tough times when student loan debt is as high as ever and families are carefully weighing the cost of higher education, we are encouraged that Kuyper College is recognized in this way,” said Russell. “All of us at Kuyper will continue to work hard to help students keep this rate as low as possible.”

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

STUDENTS TO WATCH

Will Brouwers

I was born in Grand Rapids and at the age of 2 moved with my parents to Minnesota where my sister was born. My family now lives in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Family always has been and always will be an important part of my life, especially our traditions, such as going north in the fall for the beautiful colors and looking at Christmas lights in the winter.

Because my dad is a pastor, our spiritual life has been different than most, and I wouldn't have it any other way. I remember having long talks before bed about how to deal with classmates or co-workers. I also remember how my sister would chime in on our conversations and how it used to annoy me. As I have grown, I have come to appreciate her opinions and insights on things in my life.

As I think about my life and my faith, I honestly cannot remember a specific moment that I accepted Christ. I can remember being in first or second grade and realizing that I loved God, but I knew even before then that He was worthy to be loved and praised. God has just always been a part of my life. Throughout the years, my relationship with Him has grown and taken shape through the work of my family, mentors and life experiences.

My teenage years were filled with work. I enjoy the feeling of accomplishment after a task is done. While in high school, I did show choir, a competing group combining singing and choreographed dance. I learned many things about singing and how to be in front of a large group of people. It was in these years that I found my friend group: a group of four other guys who loved hanging out in the woods around the fire, joking around and enjoying life together. I believe that these guys will be lifelong friends, even though we have been split up by our different educational paths.

I decided to come to Kuyper because I liked how small it was. I have always loved the "small town" feel. For example, in Minnesota, we

lived in a rural town of 300 people. I was looking for that feel and found it at Kuyper. But in finding the "small town" feel, I got so much more. I found a community that knows you by name and professors and staff members that invited students to their homes. And I found my fiancée!

I met Kat while downtown with a group of students. I was immediately caught by her kindness toward me and others. It has now been two years since we met, and we plan to be married in early 2021!

I know that because of her, I am not the same person I was two years ago. She selflessly loves me and continually shows me the love and grace of Christ.

In addition to finding my fiancée, I have also developed a deeper appreciation for God and His Word. Through the classes I have taken, I have been able to flex my spiritual muscles and prepare myself for graduate school. I have learned how to set boundaries and keep myself healthy, while also looking out for those around me. I have learned what it means to be a Christian and how to go out and minister to people in every facet of their life.

I feel God's call. I listen and do my best to discern what He is saying to me. Since coming to Kuyper, God has refined my call. I know that He wants me to be in a ministerial leadership role. Because of this, I am looking forward to attending Calvin Theological Seminary full time and getting my M.Div. I do not know exactly where God will lead me. I hope it is to a small, rural community. What I do know is that God is good. He is in complete control of my life, and all I can do is praise Him!



CLASS **2021**

HOME **Cedar Rapids, IA**

MAJOR **Interdisciplinary
Studies**