

# KUYPER

College News

*A Publication for Alumni & Friends*

## LESSONS FROM THEIR LEGACY

*Remembering Lee Baas and Joanne Boehm*

Joanne Boehm (front, center) with other members of the College faculty and staff, including Sarah Fredericks and Katie Gunnink (front row) and Jack Van Laar, John Schaal and Dr. Dick Van Halsema (second row).

**F**or 86 years, Kuyper College has been a community of biblical higher education, shaping lifelong learners for lives of purposeful work and service to God and neighbor.

Two beloved alumni—Dr. Lee Baas and Joanne Boehm, who passed away in March and February, respectively—deeply embodied that mission. At first glance, they might seem quite different, but their lives reflected the same core values: faith, resilience and a commitment to service.

Boehm was born in Rotterdam, Netherlands, in 1930 and was just 10 when the Nazis invaded her homeland in 1940 during World War II.

“She really grew up under the occupation,” recalled Laura Verbridge, her friend and longtime roommate, whom she met at Kuyper in 1957. “She and her family suffered greatly.”

**Dr. Lee Baas, right, with his wife Carolyn.**



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# Made for Connection

A family reunion. A night around a campfire. A road trip.  
A day at the beach. A backyard BBQ.

I hope there was a moment this summer when you truly connected with others—when you listened to their stories, shared your own, and deepened your relationships. I’m talking about connecting with real, live people—not AI chatbots that mimic human conversation.

Recently, I came across an article from *The Gospel Coalition* discussing how young adults are using AI chatbots—not to order coffee or navigate customer service issues (we all do that these days)—but to engage in meaningful, emotional conversations. The article noted that millions of young adults are spending two or more hours a day interacting with “sympathetic chatbots,” forming emotional attachments to these virtual companions.

These chatbots, now equipped with advanced conversational and emotional intelligence, are becoming sources of comfort for those experiencing loneliness, isolation and a loss of meaning.

**“I’m not here to suggest we should never engage with AI. But the article does shine a light on a deeper issue: the growing absence of authentic relationships and meaningful community—something people of all ages increasingly long for.”**

These feelings are real and valid. And I’m not here to suggest we should never engage with AI. But the article does shine a light on a deeper issue: the growing absence of authentic relationships and meaningful community—something people of all ages increasingly long for.

At Kuyper, we recognize this need. We are committed to fostering a healthy, engaged, Christ-centered community where students can truly flourish. We aim to tangibly live out our institutional values of *Holistic Development and Caring Community* as we pursue our mission *to form lifelong learners for purposeful lives of work and service to God and neighbor*.

As the article so powerfully puts it: “We need the embodied presence of another human being in our lives—loving us, spending time with us, and giving us attention, encouragement, and support.” And as followers of Jesus—the Word made flesh who dwelled among us—we are



called to be that presence for one another, to love and serve both God and neighbor.

Our alumni have faithfully lived out this calling for the past 86 years, as seen in our cover story featuring Lee Baas and Joanne Boehm. It is also embodied by our dedicated faculty and staff. And, I’m encouraged by how Alex Owens, our “Student to Watch,” describes his Kuyper experience as creating space for real relationships and deeper conversations in fellowship through it all, worshipping God together and growing in faith daily.

As we begin a new academic year, I invite you to pray that our students grow deep in their love for God and one another.

Grateful to serve,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Patti".

**Dr. Patricia R. Harris**  
President

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## 'LETTERS TO GRIEF'

# Motaung Wins Christian Book Award

When Kuyper alum Kate VanKrimpen Motaung learned her latest book had won a national Christian Book Award, her response wasn't to boast but rather to point back to her purpose.

*Letters to Grief* was recently named the 2025 winner of the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association's Christian Book Award in the devotion and gift category. Presented annually since 1978, the award recognizes standout works that exemplify excellence in Christian publishing.

Motaung, a 2002 Kuyper College graduate, sees the honor not as a personal achievement, but as an opportunity to share Gospel-centered hope with grieving readers.

"I was trying to be raw and honest but still anchor those emotions in the truth of God's Word," she said.

Writing has long served as a healing outlet for Motaung, especially after graduating with a degree in cross-cultural

missions and entering the mission field in Cape Town, South Africa. She smiled as she recalled her original intention to stay only six months.

"I ended up being in South Africa for 10-and-a-half years. I met and married my husband Kagiso, and all three of our kids were born there," she said.



Kate's mom fought cancer for nine years until the Lord called her home at age 59.

publications. *Letters to Grief* was born out of Motaung's writings in the wake of her mother's death in September 2011, following a nearly decade-long cancer battle. It started as an open letter to a personified version of grief on her blog, eventually becoming a fully-fledged book after an outpouring of positive responses.

"It definitely came out of losing my mom, and I was just trying to use writing to process everything," she recalled.

After her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer in December 2002, writing became her lifeline, and she created prolifically for both her blog and various magazines and online



2002 Kuyper graduate and award-winning author Kate Motaung.

The book invites readers into that same process. Organized into 12 sections, each built around a different personified image of grief, the devotional includes Scripture passages, guided prayers, reflection questions and gentle descriptions to help people name and navigate their sorrow.

"It's not a prescriptive book that tells you how to grieve," Motaung explained. "It's more descriptive. I wanted to help put words to a very complicated experience."

In addition to her writing, Motaung hosts *Five Minute Friday*, an online community for Christian writers, and runs Refine Services, a professional editing business.

She and her family have lived in West Michigan for the past 12 years. With their youngest child now graduated from high school, a return to South Africa may be on the horizon.

No matter where she lives, Motaung hopes her work reaches those who need it most.

"It does feel strange to win an award for a book on grief," she said, smiling. "I'm thankful that others have read it but also sorry they had a reason to, and I hope that it's helped them."

**"It's not a prescriptive book that tells you how to grieve. It's more descriptive. I wanted to help put words to a very complicated experience."**



Kuyper College was founded in 1939 as Reformed Bible Institute and offered a three-year curriculum with a practical, focused and expedient track into foreign and domestic missions. In 1970, after an almost five-year redesign of curriculum and programs, the Department of Education of the state of Michigan gave the school the right to confer a four-year bachelor's degree. As a result, RBI changed its name to Reformed Bible College. Today, Kuyper College is a leading Christian College focused on effectively training students to make a difference in God's world and continues to build on the strong foundation established first as RBI, and later as RBC.

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After the war, Boehm immigrated to Canada with her family. She didn't learn English until her late 20s and had only completed school through third grade due to wartime disruption. Just gaining admission to college was a major challenge.

"To its credit, Kuyper accepted Joanne in spite of her lack of both elementary and secondary education," said Rev. John Steigenga, Boehm and Verbridge's friend and former pastor at LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church.

Verbridge said Boehm found her calling during her time at Kuyper.

"She formed a close bond with Katie Gunnink, who invited Joanne to work in the library with her, and Joanne loved it," Verbridge said.

"However," added Steigenga, "she soon realized that, if she were to continue working in library science, she would have to have additional education."

Determined to pursue that dream, Boehm earned a bachelor's degree from Calvin University and later a master's from the University of Michigan after graduating from Kuyper in 1960.

Verbridge described her as tenacious and focused, balancing full-time work and her studies with unwavering resolve.

"At one point, she was riding her bike for miles and miles just to get to class and work," Verbridge said, laughing. "She refused to give up."

From 1960 to 1985, Boehm served as Kuyper's Director of Library Services—a role she viewed as her mission field.

"The students were who she loved best. It was always more than just a job for her," said Verbridge.

#### A Promise Made—and Kept

Baas was born in 1934 on his family's farm in Corsica, North Dakota. Before his passing, he and his wife Carolyn hosted a Celebration of Life with

## Kuyper News and Events

### Marriages

**Ben Hausman** (2025) and **Jia (Debrey) Hausman** (2025) married on May 20, 2025.

### Births

**Kelly Ann (Warren) Konrad** (2014) and her husband Mark welcomed twins Samantha and Rose in February 2025.

**Kelsey (Palmquist) Kabemba** (2015) and her husband Raphael welcomed their first son, Micah, in April 2025.

Christi and **Phil Johnson** (2019) welcomed their daughter Margot on July 10, 2025.

**Samantha (Jansma) Sleeman** (2019) and her husband Caleb welcomed their son, Asher Josiah, to their family on March 24, 2025.

### Deaths

**Robert H. Felton** (2010), 57, of Bellaire, passed away on July 22, 2025, at his home.

**“Lee and Carolyn didn’t see the end of the path God laid before them, nor did they see the twists and turns that would come their way, but they trusted God to lead them, and He did.”**

family and friends, reflecting on their remarkable 65 years of ministry together.

His pastor, Rev. Art VanWolde, a 1989 Kuyper graduate, shared Baas’ early story: “He struggled with asthma as a child and teen, so he went to Arizona for his health. While there, he promised God that, if he were healed, he would dedicate his life to ministry.”

When that prayer was answered, Baas kept his promise. He turned down a secular college scholarship from his employer and chose Kuyper instead, graduating in 1955.

He first served at stateside military bases before he and Carolyn—married in 1960—embarked on a lifetime of shared ministry. Together, they logged more than three million miles across Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe, spreading the Gospel.

“Their life together has gone in many different places, and God has used them in amazing ways,” said VanWolde.

Baas continued his education over the years, earning a degree from Azusa Pacific and advanced credentials from Rosemead, UCLA and Biola. Those

degrees opened doors to ministry and counseling around the world.

His first assignment was working with Navajo youth in Utah. In 1962, the couple moved to San Francisco for inner-city ministry. By 1965, they began nearly two decades in Nigeria, serving in mobile evangelism, translation and hospital administration.

Baas once recounted a harrowing experience from the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), when he had to drive through an armed roadblock with a truckload of villagers.

“Had I stopped, everybody would’ve been shot. I felt like the Lord was leading me, so I whipped around and found a spot where I could drive behind them,” he said with a chuckle.

After returning to the U.S. in 1984, Baas worked with International Aid and Outreach International, distributing relief supplies and theological materials. In 1990, he and Carolyn resumed missionary work in Manila, training pastors and church planters.

In 1999, Baas founded Walking in Their Shoes—a free global counseling ministry supporting missionaries,

pastors and relief workers emotionally and spiritually.

## Faith Through Trials, Time

Though Baas and Boehm came from different worlds and served in different ways, their lives were both marked by a deep hunger for learning and a steadfast devotion to faithful service.

They faced hardship—wartime trauma, chronic health issues, even threats to their lives—but never lost their sense of purpose or hope.

“Lee and Carolyn didn’t see the end of the path God laid before them, nor did they see the twists and turns that would come their way, but they trusted God to lead them, and He did,” said VanWolde.

“Joanne had the most incredible sense of humor, and she somehow managed to stay positive, no matter what happened. It was how she coped,” said Verbridge.

Perhaps the greatest legacy of both Boehm and Baas is this: a lasting reminder to trust not in circumstances, but in God’s provision—and to keep moving forward in faith.

## Professional Development

**Allison (Denk) Brito** (2005) is now the Program Director of Radiant Roots Doula Network, a nonprofit that she also helped found.

**Dylan James O'Brien Pahman** (2009) graduated from St. Mary's University, Twickenham, London, with a Ph.D. in theology on the basis of published works.

**Eddie Mercado** (2016) graduated with a Master of Divinity from Westminster Seminary California and has also accepted a call to serve as an associate pastor at Harvest OPC in Wyoming, Michigan.

**Julianna Kempema** (2019) started a new position as the Associate Pastor at the Reformed Church of Steen, Minnesota.

Stay in touch. Call the Alumni Office (877.229.0941) or send us an email ([alumni@kuyper.edu](mailto:alumni@kuyper.edu)) with your latest news, updated contact information and more. We'd love to hear from you!



## Expanding KuyperWorks

Recently, I met with colleagues at Kuyper College to plan how we can expand our KuyperWorks program beyond campus and into local businesses.



Jim Steenbergen  
Chief Advancement Officer

This innovative model already employs students across our campus in essential roles—from landscaping and facilities to admissions, advancement and academic support. KuyperWorks

students are central to our day-to-day operations, and in return for their service, they receive a significant tuition discount and valuable professional experience.

It's a true win-win that reflects our commitment to integrating faith, work and learning.

Now, we're looking to take this model into the community, partnering with companies in West Michigan and beyond to give students even broader real-world opportunities while helping meet workforce needs. KuyperWorks is a tangible expression of our mission to equip students for lives of service, leadership and impact.

Your support of Kuyper helps vital programs like this grow and flourish. Gifts to the annual fund directly support student services, which guide and mentor students throughout their work experience.

Your generosity helps us connect in deeper, more meaningful ways—with students, with the community and with our shared mission.

Thank you for your past support, and we prayerfully ask you to consider partnering with us again this season.

## In My Words

### WALKING ALONGSIDE STUDENTS

At 23, I hadn't stepped foot in a church in years. Even then, my exposure to Christianity was minimal—Jesus felt like a distant figure in faded paintings or lifeless statues. He seemed archaic and irrelevant, not a God who saw me, knew me, or had a purpose for my life. My search for meaning through worldly pursuits only deepened my despair and emptiness.

That changed one summer evening when an evangelism team knocked on my door. With sincerity and grace, they shared the Gospel—a message of hope and truth that reshaped my life. That moment became the launchpad for a lifelong journey of following Jesus as Savior and Lord.



Tom Aldrich  
Director of Program  
Development &  
Educational Technology

Because of the struggles I faced in my youth, I've carried a burden to use my story—marked by pain, confusion and redemption—to reach other young people. That burden became a calling: to walk alongside students and young adults with the same compassion and hope that met me at my front door.

Over the years, that calling led me to serve as a Young Life leader, campus missionary to GVSU students, pastor to young adults, principal of two Christian schools, Director of Young Leader Development at SpringHill Camps, and currently adjunct professor at two Christian colleges. In each role, God has given me the privilege and joy of investing in the next generation.

Now, the Lord has graciously opened another door—this time at Kuyper College. Before formally joining the community, I worked with Spring Arbor University's graduate program, which happened to lease space on Kuyper's campus. I had no idea then that it would lead to my current role at the College.

I'm continually inspired by Kuyper's mission—an intentional, holistic approach to Christian education that integrates academic rigor with spiritual formation and hands-on experience. Kuyper's commitment to weaving faith, learning and purposeful work creates the kind of environment where students don't just gain knowledge, but grow in wisdom and Christlike character.

I find great joy in listening to the hearts and stories of young adults. I've seen how powerfully God works through each new generation, and that gives me a deep appreciation and genuine curiosity for their individual journeys. It's a privilege to offer encouragement, share my experience, and extend grace and support as they pursue the purposes God has placed on their lives.

It's an honor to be part of that mission at Kuyper and to walk with students and staff as we follow God's call together.

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

# Kuyper Partners with Calvin, Dordt to Expand Degree Opportunities

Kuyper College is expanding academic opportunities for its students through new partnerships with two respected Christian institutions—Calvin University and Dordt University.



Dr. Tim Detwiler  
Academic Dean

Through these agreements, Kuyper students can now transition seamlessly from the college's Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program to Dordt's Master of Social Work (MSW) or pursue careers in elementary and secondary education through a collaborative program with Calvin.

Dr. Tim Detwiler, Kuyper's Academic Dean, called both agreements "promising prospects" for future Christian teachers and social workers.



Jennifer Colin  
Associate Professor  
of Social Work

"These kinds of collaborative programs between like institutions are a big plus for our students," he said.

Jennifer Colin, Associate Professor of Social Work and director of Kuyper's program, said the partnership with Dordt is an ideal next step for graduates pursuing advanced social work education.

"It gives them the opportunity to expand on the strong foundation of professional knowledge and Christian worldview they build at Kuyper," she said. "They'll further cultivate a range of valued skills and experiences, all of which will prepare them to address complex needs in various fields."

Because Dordt's MSW program is fully online, students have the flexibility to complete coursework from anywhere in the world.

"What sets Dordt apart is that it offers a quality online master's education that continues to emphasize understanding and articulating a Reformed response to social welfare," Colin said. "This consistency is unique and valuable."

Kuyper's program accreditation also makes students eligible for advanced standing in MSW programs like Dordt's—saving as much as two years of graduate coursework and significant tuition costs.



**"Our partners, Dordt and Calvin, are very well-respected organizations who share Kuyper's Christian worldview. These two new programs will provide quality educational options for our students."**

Kuyper's new teacher education partnership with Calvin offers similar advantages, blending Kuyper's robust Bible and theology curriculum and interdisciplinary program with Calvin's strong education program.

Detwiler said the collaboration marks a new chapter in teacher preparation at Kuyper.

Under the new agreement, students earn a four-year Interdisciplinary Studies degree with an education emphasis from Kuyper, with part of their coursework taken at Calvin. Those Calvin classes are billed at the Kuyper tuition rate, and students continue to use Kuyper scholarships and financial aid. After graduation, they can enroll at Calvin for one additional year, if they choose, in the state certification program—where they can also complete up to 15 credit hours toward a master's in education.

"They get a real head start on a quality education program at Calvin," said Detwiler.

With national demand for teachers and social workers on the rise, both new options offer expanded pathways for Kuyper students to meet those needs.

"Our partners, Dordt and Calvin, are very well-respected organizations who share Kuyper's Christian worldview," Detwiler said. "These two new programs will provide quality educational options for our students."

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## STUDENTS TO WATCH

# Alexander Owens

I graduated from Northview High School in 2022, just around the corner from Kuyper, and started out at Muskegon Community College. I played soccer there for two years while finishing up my general education classes. When it came time to decide where I'd go next, Kuyper reached out and invited me to join their soccer program. It was close to home, familiar and gave me a chance to keep playing. It felt right.

I'll graduate in the fall of 2026 with a major in social work. After that, I hope to earn my master's in education leadership and become a school guidance counselor. My goal is to support

students in their own journeys—academically, emotionally and spiritually.

**"Love God  
and love others,  
even when we  
don't deserve it.  
That's what I'm  
learning to live."**

Kuyper has actually exceeded my expectations. At first, I wasn't sure. The school seemed small, and it didn't feel like a lot was going on. But once I reconnected with my faith and started pouring into the people around me, everything changed.

For the first time, I really started to care about school. Kuyper helped me realize there's a deeper purpose. Not just in what I'm studying, but in how I can serve others through what I learn.

The professors here are amazing. They genuinely care, and it shows. At my previous college and in most other places, it's hard to form personal connections with your professors or feel like your voice matters in class. At Kuyper, it's different.

Two people stand out to me in particular: Dr. Anthony Bradley and Emily Pertont. Dr. Bradley has been a strong spiritual role

model for me, especially as an African American man navigating life and faith. Seeing how God has shaped his journey has encouraged me to explore how God is working in mine. Emily wears many hats in my life, including teacher, supervisor, therapist and mother figure. I go to her for everything. She listens when I need to rant, hugs me when the week's been hard and helps me stay grounded.

I'm heavily involved on and off campus. I work eight hours a week through KuyperWorks as a student success coach, I serve at Noto's Old World Italian Dining around 16–20 hours a week, and I'm one of the captains of the soccer team. Balancing all that is hard, no question. My schedule is tight, so I use both Apple Calendar and Google Calendar to stay on track. But it's worth it. I'm working toward a debt-free degree in social work. That goal keeps me moving forward.

Kuyper is a small Christian school where everyone knows each other. You walk into class, and almost half the students are heading to the same place you are next. It creates space for real relationships and deeper conversations. And through it all, you're in fellowship, worshipping God together and growing in your faith every day.

I've been in church all my life, but my faith really deepened around Easter 2024 thanks to my girlfriend and her family. Since then, I've been attending regularly and continuing to grow. Love God and love others, even when we don't deserve it. That's what I'm learning to live.



CLASS **2026**  
HOME **Grand Rapids**  
MAJOR **Social Work**