



Leon J. VanRees

March 7, 1934 - May 11, 2025

Leon J. VanRees, 91, of Holland, Michigan, died on May 11, 2025.

Leon was born on March 7, 1934, in Worthington, Minnesota, to William and Tena (Stuursma) VanRees. After graduating from Calvin College, he served his country in Korea and later settled in Muskegon, Michigan, with his beloved wife, Katherine (Kay) Fase VanRees.

A dedicated educator, Leon began his teaching career at Western Michigan Christian High School, where he taught Bible, government, political science, social studies, and world history. In addition to his teaching, he served as athletic director, cross country coach, and student council advisor. Later, he brought his passion for learning to Muskegon Community College. Leon was a gifted and compassionate teacher, known for his ability to encourage critical thinking and his genuine care for each of his students. He had a unique gift for reaching both high-achieving students and those facing challenges, guiding many toward thoughtful, meaningful lives.

Leon lived out his faith in both his profession and personal life. He served faithfully as a deacon, elder, and adult education teacher in the churches he attended. His commitment to community extended beyond the church—he held board positions with the Angell Neighborhood Association, Calvin University Alumni Board, Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, Community Encompass, and Love INC. Leon also volunteered with CRWRC,

traveling to Nicaragua to assist with disaster relief, and regularly transported patients to dialysis appointments through the Red Cross. He had a heart for service, particularly in empowering young people, often accompanying them to Summer Workshop in Ministries locations.

Family was at the heart of Leon's life. Sunday gatherings with the extended VanRees family were a cherished tradition. He had a love for adventure and nature, taking his children and grandchildren on countless hiking and biking excursions—from the dunes of Lake Michigan to the trails of the Great Smoky Mountains. A lifelong cyclist, Leon embraced every kind of bike, from cruiser to electric, and even a motorized amigo in his later years—always ready for a ride. He was also an avid reader and kept everyone around him well-informed on current events.

Leon is survived by his beloved wife, Kathryn (Kathy) Sneller Davelaar VanRees, and his children: Bill VanRees; David and Beth VanRees; and Steven and Leanne VanRees. He is also survived by his grandchildren and great-grandchildren: Amanda Mead (Kayden); Jacob and Bridget VanRees (Ryker, Mack); Kaitlin VanRees (Emerson); Sarah VanRees (Emmalee, Isabella); Abigail and Kyle Walwood (Brynlee); Ethan and Kera VanRees (BuckLee); Philip and Emily VanRees (Linden, Makenna); Elizabeth and Nicolas Donkersloot (Katherine, Ellen, Henry, and a great-grandchild due in June); Charles and Betsy VanRees (Wells, and a great-grandchild due in October); Anne and Jeremy Pyper (Marie, Jackson, Jonathan); Hannah and Alex Saxton (Quentin, Mia); Madeline VanRees; and Noah VanRees. Leon is survived by his sisters and brothers; Charlene Ezinga, Ike and Lois VanRees, Clare and Jerry Baker, Rosalie Bangma, and Eunice and Steve Thiry. He is also survived by his brothers and sisters-in-law; Andy Fase, Arie Knoester, Andy and Celia Sneller, Norman and Kathy Sneller, Tom and Leigh Sneller, Mark and Ann Sneller, Ron and Cindy Sneller, Scott and Sue Sneller, Cal and Joy Sneller, and Jodi Hossink.

Leon was preceded in death by his parents, his first wife Kay, and his infant great-grandson Isaac Saxton.

To view the livestream of the service, please visit https://youtube.com/live/2FAYw3v_ZEY?feature=share

A service to celebrate Leon's life will be held at 11:00 A.M. on Thursday, May 29, 2025, at Hope Church, 77 W 11th St., Holland, MI 49423. Visitation will take place from 6:00 P.M. to 8:00 P.M. on Wednesday, May 28, 2025, also at Hope Church.

Memorial gifts may be made to Hope Church or Western Michigan Christian High School.

Previous Events

Visitation

MAY **28**. 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

Hope Church
77 West 11th Street
Holland, MI 49423

Service

MAY **29**. 11:00 AM (ET)

Hope Church
77 West 11th Street
Holland, MI 49423

Tribute Wall



“ *Langeland-Sterenberg Yntema Funeral Homes created a Tribute Video in memory of Leon J. VanRees*



Langeland-Sterenberg Yntema Funeral Homes - May 28, 2025 at 08:23 AM



“ *Langeland-Sterenberg Yntema Funeral Homes created a Webcast in memory of Leon J. VanRees*



Langeland-Sterenberg Yntema Funeral Homes - May 20, 2025 at 11:03 AM

AH

We have contemplated long and hard what could we say about our Beloved teacher and friend, Leon Van Rees, without it being the length of a book! His style of teaching was so similar to that of Socrates, as we could experience in modern times. He wanted us to not only learn rote facts, but to ponder and understand the ethical, moral, and spiritual implications of those things we believed to be true!

As freshmen we were in shock; as seniors we realized we had been blessed to have been exposed to a man who possessed an excellent grasp of history, and the reality of its impact on our thinking!

He remained curious to learn and understand that which was experienced by others, not of his tribe!' He demonstrated to all of us that we needed to be lifelong learners, if we truly desired to be 'lights in a dark world!'

God was so gracious to have shared Mr. Van Rees with us, and the love we have for him remains!

Now beloved friend, take your rest! The Johnson siblings: Alexis, Robert, Mari Beth, and Suzanne

Alexis Johnson Hightower - May 24, 2025 at 02:57 PM

SR

Thank you Alexis. Your kind words mean so much to us at this time.

Steve J Van Rees - May 30, 2025 at 07:44 AM

TF

“ *The Andrew Fase Family purchased the Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum for the family of Leon J. VanRees.*



The Andrew Fase Family - May 28, 2025 at 02:04 PM

TF

“ The Andrew Fase Family planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Leon J. VanRees.

The Andrew Fase Family - May 28, 2025 at 02:04 PM

DW

“ My sympathies to Mr. VanRees's family. To this day, I directly attribute my ability to think independently and critically to my time as a student in many of Mr. VanRees's classes at WMCHS. He had a calm, dignified presence, yet insisted we use sound reasoning to examine and test our beliefs. Those lessons truly changed the person I am and have left me forever grateful.

Dan Wassink - May 27, 2025 at 02:19 PM

SR

Thank you Dan.

Steve J Van Rees - May 30, 2025 at 07:45 AM

AS

“ Alexis, Robert, Maribeth, & Suzanne purchased the Emerald Garden Basket for the family of Leon J. VanRees.



Alexis, Robert, Maribeth, & Suzanne - May 24, 2025 at 01:15 PM

AS

“ Alexis, Robert, Maribeth, & Suzanne planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Leon J. VanRees.

Alexis, Robert, Maribeth, & Suzanne - May 24, 2025 at 01:15 PM

JZ

“ I worked with Leon at Muskegon Community college for many years. He cared deeply about his students, and was a wonderful colleague. He will be missed. May memories of Leon bring his family and friends comfort.

jay zarowitz - May 18, 2025 at 04:58 PM

KR

Thank you, Jay.

Kathy Van Rees - May 20, 2025 at 11:11 AM



“ Heavenly Heights Bouquet was purchased for the family of Leon J. VanRees.



May 16, 2025 at 09:09 AM

TF

“ Dearest Kathy, I am so sorry for your loss. I am sure his physical absence leaves a void in your life. But your love for each other continues. Love is stronger than death. You are in my heart. May Leon rest in peace and rise in glory.

Thomas Folkert - May 16, 2025 at 08:47 AM

KR

Thank you, Tom.

Kathy Van Rees - May 17, 2025 at 12:58 PM

KT

“ It was our very first hour of History in a freshman high school class. Mr. VanRees got up unto his desk and said, "Prove there is no monkey in my watch." I think we all thought he was pretty crazy, and though we all firmly believed he had no monkey in his watch, none of us could prove it. He encouraged us to think, and he insisted we be able to back it up. He was a great teacher!
He was a slow driver. After babysitting his children, he would drive me home. I was convinced I could walk home faster than he could drive, but he wouldn't let me walk home alone in the dark.
He made a great difference in my life. Thank you Mr. VanRees.
Karla Tupper

Karla Tupper - May 16, 2025 at 04:45 AM

GT

So sorry to learn of Leon's death. I met Kay and Leon when they were residence of Lakeshore House Condominiums in Muskegon. Very much enjoyed their friendship and Leon's service as president of our condo association. He will be missed.
Toni Rae Gurn

Gurn Toni - May 17, 2025 at 07:23 AM

KR

Thank you, Gurn

Kathy Van Rees - May 17, 2025 at 12:57 PM

RP

I've had the privilege of attending Muskegon Community College, the University of Michigan and Valparaiso University; regardless, the absolute best teacher I had anywhere was Leon Van Rees at Western MI Christian HS. He made history and government come alive, but most importantly he challenged our prejudices and encouraged us to take what we learned on Sunday into the everyday world of Monday-Saturday. Mr. Van Rees, may you rest in peace (though I doubt you'll be sitting back doing that!). Roy Portenga

Roy Portenga - May 18, 2025 at 06:47 PM

KR

Thank you, Roy 😊

Kathy Van Rees - May 20, 2025 at 11:13 AM

RT

I agree with Roy (hi Roy) 100%. I have had some wonderful teachers but by far and away, Mr. Van Rees was THE BEST teacher I have ever had. He taught us to think critically, examine our biases, and listens to others. But also, he was a kind and caring human, a teacher who loved his subjects AND his students. He will be missed. Kathy and children and grandchildren, I am sorry for your loss. May his memory be for a blessing.

Richard Tupper - May 20, 2025 at 11:41 AM

DV

I was sad to hear of Mr. VanRees' passing. He was one of the more interesting and loving teachers I had beyond Muskegon Cristian including Calvin College and Purdue University. After class I felt comfortable asking him any personal questions and he always gave me a wise and loving response. We missed him at our 51st class reunion although he was not up to taking the trip to see us - Norm Sneller skyped all of us and him. I will always remember Leon was my first hour teacher and always read a verse from Proverbs. He would bring on the Bible to begin the class and students use to yell "SHHHHHHHHH- PROVERBS !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Deborah VanWoerkom - May 23, 2025 at 12:17 AM

KR

Karla, Roy, Richard, and Deborah: Thank you for your kind words. It means a lot.

Kathryn Van Rees - June 09, 2025 at 12:59 PM

KR

Kathryn Van Rees

Kathryn Van Rees - June 09, 2025 at 01:00 PM

KR

Kathryn VanRees (no space please to make this work :))

Kathryn Van Rees - June 09, 2025 at 01:00 PM