



## DENNIS WRIGLEY

Died 9<sup>th</sup> November 2015 aged 85 years

Dennis had an amazing capacity to impact the lives of those he met, whether through a brief conversation on a train journey, a political debate or a simple prayer at a Maranatha Gathering. The many from diverse ages, beliefs and walks of life who packed the church for a Service of Thanksgiving on Monday, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2015 was a testimony to the fruitfulness of Dennis' life, given to serving God and others. We were reminded of the words of Jesus, "*..unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*" (John. 12.24).

Dennis' life was surrendered to God at an early age. Born into a family with a strong spiritual inheritance, Dennis grew up within the worshipping community of the Methodist Church in Flixton, Manchester, which he fondly remembered as a loving family, where he felt secure and very much aware of the love of God. The teaching and spirituality of John Wesley was deeply formative in Dennis' life – his mother's family were direct descendants of one of the group around John Wesley at the formation of the Methodist Church – and he was inspired by the example of his many relatives who served as missionaries and preachers.

At the age of 9 years, Dennis was acutely aware of the outbreak of war and, as a young boy, engaged in what he instinctively knew to be a battle between good and evil. With a map on his bedroom wall, he systematically prayed against the advance of Hitler's troops with an inner conviction that good would prevail. Dennis' dynamic prayer life was matched by his avid hunger for books. In addition to the Bible and a wide variety of theology books, he had digested all the major philosophers by his early teens. Schooling at Manchester Grammar, courtesy of a bursary, also provided the stimulation of debate and the opportunity to hear national figures who visited the school. By his own admission, Dennis had little interest in the academic syllabus, though in spite of this he went on to study architecture.

The market place of industry became Dennis' chief habitat through his working life. His leadership qualities were given to service on numerous boards and bodies including the positions of President of the Association of Building Component Manufacturers, Founder Chairman of the Industrial Buildings Bureau, membership of the National Regulation Buildings Committee and the Construction Committees in the European Community. Having served as a Director of several companies, he took the step of establishing his own Management Practice, which gave him the freedom to spend time on a wide variety of other activities. He became an experienced broadcaster and had a regular slot on the TV programme 'Under Fire'. He was an international conference speaker and used his extensive travelling for business as an opportunity to visit and encourage persecuted Christians, including those in prison, particularly in Eastern Europe.

As a young boy Dennis described himself as shy until one day he suddenly thought "I've got something to say!" This marked the beginning of Dennis' entry into the world of politics as a member of the Young Liberals. He started to preach at 15 years and launched a youth fellowship in his local Methodist Church at the age of 17 years. Dennis wholeheartedly embraced Wesley's teaching on the 'single Gospel' – personal holiness and social righteousness. His political conviction was matched by a pursuit of justice for the marginalised and oppressed in the communities where he later stood as Parliamentary Candidate and his preaching was lived out in visiting the sick and in his leadership of young people in all manner of social action.

The hallmark of Dennis' life was love. Frequently he would exclaim, "I love people!". He was open to an encounter with Jesus in everyone he met and never said no to anyone in need, whatever time of day or night. It was this love for people that fuelled his passion for the regeneration of the North West, where he served as Director for the North West Group of Eight and as a member of Renaissance North West and the Phoenix Initiative. For Dennis it was natural that this passion was also expressed politically. He pioneered the rejuvenation of the Young Liberals and the Liberal Party in the North West and High Peak during the 1950's & 60's and, although never elected, he worked extensively with Liberal leaders in Westminster. Above all, he loved to work with young people. His dynamic Youth Fellowship continued, with a waiting list, for 50 years and until the very end of his life, young people leapt at the opportunity to spend time with Dennis.

In the midst of all this, Dennis was a family man, committed to his local community. Married to Sheila for one month short of 60 years, he was immensely proud of Christine and Simon his children, his five grandchildren and three great grandchildren. He delighted in the beauty of creation, had a great interest in and love of art and enjoyed a wide variety of music, with a special love of brass bands. He had a wonderful sense of humour and a great readiness to laugh at himself.

Dennis yearned for the church to truly be the living presence of Christ and, from an early age had a vision of Christians from all denominations coming together to worship God. He brought leading Methodists together, resulting in the publication of a prophetic call, 'Methodism and the Future Church' and through this, in 1981, Dennis met Monsignor Michael Buckley, a Catholic Priest. Together, they gathered Catholics and Methodists for a day of worship and fellowship in Salford, Manchester - a response to the prayer of Jesus that His followers be one. This was the birth of the Maranatha Community, which Dennis subsequently led for over 30 years. The foundations and ethos of this interdenominational community, committed to praying and working for unity, renewal and healing, are indicative of Dennis' selfless devotion to Jesus Christ. The Maranatha Community is a servant ministry to the whole Church, a loving family of believers from all traditions and backgrounds, united in the love of God, a prophetic people raised up 'for such a time as this'.

Dennis' prophetic calling, though evident throughout his life, was perhaps most apparent through his ministry within the Maranatha Community. His passionate commitment to listening to God governed everything that he did – his desire above all else was to be obedient to the Master and Friend he loved and served. He led many, from the homeless person on the street to the politicians of Westminster, to discover that they too could hear God speak and enthused them to discover their gifts and pursue God's exciting purpose for their lives.

The faith, hope and love expressed in Dennis' life led to a ministry of healing. Years before 'Maranatha', a young boy in Dennis' local church was given only days to live when diagnosed with incurable cancer. Dennis urgently organised a prayer vigil among church members and got an Anglican priest and a Catholic monk to come and pray with the boy. He was miraculously healed.

Dennis understood that healing was not limited to the physical. His quiet but far-reaching ministry for reconciliation and healing in Northern Ireland is but one example where, for over 30 years, he patiently and painstakingly built relationships with and between those from all walks of life – church leaders, lay members, victims of violence, prisoners, politicians and paramilitaries. He ruled out no one from the love of God. He was very sensitive to the pain of division within the Body of Christ and led us in the way of Jesus - sharing in the pain of others, trusting that the one Saviour would open a way for healing. In any situation of need there were no plans for 'fixing' problems, just a humble confidence in God and a readiness to do whatever He asked.

Dennis' motivation to share good news in ways that everyone could grasp resulted in him publishing endless papers, leaflets and books - available from the Maranatha Community - and consistently refused any personal financial gain. In the last two years of his life, he recorded over 100 videos on a huge range of topics and these are posted on a dedicated website ([www.denniswrigley.org](http://www.denniswrigley.org)).

Many of the cards and tributes received following Dennis' death have featured the word 'Legacy'. The legacy that Dennis has left is enormous and has been deposited as good seed, sown from a life fully given to the Sower. Our challenge now is to follow his example, inspired by his faithfulness and the faith of all the saints, with whom he is now joined in the 'great cloud of witnesses'. Then we too can look forward to the reward which Dennis has surely received - the welcome of our loving Father: "Well done, good and faithful servant!...Come and share in your Master's happiness!"