

PART FOUR

Chapter 30

Wesley Central Mission

No organisation functions without its red tape, and Wesley Central Mission was no exception. 'He's not a Methodist, how can he play a leading role in the Methodist Church?' demanded the diehards.

The board discussed the problem again and again without finding a solution, until, a few months prior to Gordon's induction, the first president of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) made a suggestion. 'Perhaps the best way to solve the problem would be for Rev Moyes to be re-ordained as a UCA minister.'

Such a drastic move called forth a torrent of protest from Rev Moyes' supporters and a shout of approval from his detractors.

The idea presented no problem to Gordon. From a theological point of view, the difference between the two churches lay mostly in the method of baptism. The Churches of Christ insisted on adult baptism by immersion; the Methodist Church recognised either sprinkling or immersion. As for uniting, he had long foreseen and favoured a merger of the mainline Protestant churches.

'They put pressure on me', he told an interviewer. 'Legally I could not be superintendent of Wesley Central Mission unless I belonged to the denomination. I agreed to join the Uniting Church because I believe in unity. In taking this appointment I haven't made any theological changes.'

As soon as the red tape had been tied into a neat bow and his leadership was ratified, Gordon began to work. One of his first pronouncements, 'Let crash victims sue the pubs', hit the headlines and alerted Sydney newspaper reporters that here was a man to watch.

With his usual forthrightness he denounced alcohol and Sunday trading in hotels: 'Alcohol is the most dangerous drug in our community and it is about time that it was recognised . . . The government should legislate to allow the innocent victims of road accidents that are caused by drunken drivers to sue the hotels.'

Later in the year he added weight to his words by presiding at the opening of a bottle shop in Wesley Arcade — selling non-alcoholic drinks.

The new superintendent of Wesley Central Mission (WCM) wisely decided not to hastily institute any of his own ideas. Reverend Alan Walker and his staff already had an ongoing program that only needed wisdom, tact, patience, perseverance, optimism, long-suffering gentleness, goodness, faith and a dozen other admirable qualities to keep it running smoothly.

'Smoothly' is scarcely the descriptive word. Gordon had long ago found that no organisation wholly dependent on people skills runs like oiled machinery. All too frequently frictions arise and plans grind to a halt. WCM was no exception.

As the months passed it actually appeared as though some of the 'old timers' within the synod of the Uniting Church resented the new administrator and quietly worked to humiliate him and undermine his authority. Others who had long held the reins in their own hands appeared reluctant to relinquish them and in their own way tried to insult the newcomer.

'Oh, Gordon, could you come around to my office for a few minutes?' One synod official regularly flaunted his authority by summoning Gordon and then keeping him waiting in the outer office for as long as two hours. While the official's embarrassed secretary tried to make excuses for her boss's rudeness, Gordon passed the time most profitably by thinking up future plans for the conduct of WCM — plans which did not include the petty official.

Rev Moyes had not studied psychology for nothing, and he well understood the jealousy and insecurity underlying such actions. On the surface the work flowed evenly, and for the present he chose to ignore the undercurrents. The key personnel recognised that they primarily worked for God, and they experienced no difficulty in transferring their loyalties from Alan to Gordon.

On the home front the Moyes family settled into a house at Roseville, and the four children enrolled at new schools. Gordon knew how Jenny and the boys felt about being uprooted from Cheltenham, the only community, church, school and friends that they could remember, and he tried to ease their difficulty by spending as much time as possible with them.

Rev Moyes paid meticulous attention to planning. But despite his efficiency, the growing pile of unanswered letters on his desk mutely reminded him that he needed drastic action.

One afternoon he left his office early, taking with him several hundred unanswered letters and a dictaphone. At home he would be free from the constant interruptions and problems of administration.

'It took me ten hours', he reported to his secretary next day as he deposited the dictaphone and huge pile of letters on her desk. 'I suppose it will take you a lot longer to type them for posting.' She didn't reply. The expression on her face was answer enough.

Although Beverley and the children necessarily occupied a secondary position in Gordon's public work, he made no secret of the fact that a happy home life was a prerequisite to his ministry. Whatever plans Gordon made, whatever actions he took, wherever he went in the course of his work, he had the assurance that Beverley and the children were supporting him.

When World Vision promulgated its idea of a Forty-hour Fast for starving third-world countries, the Moyes family all took part and, wherever possible, they attended church

and mission functions. In July Gordon officiated at the opening of the Edward Eager Lodge for homeless men and later noted that ‘the three boys behaved well’.

He did not mention that Jenny also had been there and had given her parents a scare when they saw her cornered by a homeless alcoholic man. Gordon went to the rescue only to find the man in tears. He had a daughter Jenny’s age but had lost contact with her, and Jenny was trying to encourage him.

Gordon’s great aim was to do whatever WCM could to help solve the world’s needs, but lack of funds seemed to be the ball and chain holding back every new idea that he suggested. Despite the fact that plans for the annual money-raising Spring Fair were under way, ‘We have no money’ hampered him at every turn. He decided it was time that he looked into the finances.

What he found shocked him. An amount of \$231,000, which everyone thought of as an asset, turned out to be an unpaid debt. Various other items proved to be too complicated for Gordon to sort out, and he called upon Professor Alf Pollard, who had been recommended as someone who would be able and willing to help. Together they made the rounds of bank managers, shopping for lower interest rates and better ways of borrowing \$250,000. Eventually they arranged a deal that saved the mission a sum of \$10,000 per annum in interest.

‘This is only a drop in the ocean compared with our needs; we’ll have to develop extra income somehow.’ Gordon stated the obvious.

Perhaps it was no coincidence that about this time he attended a three-day seminar on management. This helped to clarify his understanding of how to obtain better performance from the staff. He already suspected that the mission employed too many people doing too little, and now he decided to chart results. Everyone would be required to supply proof of their activities by the response to their work. Poor returns would result in lopping off. It was not a popular move.

Probably because of his early experiences in Melbourne’s slum areas, it was the inner city’s needs that touched Gordon’s heart. He knew that for ninety-five years the Wesley Central Mission had been dedicated to helping the poor and outcast from society, and he wanted to not only nurture but also expand the many facilities available. A gradual changeover of staff at the mission allowed him to concentrate on developing ideas and delegating people to carry them out. First he completed plans already in the pipeline when Rev Alan Walker left.

‘It’s no use preaching to a starving man’, he told committees. ‘Christ’s message of love for all must first be translated into material assistance.’

Gordon’s burden was also for the spiritual welfare of inner-city dwellers. Most denominations had churches in the suburbs, and their ministers laboured with varying success, but the magnificent old stone churches in the city’s heart seemed to be patronised only by a slowly declining congregation of old faithfuls. Apart from the Salvation Army and a few other minority groups, there seemed to be no attempt to attract young people or those from other nationalities.

‘Our mission is almost on the border of Chinatown’, Gordon thundered in one of his staff meetings. ‘In, around and beyond that there are thousands of people from almost every country under the sun. What are we doing for them and their children?’

A few embarrassed coughs and a shuffling of feet were his reply.

However, in answer to his challenge, Wesley Central Mission mustered its forces and began a Sunday school for the International Congregation.

Viewed with great suspicion at first, in time it grew, until now more than two hundred noisily enthusiastic children from a dozen language groups meet in Wesley Centre rooms each Sunday to learn Christian principles and hear Bible stories from ethnic teachers.

October 1979 proved to be a month that the Moyes family would never forget. It began happily enough when Gordon and Beverley arranged for their dear friends from Cheltenham, Jack and Gwen Sinclair, to stay with the children while they flew to Manila for four days as guests of Con-Stan Industries. Gordon gave the keynote address to the four hundred attending the conference, and he and Beverley made new friends and met many influential people.

The day they returned home they all enjoyed the evening meal together and then scattered to pursue their individual interests. Gordon and Beverley relaxed in the kitchen with Jack and Gwen. Peter and Andrew watched TV in the lounge room. Jenny settled down to her homework and thirteen-year-old David went to his room to set up his film lights and take some pictures.

Suddenly agonised screams rent the contentedly quiet house and brought everyone running. Gordon and Beverley burst through David’s door first. David crouched near his desk trembling violently, apparently unable to let go of a metal frame in his hands. Instantly Gordon ran for a broom handle and knocked the electrified frame out of the boy’s hands. Beverley caught him as he crumpled.

Jack’s quick examination of the photographic equipment revealed that the positive wire in the electric plug had come loose, touched the earth wire and electrified the light frame. When David picked up the frame he received a full 240-volt charge.

David’s left hand and forearm were badly burned. Probably his rubber-soled shoes had saved him from further injury or death, but the boy did not think of the shoes. With tear-filled eyes and trembling lips he whispered, ‘Thank you, Lord, for saving my life. Thank you. Thank you, Lord.’

‘Thank You, Lord.’ Gordon and Beverley echoed his words as they rushed him to the Royal North Shore Hospital, where his burns were treated and he was allowed home on condition that he return daily.

That night David’s shattered nerves resisted sleep, and he crawled into his parents’ bed for comfort. Shock loosened his tongue, and he told them how much he loved them, adding, ‘I’ve done a lot of serious thinking lately and I’ve decided that when I grow up I want to become a minister like you, Dad’.

Next day David did not remember the conversation, and they did not remind him of it until several years later, when in private he told his father that he felt a call to the ministry.

Today Pastor David Moyes still carries the scars of that experience, and neither he nor his parents will ever forget that his life is doubly a gift from God.

Scarcely three weeks after David's terrifying experience Miss Maggie Perry died.

'Mimi Perry died today.' The telephone message throbbed in Gordon's brain, numbing all sensations other than grief. He had written to the sisters only two days earlier. Jean, his beloved 'Peppi', was due for cancer surgery later in the year, and probably the worry of her sister's sufferings had taken its toll on Maggie. Both had passed their 'three-score years and ten'.

All day the pressures of work kept Gordon's sorrow under control, but when night came and blessed sleep claimed the other members of the family he lay awake letting memories flicker across his mind's screen. He saw the bakery in Box Hill, the town where he was born. He saw Mimi and Peppi working in his mother's cake shop. He saw a little boy with all three women always there to comfort, control and advise him. He saw his mother caring for the material side of his life: feeding, clothing, schooling. But it had been left to the Perry sisters, Maggie and Jean, to introduce him to Sunday school and Bible stories.

Gordon choked back tears as his thoughts raced through the years, tracing the wonderful way in which God had used the Perry sisters to chart the direction of his life. Without their influence he knew that he would not be in the ministry.

The funeral itself was the hardest that Gordon had ever conducted. Gone was his usual savoir faire, his calm control over any situation. The lump in his throat could not be swallowed; sobs choked his voice, and only those standing nearest heard him brokenly pronounce, 'Ashes to ashes, dust to dust'.

No matter how great the grief, life must go on. No sooner were the Moyes back in Sydney than Gordon was plunged into the thick of things. The film crew and he were due to make five TV programs in one day. A key member of the old staff, given a pep talk about using more effective methods, had reacted unfavorably and handed in his resignation. The council queried WCM's plans for expansion and insisted that the city traffic controller must be consulted. Someone criticised the choir and upset the music director. Gordon did not know whether to be sad or glad that his sorrow had to be set aside while he coped with all these matters. Perhaps this is how Mimi would have wanted it to be.

The year ended on a hectic but happier note. David was out of hospital after having skin grafts on his burns. In December he made a firm commitment and joined the WCM church. WCM's first TV program elicited an excellent response. A thirty-five-member choir sang Christmas carols at the dedication of the restored pipe organ in Wesley Chapel. The whole family attended Ravenswood School for Jenny's Speech

Night. Gordon felt that the final Sunday sermon of the year was his best; it resulted in three decisions for Christ.

His diary entries for the year conclude: 'The first year is over. In plan 1980 looks even better. We must gather the best men and women for service and then reach out to the nation. Thank you, Lord, for a good Year One. Please be with us for Year Two.'