

Sometimes at Thanksgiving Services the impact of the person called Home on the lives of the people gathered for the occasion is so great that it is as though he or she were still present.

It was like that at the Thanksgiving Service for Reg Stewart in Spicer Street Church, St. Albans, on 26th February 2010.

The people who spoke about him – his son David and his ‘other family, the Foundling Family’, his pastor and, over refreshments afterwards, his wife Gwen, church members and former Pilgrim Homes’ colleagues painted a picture so warm and vibrant that Reg seemed still to be there. He also spoke for himself in his testimony printed in the Order of Service. As a young man newly demobbed from the Navy he was in London looking for lodgings and found himself on the doorstep of a prospective landlady, a retired Parish worker called Sister Evelyn. Describing him to her friend Vera Foundling, as ‘this little cub standing on my doorstep,’ she wondered if the Lord had sent him. Clearly He had, for it was through being a lodger with this lovely Christian lady that Reg came to know the Lord and the Foundling family took him to their hearts as ‘an extra brother’. Reg was present again in a photograph on the back cover of the Order of Service, beaming as his arms encircled his grandchildren, and again

Thanksgiving for Reg Stewart



Reg Stewart. A photograph taken around 1971

on the front cover in a photograph taken around 1971, the year he began to work for the Aged Pilgrims’ Friend Society.

Missionaries in Bolivia

Reg and Gwen Stewart had been missionaries in Bolivia in the 1960s, and when he joined the Society in 1971 Gwen recalls, ‘Reg came to regard it as another aspect of missionary work as so many former missionaries and Christian workers were cared

for in the homes: praise God that continues up to the present! I think that during his first nine years Reg had experience of every role in Head Office!’ In 1981 he became General Secretary.

A time of great change

The 1980s saw many radical changes, including the regulation of the care sector for the first time. All care homes had to be registered with their respective Local Authorities. ‘It was a major task that required determination and an ability to negotiate with the Authorities who were often unsympathetic to the Christian cause,’ remembers Trevor Dennett, who became Chief Executive after Reg retired. ‘But all was completed well on time – due in no small measure to Reg’s ability to get on well with people. Perhaps he will be remembered most as the person who steered through the change of name of the Society to Pilgrim Homes. Here again his ability to get on with those opposed to his views was a great asset.’

It was also a time of rapid expansion. The sheltered housing bungalows at Great Finborough were opened in 1981; The Gables in Southport opened in 1983, Framland in Wantage followed in 1986, Shottermill House, in Haslemere in 1990, and the care home at Finborough Court in 1994. Trevor said, ‘Reg Stewart quietly got on with

all that had to be done during this time. Perhaps the most memorable event he was to oversee was the Annual Meeting of 1990 and the official opening of Shottermill House on the same day. This was attended by some 800 friends of the Society and it really was a great occasion. He organised the whole day in his usual quiet way.

‘He was always intent on keeping a family atmosphere within the office and it was a very happy environment that we all enjoyed. His family meant a lot to him. They all supported the work in which he was engaged and his wife Gwen was very much involved in the work, especially in the production of the Quarterly Record. Reg was a frequent visitor to all the homes of the Society, encouraging the matrons as they were then known, as well as the staff and residents. His visits were always looked forward to, and they helped the homes to feel that they were part of the Pilgrim Homes family. Reg retired in 1991 but continued to take a great interest in the work for many years. His family was his great delight, especially the grandchildren, and there is no doubt he will be missed. He was a man of prayer and the Church of Jesus Christ will miss him. It was so good to be present at the Thanksgiving Service at Spicer Street Church St Albans, and to be able to thank God for the man He raised up to lead the work of Pilgrim Homes for many years.’