

## **Book Records Impact of People's Pastor**

<http://sg.christianpost.com/dbase/ministries/1423/section/1.htm>



The late John Bordi Willis, Pastor Emeritus at Bartley Christian Church. (Photo: Glow Consulting via The Christian Post)

What would you do if you had retired at 62 with a pension to live on?

An American became a minister in Singapore and served until his death at 99.

A biography by the Singapore Christian Foundation records the details.

An American We Are Grateful For contains positive testimonies of 69 people excluding Willis' family members of the life of the pastor. The 246-page book was written by Ms Geraldine Leong.

Willis, who passed away on 10 April 2004, was an evangelist, chalkboard artist, marriage solemniser, spiritual father and pastor at his own expense. He led a frugal and selfless life, sharing the Gospel up to his last years.

Members of the Bartley Christian Church, where Willis ministered, recall a Westerner who freely mingled with the locals.

"He tried to be like the people, he immersed himself with the people," said Mr Peck Hock Cheng. It was to the point that for Willis, Singapore was home.

Willis was also an example of pastoral care.

He would stand at the door of the church and greet every church member before and after the services. In his greeting, he would look at each person intently in the eye, smile, shake their hands firmly and ask how they were. He remembered every member by name because he had been praying for them.

The pastor would send illustrated cards to encourage young members.

Ms Florence Yap, who came from a dysfunctional family and was often in need of emotional reassurance and support, said: "I survived because of (the cards)."

Another member Betty Seah, who received cards everyday while she was sick, said: "Sometimes, it got me to tears."

Willis would write letters of encouragement to church members serving as missionaries overseas. He also visited them.

The pastor was especially concerned about church members who stopped attending services. He would visit them and get to know their family members.

The faithful visitations had an effect on his formerly absent church members.

## News Clipping

Media: The Christian Post

Date: 8 September 2010, 12.55am HKT

Section: Home/Ministries/Figures

An 18-year-old Michael Tan was touched that the pastor noticed he was missing and took a bus to visit him.

He said: "I told myself: no, I cannot risk him coming to visit me again, because he was old and he would take the bus and I didn't want him to fall from the bus or something like that."

For Ms Esther Heng, Willis was God's love personified. She stopped attending church from 1972 to 1982. Yet the pastor would pop by her place consistently to find out how she was getting on.

"He was one of the key persons that God definitely used to bring me back to Him," said Heng.

Many others returned to the church because of Willis' "testimony and his life, and his love and concern for those who 'ran away'," expressed Ms. Rosalind Ng.

When they returned to church, Willis would ask about their spiritual wellbeing.

Ms Irene Lim said: "Whenever you had a problem, he would always be there and he would be the first to arrive.

"You knew that when you see him, you would get help." Willis was there when Lim experienced the loss of her three-month-old daughter. The pastor was the first to arrive at her home in the middle of the night. He held the couple's hands tightly and gave them comfort.

The pastor, though single, counselled and solemnised over 230 couples. Every Sunday, he would ask all those couples the same questions to keep their marital health in check.

He would hold the wife's hand and look at her eye to eye and ask: "Have you been submissive this week?" If she did not return his gaze, he would urge her to submit to her husband. Then he would shake the husband's hand and ask: "Have you been loving your wife?"

Willis kept records of the marriages he solemnised. Two weeks before each couple's anniversary every year, he would faithfully send a relevant, handwritten personalised message of exhortation and advice. He would attach to that marriage vows and a series of articles creatively cut and pasted together.

In his letter, he would suggest the husband take his wife out for a candlelight dinner. He would also remind them to recite their marriage vows to each other.

Willis was a pastor who everyone missed.

"Every week, the high point was to go to church, see (Willis) and hug him," said Ms. Susan Lau. "It was all about just being there with him."

Edmond Chua  
edmond@christianpost.com