

Revd Paul Joseph Bell:



by his sons, John and David Bell Tribute prepared for the Funeral and Thanksgiving Services on March 11th, 2020

Birth

Born in Newcastle in 1935 to a commercial artist and a children's author, Paul weighed just 1lb 13oz and was one of premature identical twins. His brother Henry did not survive. The midwife, a Roman Catholic, baptized him 'Joseph' at birth thinking he also would not survive, but his parents chose 'Paul'

meaning small! If you look this up it also means humble, which I find an apt epitome for him.

Childhood

Education

Paul had a great gift for lasting friendships and two friends from his primary prep school, James and David, have written tributes. He went on to the grammar school, then to King's College, Durham University.

Music

Paul loved singing and was in the school choir and learnt to read music and play the piano. Every year they did a Gilbert and Sullivan production and Paul knew every word of every song. The other gift the school nurtured was in public speaking. His teacher was in fact a Crusader leader and Paul's voice was trained to reach the back row of the school hall!

Early Faith

Paul was invited to Crusader Class. That was the beginning of his faith journey, when he grew to know and love the Lord Jesus.

Later Faith

At college he joined the Christian Union, but his mother forbade his evenings out saying he needed to study! During his final year, his mother suffered from breast cancer. She died on April 19th, 1956 as he was working for his finals. He did manage a Grade 2 in General Arts, including French and Religious Knowledge – a good foundation for 20 years later!

In 1957 Paul completed his teaching practice at Morpeth Grammar School and then taught a year in Bordeaux which perfected his French and gave him knowledge of the French education system – a great help for Belgian teaching methods in Burundi.

In November 1959 he was called up for National Service and with great glee quoted from his commission signed by Elizabeth R, the words 'To our trusty and well beloved Paul Joseph Bell Greeting!'

Call to Mission

In October 1958 a missionary speaker, Ken Kitley, visited St. Mark's Byker and spoke of the need for teachers who knew French. Paul went to London to get more information from the Ruanda Mission Office. He thought and prayed about this during National Service while based at Catterick where he taught soldiers as a member of the education corps. He always said it was the richest time of Christian Fellowship that he'd known. Another officer, Ben Crick, came to faith there and later was ordained an Army Chaplain. He was sorry he could not be at the Thanksgiving service.

Mission Service

In 1960 he started missionary training at Liskeard, the CMS College at Chislehurst. The following year he departed for Africa. He sailed from London to Mombasa, then by train through game parks to Nairobi and on to Kampala in Uganda. From there he was in the back

of an open lorry down to Shyogwe in Rwanda. He taught there before going south down to a new school in Burundi at Matana in 1963. In 1964 he was sent to the interdenominational protestant school at Kibimba, a secondary and teacher-training school for primary school teachers.

Marriage

Paul met Lucie at language school in 1965. They were engaged, with the mission's and parental permissions, in 1966. However, marriage - per mission rules - was not allowed till the 1st Kirundi language exam was passed! Lucky for me (their son John) they passed. The banns were put up for the civil wedding in the British embassy (next to the notice about Rabies...) What Paul called their post office wedding was registered on April 17th and Paul returned to school that same day. The church - what they called their real - wedding was at Buye Cathedral on July 8th. The entire diocesan synod was there and they made this event their 1st item on their agenda! The Bishop gave Paul and Lucie his blessing and they spent their honeymoon on Lake Bwama in Uganda.

Family

John was born at Buye in June 1968, so had dual nationality. In 1969, Lucie's 4 year tour complete, they returned home on leave. David was born in June 1969 in Newcastle. Paul's father died in Wales that year. Paul had to preach that Sunday before travelling to the funeral.

Continued Mission Service

When they returned to Burundi in October 1969, they found they had been moved to the Anglican Mission at Matana where they stayed until their last leave in 1981. Paul taught up at the school and had VSOs as colleagues. We are glad that Hamish was able to be at the Thanksgiving service. Teaching in the school in French, Paul also taught in the Bible school in Kirundi, where lay readers were in training to be pastors.

1972 Massacres

When Paul arrived in Africa, Independence was being declared in both Rwanda and Burundi. Lucie saw the newly crowned King of Burundi in August 1966. He was ousted in November. Since then there has been continual political tribal unrest between the governing Tutsis and the majority Hutus. In 1972, rebels from Congo invaded and attacked a political gathering of Tutsis down by Lake Tanganyika. Various groups in the country rose up as word spread. Once retaliation set in, the Tutsis were brutal and rounded up all educated Hutus. The church lost pastors, teachers, head teachers and hospital workers. This was like the genocide in Rwanda but much less known. Worst for Paul was seeing schoolboys he had taught in class and in the Boys Brigade being rounded up to be taken away in lorries. Their car was confiscated as was the landrover of a builder missionary. When they were on leave in 1973, Paul brought away all photos of the schoolboys who had been killed. It was too dangerous to be found with them.

They took an extended holiday in July in Uganda, where a mission representative from London came to debrief them. They then went to stay with friends Tom and Mary Fisher in Mombasa. It was during that stay that Tom ministered deeply to Paul and the Lord released him from all the tensions and fears and anointed him to preach the gospel.

Paul's Ordination

In 1977, the Bishop asked Paul when he was going to get ordained. He'd always resisted, thinking he was more effective as a layman and witnessing Christian. After discussion and prayer, he decided it was the Lord's call. He and Pat Brooks were ordained deacons in 1977.

Next leave, they lived in Bristol 1977-78 where Paul went to Clifton theological college. Paul was priested in July 1978 at Christ Church, Clifton by their own Burundi Bishop who had attended the Lambeth Conference.

Last tour 1978 – 81

On returning to Burundi, instead of teaching in Kirundi, Paul was asked to pilot a foundation course in French to teach secondary educated ordinands to be Non-Stipendiary Ministers. He was to cover Old Testament, New Testament, Prayer Book, Doctrine, Church History and Pastoralia. Using his typewriter, he managed enough copies for each student. Paul and Lucie travelled around in a VW Combi camper van funded by St Paul's Shanklin and Tearfund. Meanwhile, Lucie was training Mothers Union leaders to teach preventive medicine, covering hygiene, 1st Aid, home midwifery, and nutrition. In 1981 the Matana Theological Institute was opened to teach in French. They used Paul's courses in full, much to his surprise as the teachers were more highly qualified. Looking back on his life in Burundi, he wondered what he had achieved. Then we heard that one schoolboy he had taught had become the Archbishop, and another who had fled in 1972 had become the American Baptist Church's Minister for international mission and reconciliation. When this leader visited Paul and Lucie in Norfolk, he said it was Paul, through the Boys Brigade at Kibimba, who had brought him to faith in Jesus.

1982 – 2001 UK Service

On returning to the UK for the last time Paul was invited by John Lefroy to be his curate in Christ Church, Highbury. Paul and Lucie stayed in London until 1985 when the living of Middleton with East Winch was offered in West Norfolk with two church schools. They stayed there 10 years and then were asked to go north to a benefice of 5 churches based at Matlaske, total population about 500. They got to know nearly everybody! After Easter, in April 2002 after 7 years in Matlaske, Paul retired to the Isle of Wight.

Retirement 2002 – 2020

I say retired... Paul was delighted to be able to work without having 5 PCCs a month, no synods, no school governors' meetings! His great joy was preaching and leading services and he didn't wait long to start with Andy the vicar. His main aim was to focus on Jesus and the Cross. He judged sermons on this, having been taught by great East African revival brethren.

Many at the Thanksgiving will have known him for nearly twenty years. Someone described him in a tribute as a gentle shepherd to the flock, and he was. He was so knowledgeable and faithful in what God had called him to do. He persisted in obedience to his call honourably and reliably. A true faithful servant. I will remember him for many things, but particularly his voice, loud clear and authoritative. Reading us stories, Tolkien and CS Lewis. And his eyebrow. How can one eyebrow express so much? A question? No words, just eyebrow raised. Doing something he didn't approve of? eyebrow raised but so much more sternly!! Mum, Lucie would like to thank all those who have lovingly supported them during these past few years with Paul's increasing disabilities. The Christ Church family has been brilliant, thanks to so many of you: Robin who patiently assisted Paul during services, and John and Sue with personal care. Many others helped us. John Honeychurch had introduced him to Cantata in which he delighted. Then the Gouldings and Inglefield staff who treated the whole person, and Paul enjoyed his times of activity with them. Today we are especially grateful to James and Leisa for their ministry and friendship.

Thank you all so much for your love and prayers..... We mourn his passing but praise the Lord for the assurance that he is with him in glory. Praise the LORD! Iman`ishimwe! Amen."