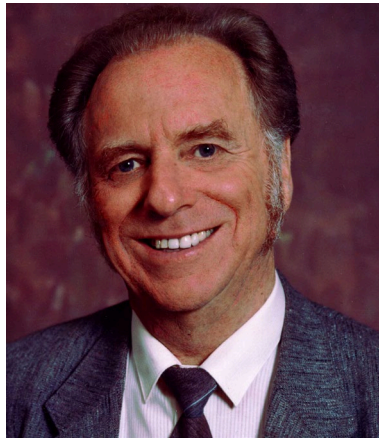


DAVID WALTER MANSELL
A FRUITFUL LIFE

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by

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The Conference of Churches of Christ in NSW will consider for publication short papers on historical and theological topics relevant to the development of Churches of Christ. The publication of a paper does not constitute an official endorsement of the view expressed therein.

Early years

David Walter Mansell was born on 17 March 1930 to Christian parents when the Great Depression was applying its vice-like grip to the nation. His father, Walter (“Wally”), was a bricklayer and a very devout man cast in the Victorian era mould: strict in moral expectation but with a kind heart. The home in which Mansell grew up included, from an early stage in his life, children who were not his siblings: they were foster children whom the Mansells sought to help. Many of them were socially and emotionally damaged.

His youth was, to use his own phrase, “somewhat wild.” However, his mother prayed that he would come to know the Lord and become a preacher. Her prayers were answered on both accounts. David gave his heart to the Lord at an Hinrichsen-Morris mission at Wiley Park in 1948.

He had started working in accountancy, but had accumulated little capital when he made the momentous decision to go into full-time Christian service.

Woolwich Bible College

In 1949 he entered the Churches of Christ Bible College (Woolwich) to train for the Christian ministry. While in college he worked to sustain himself, doing any paying odd job he could find. He shovelled blue metal from railway trucks; stacked groceries, and was a builder’s labourer carrying bricks for his father, working every Monday and many Saturdays in order to provide for his living. A benefactor contributed to his college fees. He graduated with honours in many subjects and developed a passion for people and for preaching the gospel.

During his College course he had student ministries in some small churches including Granville and North Auburn. At North Auburn he met Shirley Kenyon, whose mother and father were significant members of the little church. Her father was church secretary and organist, and her mother Sunday school superintendent. Shirley, though only sixteen, was a Sunday school teacher, helped with the Girls’ Club and ran the Christian Endeavour. Romance budded and blossomed into marriage.

First Ministries: East Kew and Ormond

David’s view was that Shirley would “make a good minister’s wife.” They married in 1953, but he had graduated at the end of 1952 and had already taken up the ministry at East Kew, Melbourne; the first Woolwich trained student to be accepted in Victoria.

They managed on a shoe string. Shirley went out to work, and David's salary was less than Shirley was getting working in an office. Moreover, they had to completely furnish their home even to the floor coverings and curtains. They did this four times as they moved to each new manse and had to leave the floor coverings etc. behind. The church grew and although invited to stay on in 1956 Mansell decided to accept a call from the Ormond church because of the great potential in youth work.



Shirley and David at the ACOM Anniversary Dinner

Quickly the Ormond membership more than doubled, the youth work flourished, and became known for its success in sport and other programs in the Victorian Churches of Christ scene. Young people such as Neville and Keith Farmer, and Barry Rice travelled from Oakleigh and other churches to Ormond for the night service, the last two named ultimately going into the Churches of Christ ministry.

While at Ormond, as part of his pastoral ministry, Mansell became involved with a young man and his family. The lad had murdered his year old sister when he was at the tender age of sixteen, and became the only child prisoner to be placed in the notorious Pentridge Prison. He was the only prisoner ever shot to death while attempting to climb the wall. Mansell visited this lad as long as he was allowed, and helped the family cope.

State Youth Director and Home Missions Organiser

In 1959 Mansell was invited to become State Youth Director and Home Missions Organiser for Churches of Christ in Queensland. One of the things he did before he left was to encourage the Farmer boys' father to go to Queensland saying that there were

better opportunities for him as a lay preacher. As a result, when Keith Farmer entered Woolwich Bible College it was from Queensland, not from Victoria.

Mansell travelled all over that vast State holding missions and youth programs. The year Chris was born, he was away from home for a total of nine months. Sometimes Shirley went with him. In this role Mansell helped plant many churches, including the Southport church, which grew to be one of the largest Church of Christ in the Commonwealth. He was also involved with the beginning of the Queensland Bible College (Kenmore) with Maurie Pieper and Professor Alan Wilson. They negotiated for Jim Jauncey, a leading rocket scientist who wrote *Science returns to God*, to be the College Principal. Jauncey was an Australian, who at the time of the college's establishment, was living and working in the United States. The families became personal friends. Mansell raised much of the financial backing from members all over the State. He also started the bookshop, storing most of the books at his home until a suitable place was found to house them.

The adage says that “you should never work with animals or children.” During one of his tent missions he was preaching his heart out when his little daughter, Jenny, cried out with a loud voice during a quiet moment, “Mummy, why is dad rousing on all the people?” Jenny grew up with an amazing tolerance and acceptance of people from “princesses” to the homeless.

Mansell would go to a town and hold a month of meetings and leave behind a strong church ready to grow. It was during this period of his ministry that the Mansells acquired a love for the countryside, and he found a real interest in cattle. On one occasion he carried a tiny pure bred Poll Hereford heifer calf in the boot of the car from Kingaroy to Bernie Christensen's farm in Rosevale, and thus shared with him the beginning of his soon to be large Poll Hereford stud.

First New South Wales Ministry: Wollongong

In 1964 a call came from the Wollongong church, which was really struggling and in financial difficulty. By the time he moved to Sydney to take over the YMCA the church was the largest, most active Church of Christ in New South Wales, and certainly the most active church in the city of Wollongong.

Mansell ministered there for almost nine years, during which time he took the city by storm. He launched the first talk back radio program—a very new thing then—

in Wollongong with Brian Surtees and Sid Heyes. The newspapers regularly reported the doings of the church and Mansell's work with the street kids and drug addicts.

He worked extensively with magistrate Jim Towns, and Maurie Shirley, also with the local police. The police superintendent attended church regularly, and there were three or four young police officers in the membership of the church. When Keith McClelland, head of the NSW State Parole Board, addressed fifty businessmen of the town he stated that Mansell and his volunteers from the Wollongong church had been instrumental in helping more criminals to reform than any other parole group in the State.

On Sunday night in the service one could see the local magistrate sitting beside boys he had previously sent to jail. One of them had forty-eight convictions, but because of Mansell's ministry to him ultimately became a social worker in Sydney. He had lived in the manse for six weeks with the family. The Mansell home was always open and doors never locked. When the children set the table each night for tea they asked, "How many do we set for tonight mum?" And, there was always enough for one more! Chris hated too many people in the home, but grew up to be a real carer for other people with open house at all times. Lynn, the third child, like her siblings was born on a Sunday while Mansell was at church. She went everywhere with Shirley, never shy of anyone; full of confidence!

Sir Doug Nicholls, who became the Governor of South Australia, stayed in their home and was a real personal friend, and the children adored him. Indeed, many politicians including Sir Charles Adermann counted Mansell among their friends.

It is always enjoyable to be able to go somewhere and "hang out." Frequently, the doctors from Wollongong hospital gathered at the manse to play billiards for a break from the hospital. They used the manse as a drop in centre.

When David was away Shirley carried on taking young people in off the streets. The Child Welfare officers would bring the young girl runaways to the manse rather than leave them in the local cells that were horrible. One little girl did not want to leave, claiming Shirley was the first woman in her thirteen years of life that she ever remembered kissing her with tender love! Many times Jenny helped her mother with drunken young people, cleaning them up and helping to put them to bed in the lounge

room to sober up. One such young man later came to Sydney and became the apprentice of the year in his trade.

Mansell followed the apostle Paul's dictum that "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." He had great rapport with the Wollongong High School and was invited regularly to speak at the assembly. Then he started a boxing club and took young people to Sydney Leagues Club with "Church of Christ" blazoned on their shirts. If they did not behave themselves he would stop the car and put them out on top of Mount Ousley on the way home. His work attracted much attention and when Channel 4 did a documentary called "The Hollow Years" it included his work with street kids.

The NSW Adult Education Department asked him to debate, in Wollongong Town Hall, the Wizard from the university, Ian Channel, on the subject of student revolt. It was a very lively debate in a hall packed with students. Mansell proved himself to be an entertaining and excellent debater. Social justice was as close to his heart as that of his Lord. He also felt called "to proclaim freedom for the prisoners." He had a strong ministry to the poor and downtrodden.

The church growth was not the result of attracting members from other places. The Conference Report book reveals that for the year 1967 the Wollongong church enjoyed progress in all departments, not equalled before in its twenty-six years of history. During the year there were approximately 140 decisions for Christ, and over 110 of these had been baptised. Some of those not baptised had family difficulties, or other circumstances that hindered obedience to Christ. Twenty came from the Dapto area. Attendances at the Wollongong services had reached an all-time high, with well over 200 breaking bread each Sunday, and a gospel service of 200 each Sunday night. A result of that spectacular year was the church plant at Dapto.

Overseas Odysseys

During the 1960s Mansell was invited several times to the United States to hold meetings and visit the San Jose Bible College to give the Shaw lecture on public speaking. When he went the Parole Board asked him to visit the prisons in the US, particularly San Quentin, San Francisco, which he did. What an experience!

When in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1968 he went to the underground city and visited with the local "bad boys", called hippies then, and was well received. He had an

invitation to meet with Martin Luther King, but while he was in Indianapolis King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. King's father, Martin Snr., had read his son's diary of appointments and invited Mansell for a meeting with him at Martin Luther King's home. He had a recording of this meeting, and was able to report the meeting and another side of America's racial problems on the ABC with a panel, including Sir Robert Helpmann, on the good and bad of racial issues in the United States of America.

In 1971 Shirley went to the States with him. His expenses were paid, but Shirley worked cleaning caravans, and selling freezers to save her own fares. Bettye Marcus, a well-known radio gospel singer, accompanied them. Shirley and Bettye were invited to share in many women's meetings, including a "Taster's Lunch" at an Ohio church, the then largest Church of Christ in the world. Mansell was conducting a week of meetings there and Bettye was his soloist.

At Indianapolis he was guest on a live television show with Jim Gerard, who interviewed "the man from down under," along with an FBI Agent. The show featured the singing group the "Ink Spots." He was also a guest speaker at the Kiamichi men's clinic in Oklahoma where over ten thousand men went for a preaching feast. There was preaching all day in the huge tent. His session was very early in the morning and was amazingly attended, and he was very well received. You had to be highly recommended to be asked to speak there.

Mansell spoke frequently at the NSW Conference meetings—and in Queensland, Victoria and Perth—held in the Sydney and Brisbane Town Halls and the large Stanwell Tops Conference Centre. He also conducted meetings and missions in New Zealand, and was privileged to be guest speaker at Tokyo Church, Dr Chae's Korean Orphanage, and Edinburgh, Scotland.

Para-church Ministry

In 1972 the Mansells purchased their first own home in Sydney, at Dundas, as he was chosen from thirty-six applicants as General Director and Program Director of the Sydney YMCA. This was a challenging job as the association was in financial difficulties. He became known as the "hatchet man" as he removed those who thought it was a charitable society and they were part of the charity. His work prospered and the YMCA became a very formidable society with huge programs with the disabled. Indoor soccer had its beginning in Bankstown YMCA with Joe Brent.

Shirley's life was different now, although still heavily involved in the ladies work with the church, and looking after her elderly mother-in-law, she worked full-time for twelve months in order to pay back a small personal loan. They had sold their car and caravan and cashed in his small savings from the Preachers' Provident Fund in order to find the deposit. Then Shirley took on being a social worker in the inner city with elderly pensioners four days a week. For a time Mansell carried on an unpaid part-time ministry with the church at Beverley Hills. The church grew and helped the Coffs Harbour church financially as they did not have to pay Mansell's salary.

For the Conference year 1971–1972 Mansell served as Conference President. In some ways it was a difficult year as the College from which had graduated in 1952 was under attack. There was much discontent with the way the College was managed and the “quality” of the graduates it produced. Much was mere perception, but to some perception is reality. It was providential that the President while this was going on was a man who was prepared to stand up for his *alma mater*. He adroitly guided the process that addressed the issues.

After three years at Beverley Hills he took a part-time position with the Thornleigh church, where he and Shirley became very involved with people from Kings Cross who came to the church seeking help to get away from prostitution and crime. Some of them were taken into the Mansell home. One was a leading “madam” who was afraid for her life. Some were transvestites. One couple bought a prawn trawler and called it the “Mansell D”. None went back to the old life or the Kings Cross environment. Thornleigh church was so supporting of these people. The church also helped Port Macquarie church financially by paying their first minister's salary for them.

Retirement Years

He retired from the YMCA and set up in business. On a trip to Manila, Philippines, with Chris to look at salt-water fish for his aquarium business, he saw an opportunity to export to Manila. He had a best friend, Jacob Vromen, a cosmetic chemist, who asked him to market for him. They exported skin care products for twenty-eight years and had a distribution centre there, selling to doctors, hospitals and clinics. Mansell took a Philippine church under his wing by supporting it.

With his retirement funds, he tried to buy a few hair and health salons. Shirley ended up taking over the books because of staff dishonesty. He soon sold them.

In 1989, tired of city life, the Dundas property was sold and a ten acre block was purchased at Kurrajong, and they took on the fun of building their luxury home. They did all the hard work themselves and built fences, dams, sheds and beautiful garden driveways. All the time they were travelling to Queensland on a regular basis to help with preaching and building up small country churches.

Mansell was in his seventh heaven with some cows and tractors, but Shirley was the one who fed the baby calves when needed with bottles and learned to be a real farmer, even to disposing of any calves who died, and feeding up with hay and driving tractors.

Always a family man he presided over a growing family as first grandchildren then great-grandchildren came along. “Children’s children are the crown of an old man” the writer of proverbs stated. As this photograph shows he was well-crowned.



The extended family

After three wonderful years, he was asked to speak at the fledgling Forster Church of Christ. It was “love at first sight” with these few people and their dedication, with the little building and hard work in the area. He was invited to become part-time minister on a voluntary basis. Mansell faced a palace revolution from a wife who was horrified at having to leave their dream home, and said she would only move to the waterfront! Lo and behold a beautiful farm became available at an extremely reasonable price, with a kilometre of salt-water river frontage and a huge lovely

country home. They took a chance, put the Kurrajong place on the market and paid a deposit on a 100 acre farm in Wang Wauk, and took on cattle breeding and the little Forster Church.

His love of cattle and the church work was a full-time job, along with the regular visits to the Philippines where he had taken a wonderful pastor and a small struggling church under his wing. He grew to dearly love Redentor Reyes who inspired him with his faith and dedication. Red came over to Australia for some rest and restoration for his health and was a great blessing.

By 2004 the Forster church had grown and erected a new building. It was known in the district for the work among people who had problems. The Mansells took into their own home a lass to help her overcome heroin addiction. She's now married, a nurse and has three children; a true soul redeemed by Christ with love and patience. The church was now big enough to look for a full-time minister, so David and Shirley sadly left the Forster fellowship in order to give the new minister full rein.

About that time they purchased a property further down the road in Coolongolook: a magnificent farming property for cattle with a 100 year old home overlooking the fresh water river. They sold Wang Wauk and took on the adjacent property to the old homestead, moved in and had great fun fully renovating the old place to a comfy beautiful property. Now he had 200 acres and really went in for Brahman cattle.

Mansell loved to "wheel and deal." He tried restoring vintage cars teaching his patient wife how to help pull them apart; bought and sold and hired out caravans driving them to many destinations and cleaning and repairing them; bought and sold televisions (while at Dundas): Shirley learned to fix them with soldering iron, and then cleaned, stacked and help sell them.

He made many, many friends in the ethnic communities.

David and Shirley learned to farm together. Mansell became a very knowledgeable cattle dealer, really learning how to manage the land. He was very popular with cattle people all over New South Wales, making many friends. There were seven grandchildren who came for weeks with their friends during holidays. These were the best of days.

At eighty-three, he went to Manila, spoke at the church he supported in early August (2012), which by then was a huge, bustling, growing church. He was sad to say goodbye to pastor Red, his dear friend, who was called home mid-August.

The Mansells returned to the Forster/Tuncurry church as members. He found a particular ministry with a group of non-Christian men at Hungry Jacks in Taree; a ministry he pursued until ill health made it impossible. He also preached regularly at the Taree Uniting Church. With the passing away of Noel Flint he became the oldest living graduate of the College in Australia.



Family and friends gathered on 17 March 2020 at his home to celebrate his 90th birthday. He was not well, but he still managed to reign supreme. Among those gathered were some ministerial colleagues: one, Doug Willis, had been in college with him; another, Jay Bacik, had been mentored by him, and the author.

In August 2017 David Mansell left the delights of Coolongolook and travelled to Oatlands in Sydney for the 75th Anniversary celebration of the College from which he graduated. The author had the privilege of preparing a citation in his honour. It reads:

Last year I celebrated the 50th Anniversary of my graduation to ministry. But that pales into insignificance alongside one of my friends and colleagues who is with us tonight and whom I wish to honour. I refer to David Mansell. This year, David celebrates 65 years in the ministry. He entered Woolwich Bible College from the newly-formed Wiley Park church in 1949, when Harold Patterson was Principal, and graduated in 1952 when Arthur Stephenson was at the helm. He has had an outstanding ministerial career that has borne much fruit for the kingdom. Only poor health has slowed him down, but not entirely. We are delighted that he is here tonight to celebrate with us and we wish him God's blessing in the days ahead.



The earlier part of this paper reveals why the valedictory was made. On that occasion something of David's wit and larrikinism was revealed in an interview conducted by Neale Meredith. Something of the joy of the interview is captured in the attached photograph.

David Mansell's life and ministry was a fruitful one. Whether in local church ministry, para-church ministry or retirement ministry he was always seeking opportunities to present the gospel of Christ to those who were outside the kingdom. His love and compassion for the despised, the defeated and the disheartened are hallmarks of his almost seventy years of service.

At 1.15 am on Sunday 19 September 2021 David Mansell peacefully fell asleep in Jesus, and crossed the great divide into his Lord's presence to hear "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord." He could rightly claim with the Apostle Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith."