

## **Dr Wallace Allen Shaw; Minister, teacher and writer**

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**The Reverend Dr Wallace Allen Shaw, who has died aged 76 of cancer, was an inspirational American minister and outstanding teacher who introduced a more open approach to religious education in Scotland and founded the international youth venture, Operation Friendship.**

His series of textbooks, Living Bible, have been widely used in schools throughout the UK and abroad. A later text, Where Rivers Meet, explored world religions.

Born in Crawfordsville, Indiana, Wally – as he was affectionately known – was named after Civil War General Lew Wallace, author of Ben Hur. He had a privileged upbringing, showed early leadership skills in the Boy Scouts and was selected to set up a new Scouts junior leaders course in the USA.

He graduated from DePauw University and Wabash College. His studies in philosophy provoked an interest in David Hume and the Scottish Enlightenment and in 1956 he came to Edinburgh University to study practical theology, before completing a Master of Theology at the Union Theological Seminary in New York.

While in Edinburgh, he met Lesley Ballantine, an Edinburgh undergraduate and daughter of the highly respected then director of information at the Scottish Office, Willie Ballantine. They married in 1959. By then Mr Shaw, an associate minister, was attached to the Methodist Church at Bay Ridge, Brooklyn where he was director of the released-time school, providing RE classes for state pupils. He was also local chairman of the national council for Christians and Jews and, following gang trouble, worked to bring young people from three faiths – Christian, Jewish, and Islam – together for the first time.

In 1960, he became minister of Westhampton Beach Methodist Church in Long Island. But within two years the area superintendent served him an ultimatum. A church board member had complained that Mr Shaw was welcoming a black American to Sunday services in the all-white parish. Mr Shaw refused to back down and was summarily dismissed.

Within weeks of the complaint, Mr Shaw, his wife and their baby daughter were homeless and heading on the Queen Mary to Scotland – his home for the next 48 years, still retaining American citizenship and his right to vote based on his last address, the manse in Westhampton.

His first job was as a part-time youth organiser earning £30 a month, at St Georges West Church, Edinburgh, assisting the popular minister, Rev Dr Murdo Ewan Macdonald. Mr Shaw focussed on re-organising the church's education programme for children and young people.

In 1963, he petitioned the General Assembly to become a Church of Scotland minister. Despite some opposition, the Assembly voted to accept MR Shaw, the first ordained American Methodist in the Kirk.

On his 30th birthday in January 1964, Mr Shaw was “called” to the church extension parish of St Margaret's in the new town of Glenrothes, Fife. With a congregation of almost 1000, the pastoral demands and pressures on a single minister were immense and his working day would rarely end before 10pm.

His friendly and committed approach endeared him to many. His infectious enthusiasm enlisted volunteers to support the church's many activities in the community. He sought to break down barriers and worked closely with neighbouring churches. When vandals desecrated St Paul's RC church, parishioners from St Margaret's helped in the clean-up and repainting.

There was a buzz about St Margaret's. Mr Shaw's expertise in youth work paid dividends and many young people owe much to his vision. He was appointed as presbytery youth convener, arranging the biggest church youth rally ever held in Fife. Later he was honoured to be appointed Moderator of the Kirkcaldy Presbytery.

In 1965, he founded Operation Friendship, an organisation recognised by the United Nations. Its original aim remains to link up youth groups across countries and continents and many thousands of young people have benefited from the exchanges and the dialogue.

After 12 years in Glenrothes, he moved into full time teaching, as chaplain and head of religious education at the merging Daniel Stewarts and Melville College (and later for a time Mary Erskine) in Edinburgh.

With his doctorate from St Andrews University, analysing the method and content of religious education in state secondaries in Scotland and England, Mr Shaw developed a more thought-provoking and less-exclusive approach to religious education.

He was ahead of his time and introduced work sheets on all the world religions.

He also served on the Secretary of State's committee for religious education in secondary schools.

In December 1988, within hours of the Pan Am disaster, he was one of the first American volunteer counsellors for the families at Lockerbie.

In 1994, he retired from Stewart Melville but continued to support inter-faith dialogue in Scotland. As well as travelling widely, walking in Scotland, camping in France and many visits to the USA, Mr Shaw committed himself to writing.

His fascination with the Scottish Enlightenment and his interest in philosophy, resulted in five plays presented at the Edinburgh Fringe. His play on David Hume, Citizen of the World, is planned for a re-run at the Fringe in August, 2011, the 300th anniversary of the birth of Hume.

Wally Shaw is survived by Lesley, his wife, their three children – Alison, Fiona and Andrew – and grandson Christopher.

- Born January 31, 1934 Died December 19, 2010