

It is with great sadness we acknowledge the home-call of Arthur G. Williams on Tuesday 21st May 2019. Arthur had been diagnosed with heart failure and pancreatic cancer in the latter months of 2018. For the most part he remained at home with his wife Beth, living contentedly and quietly while receiving visitors and enjoying the beautiful location of his home. As his condition deteriorated it was necessary to provide extra help for Beth until, eventually, he had to go into Prospect House nursing home in Ballymena. It was there, after two weeks and two days, Arthur passed away in the early hours of the morning. His funeral took place in Portstewart Baptist Church on Thursday 23rd May and was presided over by Pastor Val English. During the service Arthur's son David paid tribute on behalf of the family, as did Norman Lynas and Robert Whittet, both life-long friends of Arthur, and founding Trustees of Stauros.

Arthur was born in Scotland in 1943 to Arthur Joseph and Gladys Williams, the eldest of the three siblings. After the family returned to Coleraine, Arthur attended the Honourable the Irish Society primary school and then Coleraine Academical Institution, where he played rugby for the first fifteen. Later he studied English and Philosophy at Trinity College Dublin, although he left after his first year. He married Beth in 1967 and together they had three children, Sharon, Joanna and David. Arthur was the proud grandfather of three grandchildren, Andrew, Jonathan and Evie.



No one could be in any doubt about the fervent faith Arthur held, nor of his deep devotion to the Lord. He was converted in his late twenties with the help of Dr Bill Holley, the family GP. His conversion to Christ was quite a remarkable story of one raised in challenging circumstances and with a serious addiction to alcohol. After just one year's training in evangelism at Cliff College, Arthur went to work as a lay evangelist in the Methodist church, on the Enniskillen circuit. From there he received a call to pastor the Findlay Memorial Church, on the Maryhill Road in Glasgow. It was during Arthur's time as pastor that the Stauros Foundation came into being. After returning to Northern Ireland, Arthur and Beth spent the rest of their ministry in Stauros, with Arthur as General Director.

It was during these formative years of Stauros that Arthur's dynamic personality shone through. In particular his vision for the work was clear and uncompromising. It was his vision and energy that got Stauros off the ground and propelled it forward to where it is today. Arthur's passion for the work was contagious, and many of the earliest staff members were motivated and driven by the same enthusiasm. The foundations Arthur laid down in those early days are still the platform on which the current work stands.

Arthur was most at home, however, in a pastoral setting, sitting one-to-one with someone needing help and guidance from the stranglehold of addiction. Arthur's insight into the human condition, especially in all its intensity, was profound. His approach was to journey with someone through their life's challenges with a view to pointing them to Christ. He often used to say he was just, "One beggar telling another beggar where to find bread". He was a safe person to be with, someone who never condemned nor pre-judged, but who demonstrated Christ's unconditional love and wisdom.

Arthur was also a bit of an enigma! At times he was powerful in personality, uncompromising in his preaching and authoritative in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. At other times he felt vulnerable and very aware of his own shortcomings. He was unorthodox in some ways, and probably never really fitted into the stereotypical image some people may have had of a pastor or a preacher. Arthur never liked being categorised in this way. Arthur was fiery and reactive, but fiercely loyal, especially to his family, but also to the broken-hearted, the troubled and those in distress. He had the ability to instil hope where few would ever think to find it, and there are many, many people who could testify to being helped by the counsel they received from him.

At Arthur's funeral pastor Val English finished his sermon with an illustration of a drowning man giving his life jacket to someone else and spending his last moments holding other people up. This is a fair picture of Arthur's ministry, holding people up in their sea of distress. In Stauros it is unlikely we will see his like again and his passing marks the end of an era. On a personal note, if I may be permitted to take a scripture out of context, I recall Paul's words in Philippians 1:3, 'I thank my God in all my remembrance of you'. Till we meet again.