

1976-2006

WILLIAMSBURG CHRISTADELPHIAN FOUNDATION

FOCUS ON 30th Anniversary – Fall 2005

Do you remember 1976?

- The Israelis raided Uganda's Entebbe Airport to free 103 Air France hostages held by pro-Palestinian hijackers.
- The United States celebrated its Bicentennial.
- Jimmy Carter, a peanut farmer from Georgia was elected President of the United States.
- Canada hosted the summer Olympic Games in Montreal winning 5 medals.

That same year, Brother Woodrow Legge, affectionately known as Woodie, came up with an idea. He envisioned a foundation that would support preaching and welfare efforts within the Brotherhood. Instead of ecclesias scrambling when needs arose, there would be a proactively-established fund that could be drawn upon as circumstance required.

Supporting Woodie's idea were four close friends and Brothers Tony Giordano, Bobby Morrissette, Herman Opitz, and Maurice Wubbels. The name of the new organization would include Woodie's hometown of Williamsburg. Thus with the help and legal assistance of Brother Leroy Canoles, ***The Williamsburg Christadelphian Foundation (WCF)*** was incorporated by the State Corporation Commission of the Commonwealth of Virginia, December 17, 1976.



WCF Directors, Lancaster, PA, May 7, 1983. Pictured left to right: Herman Opitz, Don Elliott, Bobby Morrissette, Woodie Legge, Maurice Wubbels, Norm Zilmer, Tony Giordano

WCF Newsletter, 1980

"The basic premise behind the Foundation, then, is to be a resource which will meet needs for which there is no other vehicle in our community. Take charity, for example. There are needs that exist outside present ecclesial channels. Money needs are seldom related to neat, stable, straight-forward circumstances. We are usually dealing with situations outside the usual ecclesial framework; people in isolation, old people with mental or physical problems, needs resulting from legal problems. These situations require one of the directors to get firsthand knowledge of conditions by personal visits or through other reliable sources, e.g. other brethren in the area. We want to help, we want to respond quickly, but we must apply good stewardship."

An Interview with Past WCF Directors

This summer, current director Kyle Tucker interviewed five past directors of the Foundation – George Booker, Don Elliott, Tony Giordano, Bobby Morrisette and Norm Zilmer. Here is the substance of their conversation.

WCF is turning 30 next year. The Foundation has grown and expanded its sphere of activity. What differences do you see that perhaps weren't envisioned back in 1976, or when you joined the board?

Norm Zilmer: It is bigger now. We didn't have much money to work with. The current global outreach was a distant hope that wasn't realized. We were a much more localized organization.

George Booker: It is a wonderful thing that those who began the organization had a structure in place that could take advantage of new opportunities as funds became available. It takes vision at the beginning to carry this through, and it was greatly appreciated that brethren were stepping up to the plate to do just that.

Tony Giordano: I can share some of the background on the creation of WCF. Brother Woodie Legge owned a motel, and his hope was that this facility could be used as a permanent base for both missionary work and as a retreat for Brothers and Sisters in need of help. It was thought a portion of the facility could be used as a training center to equip Brothers and Sisters who wanted to participate in mission work.



Bro. "Woodie" Legge

The unfortunate thing was that the plans we had in 1976 were delayed a year because Brother Legge learned that the city fathers in Williamsburg would not let him do what he wanted – incorporate a portion of the motel as a religious facility – unless he changed his entire corporate structure with onerous tax consequences. Brother Maurice, bless his heart, was the one who saved the idea. We actually thought, 'Well, if it can't work, let's drop it'. Maurice said, 'No, no, the idea is too good'. Most of the funding to establish WCF in the beginning came from Brother Maurice Wubbels. Only the Lord knows what he did to preserve WCF. He actually started the Williamsburg tape library and kept it in Lancaster for about six years or so until a building was constructed on the Legge's property in 1984.

For quite some years the tape library was the primary work of WCF. I am so thankful that younger brothers continued and expanded the work to include outreach. It's wonderful. I am so thankful that the idea didn't die. By the grace of God, it kept going.

The WCF Tape Library has provided tens of thousands of listening hours to brethren, and we have received many testimonies from individuals who have been comforted by the tape messages in their loneliness, encouraged when their faith was weak, and had their minds directed to spiritual growth. – WCF website

This may not be news, but WCF has been working very closely with CBM-UK and CBMA. This has increased in the last few years. As a result, some of those interfellowship barriers have greatly diminished as we've worked together.

George Booker: I think this is a very important development. Some of that was happening while I was a director, but it has expanded considerably. I think working together in conjunction with other Christadelphian organizations opens new avenues where there are a number of different opportunities to serve. Such joint projects develop a working relationship with one another across what are sometimes artificial barriers, but barriers nonetheless. By bringing brethren together, we

can recognize how much we have in common, how much we need one another, and how much we can do together.

Norm Zilmer: Just even 'acquaintanceship' is a plus. I think that in many ways we were hurt by the Depression because at that time nobody had any money and no one could travel. So they sat back in their own little insular environment and said, 'You can't trust those guys down the road. They do... they think... they...whatever.' And nobody was able to verify if that was even true. We still have a lot of that in our community – more than I would like to see. But all of that breaks down when we have free interchange among people and we learn that there are neither horns nor tails on those folks we thought were such awful people.

George Booker: And in the bigger picture, the same principle was at work during the war, when brethren grew together in the Conscientious Objector camps. We need to be together and see what others are like and work with one another. This lays a foundation for further activity in the future.

Tony Giordano: Kyle, a question. Is most of the missionary work WCF is involved with overseas or local? How much would you say is domestic and limited to North America?

One of our new programs that is receiving a lot of interest is the White Fields initiative. Just as a refresher, Tom Thorp and I attended a CBM Eastern European meeting in England in 2003. We learned there were a lot of people who were willing to do missionary work, were it not for the financial obstacles that hindered their participation. CBM reported that their largest challenge was 'manpower in the field'. So WCF responded with the White Fields program in which successful candidates are provided stipends or grants. This enables them to cover expenses or financial obligations that CBM would not normally reimburse. The Foundation has made a sizable financial commitment to get workers into the mission field. WCF is currently funding missionaries in the U.S., India and Eastern Europe. To answer your question specifically, I'd say about 75% of these designated funds are being spent overseas.

Bobby Morrisette: As all you brethren know, WCF never allowed fellowship barriers to influence the work we did. In other words, we made it our policy to help and use our funds for the entire community wherever they were needed. Fellowship designation didn't have anything to do with it. We purposely avoided the fellowship problem and tried to do our work.

Tony Giordano: You're right, Bob. I can concur absolutely. We never wanted the fellowship issue to get in the way. Unfortunately, our traditions get in the way. No matter how much we have avoided making WCF or the conference a fellowship issue, there are some folks, who, have made it so. We still suffer the effects of that.

George Booker: From my own observation and talking with various brethren in the Central fellowship, I think that there is a great deal of appreciation for some of the programs that WCF has initiated, for the tapes, and for their willingness to help in any way they can to advance projects that are largely in the Central fellowship. They may not be contributing money directly to the Foundation, choosing to contribute in other places, but they recognize that WCF is helping considerably and they appreciate it very much.



How has WCF changed your life? Did your participation in the Foundation play a part in your spiritual growth in our Lord Jesus Christ?

Bro. Maurice Wubbels

Tony Giordano: The formation of WCF was the culmination of our strong desire to change the focus in the Christadelphian community away from continuing strife over certain issues and towards

constructive, positive work. I am thankful for the opportunity and privilege to have worked with Maurice Wubbels and Woodie Legge in that regard. When I first became involved, it was at a time of personal need. Every ecclesia is subject to internal strife and contention. All of you have had your share of it. Since that time, it has been my burning desire to help believers, irrespective of their affiliation, to focus on the Lord Jesus Christ giving him the honor and glory. Make him your model when it comes to solving problems in our spiritual family. I was given, through my association with WCF, a vehicle to help me shift my focus and serve the Lord.

Norm Zilmer: I think it would be fair to say that it expanded my vision of opportunities within the Brotherhood. And it certainly fed a pure desire that I had to heal some of the ruptures. It was also wonderful to find some brethren who felt like they wanted to surmount that obstacle and carry on with something that was really positive in the Lord's work and not get bogged down with all this partisanship.

Bobby Morrisette: I think that this is the attitude that all of us would have. It was so encouraging and inspiring to do something with a group of brethren who knew a lot more about Scripture than I did. To associate with these people and overcome the pettiness of the day was one factor. It also gave me an opportunity to work with brethren in the Amended group with whom I had not worked before. We found that we could work together just as well as anyone. I liked and respected them just as much as anyone else I knew. That was another plus in my mind.



Bro. Herman Opitz

Was there one event or issue that epitomized your work as a director for WCF?

Bobby Morrisette: As a former treasurer, one of the things I got the most pleasure from was being able to forward donated funds to help people who were really in need. An outstanding example was the generosity of brethren who responded to the hurricane in Jamaica. We were able to solicit and collect a lot of funds to help those people quickly and efficiently without going through a lot of red tape. In my opinion, we were able to come through without any barriers holding us back.

George Booker: Yes, that was a real eye-opener. We were able to move quickly and we were closer to the situation. We could get something done rapidly. It was a very good thing.

A rapid response by WCF was possible when hurricane Gilbert struck Jamaica in 1988. A large number of brethren answered our appeal, and within weeks we were able to send \$60,000 for relief efforts to the Jamaican brothers and sisters. Usually WCF operates as a "proactive" reserve fund. However, in this case, WCF served not as a source but as a conduit for the relief funds – [WCF website](#)

Tony Giordano: You may recall back in 1980 the idea of holding seminars was developed. This progressed beyond simply talking about filling needs here and there to actually doing something. A family seminar was made available, funded by WCF. For twenty or more years, I had the privilege of visiting a lot of ecclesias in the United States and Canada that were crying for help. Personally, this was an opportunity to do something in the service of our Lord that was of help to our community. I can think of a number of cases where the results were very gratifying but this rested in the hands of the Lord.

Norm Zilmer: One of my outstanding recollections would be, like Bobby's, in connection with Jamaica. I was sent on a fact-finding mission to see what we could do to be helpful to Alan Eyre and company. Actually, George put me in contact with Alan. I spent a week touring the island and returned to report to WCF. That would certainly qualify for one of my adventures. It was the only time in my life I was threatened by a gunman. I would never have expected it when I was sixty.

Tony Giordano: For a few years, there was considerable activity with the correspondence lessons. A lot of people learned the Truth. Brother Phil Kapusta came in as a result of these efforts. I remember corresponding with Phil. Different Brothers and Sisters were assigned to keep up with the correspondence. I remember at one time I was actually sending out Bible study lessons to 30-40 people. In the late '80s we had quite a few from West Virginia including about six from the Charleston area. I thought, 'Why don't we go over and meet some of these people in person?' In the spring of 1988, Esther and I went to visit these people with whom we had been corresponding. It was a very, very good experience.

WCF also got involved in the work down in Mexico. Missionary workers, though, need training and preparation for the field. George Booker at one time had the idea of a 'School of the Prophets'. We need to help people learn how to work with other people. WCF could facilitate such a program for Brothers and Sisters who really want to commit themselves to serve the Lord. It is a need in our community. One of the reasons we have limited success is that the people who want to help don't know how. Consideration could be given to a training center or a retreat of some kind.

George Booker: I think the ideal is a combination between a classroom setting and a laboratory where you are actually doing work. The right forum and place and people to do that could be a little tricky. That was the sort of thing we were thinking about, but it never really materialized.

Currently, we are considering publishing a book to assist prospective mission workers both in the field and upon their return. We are noticing that some returning brethren are having difficulty readjusting to life in North America.

Tony Giordano: A book would be great. To you young Brothers, if the Lord doesn't return shortly, opportunities are still there. There is certainly a great need for domestic missionary work.

We are getting near the end of our allotted time. What advice would you give our current directors?

George Booker: I would return to what Tony said. A 'School of the Prophets' program would be very useful... a great contribution. North America is a big area and we just don't cover much of it.

Bobby Morrissette: North American brethren see WCF investing a lot of time and effort overseas, rather than in this country, but a real need exists here. I don't know what advice to give in accomplishing this, particularly because of the affluent conditions in this country. Their material wealth has given them so many things to distract them that their desire for anything religious seems to have faded or gone by the boards completely. This is one reason why it is so difficult to reach out in the U.S. or Canada. If you can find a way of achieving this, it ought to be done.

We need to wrap up. Let me give the last word to each of you.

Norm Zilmer: I think WCF was probably one of the first organizations to begin a program without having zero-based financing. This was a radical idea

WCF has grown beyond what we expected. It is a real success. Keep going. Amended brethren have realized that there is a source of really good material. With reunion, there should be a vastly expanded opportunity. For myself, it was very pleasant to work with people like Maurice, Tony, Bobby and Herman, and to meet Ora Wubbels... WCF will only be as good as its directors. Any organization runs down unless it is continually renewed and reinvigorated with a lot of effort from its leaders. – **Recap of Don Elliott's thoughts** (interviewed separately)

to have a fund in existence when the need arose. That kind of foresight was due in good measure to Maurice. This provided for the opportunity to move forward and do some things without worrying about fund raising. It also kept WCF from being beholden to a special interest group.

Bobby Morrisette: I would encourage WCF to take a good look at the various things that they have done and continue to do, and then focus on the things they do best. I think it is more important to take a few things and do them well rather than being unfocussed and overwhelmed.

Postscript: *Our thanks to all past WCF directors who saw an opportunity to advance the cause of our Lord Jesus Christ, and through their service to the One Body, the Brotherhood has benefited.*

Pictures of Former & Current Directors



Hurricane Relief Update

Through the generous contributions of our donors, WCF was able to send approximately \$11,800 to victims of Hurricane Katrina. Thanks to all who respond so quickly and so generously to their brethren in need.

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