

Chapter 19

Ireland



Ireland was first reached with the gospel by St. Patrick in around 350 AD. It was a missionary-minded country sending missionaries all through Europe. When Europe had turned its back on the gospel, Ireland was the place that kept the message alive. Oh, how things have changed! With independence from Britain, many of the evangelical Christians left to go back to England in the 1920s. This independence left the country with a significantly depleted church and only a very small witness. Ireland can no longer be called “The Land of Saints and Scholars.”

This beautiful country is marred by secularism, paganism, druidism, and the occult. Immorality and deception abound. Suicide is all too common. Alcohol and drug abuse are at seriously high levels. An interesting fact to note is that Guinness produces two million pints of Guinness beer every day, to say nothing of all the other varieties they produce. Crime is increasing; the people pride themselves on being self-sufficient, thus there is no need, in their thinking, to seek God.

The real Christian Church in Ireland is considered a cult and has received the nickname “The Born Agains.” Some churches around the world have more members than there are Christians in Ireland. The church is small and growing only very slowly. The task before us is huge. We are greatly in need of the prayers of God’s people.



**BARRY TETLEY (LEFT) AND
DAVID STEVENS (RIGHT) BUILT
THIS SOWERS PLATFORM IN
A SINGLE DAY!**

OAC began working in Ireland in the ‘70s. Most of it was due to the work of Barry Tetley and Ken Rout from Sowers, which was then part of OAC. Sowers is an interdenominational missions organization that trains local leaders to do the work of evangelism. They do



**KEN ROUT PREACHING HIS FAMOUS
‘NOTHING’ MESSAGE IN IRELAND**

not send in Western missionaries to preach to people from other cultures. Instead, local leaders do this, as well as plant new churches. One of their main tools of evangelism

was called the “SOWERS platform,” a portable box on which the staff could set up their sketchboards and, thus, easily be seen by those to whom they were preaching. Much



DAVID STEVENS PREACHING ON THE STREETS OF LIMERICK CITY WHERE HE AND HIS WIFE SERVED THE LORD FOR 42 YEARS!

of the OAC-style ministry through the years has been taking place through those individuals trained by OAC, many of whom never became official OAC staff members.

One such person was a Brethren missionary named David Stevens. David was introduced to the work of OAC as he attended a Sowers Seminar in 1979. During this time of training, David met and began a mentoring relationship with OAC staff man, Ken Rout. In the years that followed David's initial open-air training, God used Ken, who would stop off in Ireland en route to Africa, as an encouragement to David. David was involved in dozens of Sowers Seminars. He trained groups consisting of 10 to 15 participants each which were held at various locations throughout Ireland during the 1980s. David soon discovered it was preferable to train church groups instead of individuals. By doing this, the church groups could then encourage one another in the



BARRY TETLEY PREACHING AT THE ROSE OF TRALEE FESTIVAL



SOWERS SEMINAR WITH DAVE GLOVER (SITTING - BLUE TOP) AND KEN BARRETT (BROWN JUMPER LEFT OF BOARD AT BACK)



ONE OF THE EARLIEST SOWERS SEMINARS WITH KEN ROUT (FAR LEFT) AND DAVID STEVENS (FAR RIGHT). THIS TRAINING WAS HOSTED AT THE HOME OF LESTOR HONSON

furtherance of the ministry, as opposed to individuals who came from different parts of the country and often went back home to find few with a vision to join them in this type of outreach.

A couple of David's fellow Brethren missionaries saw a

door of opportunity to reach large crowds at various Irish Festivals, such as the Rose of Tralee Festival, Traditional Music Festival, Galway Races, etc. These teams became known as the "Irish Festivals Outreach" teams and they regularly encountered crowds between 50 to 100 people gathering around the SOWER's platform to hear a gospel message. David and his team members mingled among the street entertainers and discovered countless people with time to talk in this holiday atmosphere. These teams continued for over 20 years, and only eternity will reveal the lasting fruit from those days (and nights!).

David continues to be active in the open-air ministry. After turning 70, he and his wife, Kay, moved from Limerick to Dublin and since then have been out preaching regularly in the City Center with Mickey Walker, a staff man from Operation Mobilisation. David still takes his sketchboard with him to Youth Camps held twice a year in Cork and to other outreach activities conducted in hotels and community halls around the country.



DAVID STEVENS HAS FOUND THIS MESSAGE OF THE FOUR CROSSES EXTREMELY ADAPTABLE TO VARIOUS AGE GROUPS OVER THE YEARS — THIS IS AT THE ROSE OF TRALEE FESTIVAL

MICKEY WALKER

Mickey Walker, mentioned previously, was another non-OAC staff person who conducted much open-air ministry. He served with Operation Mobilization since 1968 in Nepal, India, Lebanon, Belgium, Iran, and on OM ships. When he joined Operation Mobilization, he trained with OAC, took to the sketchboard like a duck to water, and through the years, did a lot to motivate the OM students whom he was in charge of to conduct frontline evangelism. For several years, Mickey would bring his students and join with our OAC staff in Great Britain, which would result in 100 or so team members launching out into inner-city housing projects in places like Birkenhead, Liverpool, Plymouth, and Portsmouth. The two or three big campaigns conducted by Korky Davey and the team in Bristol led to a number of the OM staff joining West Country OAC Branch as trainee evangelists, and two of them, Matt and Lindsey Vlaardingerbroek, ended up in Holland. Matt was Holland's champion under 18 long-distance runner! Lindsey had a First for Cambridge University degree. They would teach in churches all over Holland, having established a lovely local fellowship in The Hague. Mickey eventually established a ministry in Dublin, where he was on the street just about every day. He has conducted open-air evangelism in Dublin City Center since 1984. He and his wife, Kathleen, have six children and 19 grandchildren, at the time of this writing, who live scattered between India, Ireland, and the United States.





LARRY O'MAHONY PREACHING 'GOOD NEWS' AT GALWAY RACES



LARRY O'MAHONY OFFERING A TRACT AT THE THURLES ROCK FESTIVAL AS HIS WIFE MERIEL LOOKS ON (FAR RIGHT)



LARRY & MERIEL STANDING IN THE CROWD AT GALWAY RACES - BRETHREN MISSIONARY COLIN SHELDON PREACHING

In 1992, Larry O'Mahony started the work of OAC in Ireland on an official basis. He and his wife, Meriel, live in Killarney in the south of the country, and he is the national director there. In their own words, the following is an account of the work in that part of the world.

"Meriel and I went from England to Ireland in the early 1980s, as I felt the call of God to my native land. I had become a Christian in the town of Burton upon Trent, Staffordshire in 1978. We decided to go to Ireland for short periods to test the ground and also for Meriel to get used to a different climate and environment. We got to know other Christians involved in evangelism and joined them in spreading the gospel in towns and cities all over Ireland. We went to several places to share Christ, including the Rose of Tralee Festival, The Puck Fair in Killorglin (an old pagan festival), along with many other music, beer, and cheese festivals. The Galway Races and Festival lasted five days. I remember once at the Galway Races [that] we could not find our car for ages as there were thousands of other cars at those races! Korky and Anni Davey of Open Air Campaigners UK have been

such a blessing and encouragement to Meriel and myself through the years. In 1988, we were actually working with OAC before joining as full-time staff members two years later. There was great fellowship and comradeship in teamwork in schools and colleges and universities in those days. God was doing wonderful work through Korky and the team. The time spent after ministry outings at team suppers was a great blessing not only as we enjoyed the cuisine, but most importantly, in getting to know the other team members and growing closer together in fellowship.

“Being involved in the school of evangelism and discipleship, along with other trained evangelists, was a tremendous time of blessing and growth as we traveled all over Europe to preach the gospel. The open-air meetings conducted outside Wesley Chapel were memorable, and souls were saved.

“We decided to sell our home in Bristol and live here in Ireland permanently in 1992. I thank God for every opportunity to spread His Word. I had the privilege to train pastors and take them out on the street to preach the gospel. People came from other areas to be trained, and I had the joy of teaching a church of young people to use the sketchboard and hear them preach a message. I am still excited about the wonderful message of Jesus and still look forward to ‘Presenting Christ by All Means Everywhere’ in the days ahead.

“As of this writing, I am eighty-five years old and thank God for every year. The longer I serve Him, the sweeter He grows. I had a quadruple heart bypass in 1994 and two hip replacements, but I look forward to singing and preaching the gospel for many more years with His help and strength. To Him be glory forever and ever.”

Editor’s note: Word came to us on March 4, 2025 that Meriel was promoted to heaven.



*MERIEL & LARRY O'MAHONY -
NOTE THE WINSOME IRISH SMILE!*



ROB VOLLEBREGT PREACHING AT ROSE OF TRALEE FESTIVAL

Another OAC staff worker from Ireland, Rob Vollebregt, was born of Dutch parents in Dublin. Through the Sowers training mentioned perviously, he learned to use the sketchboard and conducted some open-air ministry in this country before moving on to the Netherlands in 2002 where his evangelism efforts continue to this day. See the Netherlands chapter in this book for more details.