

Chapter 19

Ireland



Ireland was first reached with the gospel around 350 AD by St. Patrick. It was a missionary-minded country, sending missionaries throughout Europe. When Europe had turned its back on the gospel, Ireland was the place that kept the message alive. Oh, how things have changed! Following independence from Britain, many evangelical Christians returned 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; people pride themselves on being self-sufficient, so, in their thinking, there is no need 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 for this area of the world.



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



KEN ROUT PREACHING HIS FAMOUS 'NOTHING' MESSAGE IN IRELAND

called the “SOWERS platform,” a portable box on which the staff could set up their sketchboards, making them easily visible to those to whom they were preaching. Much of the OAC-style ministry over the years has taken place through individuals trained by OAC, many of whom never became official OAC staff members.



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



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 such person was a Brethren missionary named David Stevens. David was introduced to OAC's work while attending a Sowers Seminar in 1979. During this training, David met and began a mentoring relationship with OAC staff member 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, to encourage David. David was involved in dozens of Sowers Seminars. He trained groups of 10 to 15 participants each, held at various locations throughout Ireland during the 1980s. David soon discovered that it was preferable to train church groups rather than individuals. By doing this, the church groups could then encourage one another in the furtherance of the ministry, rather than individuals who came



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

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 an opportunity to reach large crowds at various Irish Festivals, such as the Rose of

Tralee Festival, the Traditional Music Festival, and the Galway Races. These teams became known as the "Irish Festivals Outreach" teams, and they regularly encountered crowds of between 50 and 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 member 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, over the years, did a lot to motivate the OM students under his charge to conduct frontline evangelism. For several years, Mickey would bring his students and join 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 major campaigns conducted by Korky Davey and the team in Bristol led to several OM staff joining the West Country OAC Branch as trainee evangelists, and two of them, Matt and Lindsey Vlaardingerbroek, ended up in Holland. Matt was Holland's under-18 long-distance champion! Lindsey earned a first-class degree from Cambridge University. 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 officially began the work of OAC in Ireland. 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, 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 member from Ireland, Rob Vollebregt, was born in Dublin to Dutch parents. Through the Sowers training mentioned previously, he learned to use the sketchboard. He conducted some open-air ministry in this country before moving to the Netherlands in 2002, where his evangelistic efforts continue to this day. See chapter 25 for more details.