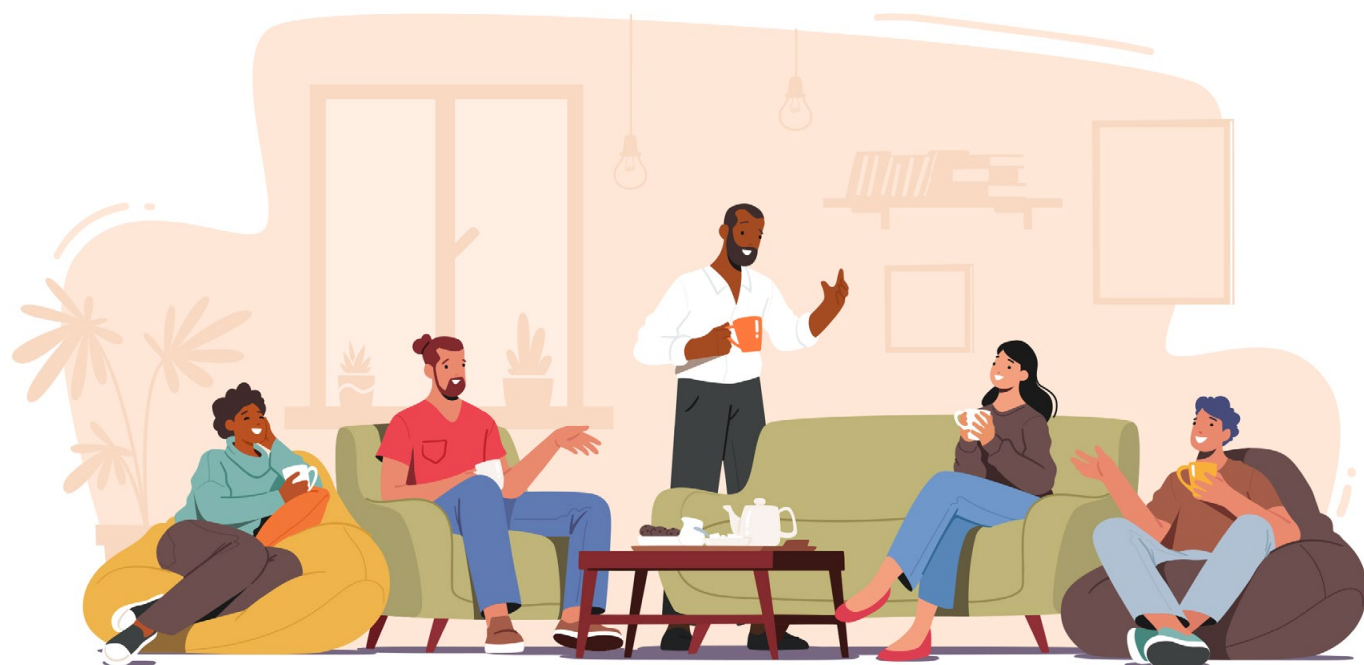




Celebrating the Lay Witness Movement

BRIAN
& HAZEL
ROLLINS



Former leaders of the Lay Witness Movement, Brian and Hazel Rollins, reflect on the impact and influence of the Lay Witness movement in their own lives and in the UK

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the introduction of the Lay Witness Movement to churches in the UK in 1976. It was instrumental in bringing us into a living faith and played a large part in our development as Christians.

Lay Witness was the brainchild of Professor Ben Campbell Johnson, an American pastor, who realised the impact that lay people could have by sharing their Christian faith at other churches. He developed the format for church weekends comprising worship, meals, and visiting team members giving personal testimony and leading group discussions - gently, but asking searching questions.

The first weekend was held in Phoenix City in 1961 and the results were such that Lay Witness was born.

In October 1976, as a result of contact between Dr Roger Haining, a Lay Witness team leader from Seattle, and Colin and Janet Newell and Nev Sharples of Bolsover,

five Methodist churches in England each held a Lay Witness weekend. Dr Haining led them with both American and English team members. The weekends had a tremendous impact on the churches and the lives of church members - new and deeper commitments to Jesus Christ, increased membership, new Bible study groups. These and other results were experienced by many churches later.

A group was formed to promote and coordinate weekends in Great Britain and the Lay Witness Movement was formed. Its aims were 'to bring people into a closer relationship with Jesus and to bind the church family into a more loving and caring community'. As a result of the tireless work of that group, by the end of 1978, 18 Lay Witness weekends had been held and 52 team members recruited.

As the number of weekends increased, by early 1980 it was clear that full-time leaders were needed. Tom and Margaret Moyle, who had taken part in the 1976 weekends, took on this role. The Movement continued to grow, and by 1986 it was running 40 Lay Witness weekends annually.

We knew nothing about the Movement until 1984 when our minister suggested we hold a Lay Witness weekend. The weekend was held in September 1985, led by Michael and Tricia Bancroft from Lammack, Blackburn. We had been members of the church for many years and held various offices. At that weekend, hearing team members talk about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, we realised that this was missing from our lives. At the Sunday service, we both responded to the invitation to commit our lives to Jesus. Although neither knew that the other had intended to make that response, it has been one of our joys that we did respond, allowing us to give so much together.

Shortly afterwards, Michael and Tricia invited us to go with them to Lindley, Huddersfield in May 1987 as 'observers'. Hazel reluctantly agreed. Brian was adamant he wasn't going, changing his mind a short time beforehand. Following that weekend, we both believed that God was calling us to join the Movement. Our first weekend was under Tom and Margaret's leadership at Lammack, in October 1987.

In 1989, at the end of a weekend led by Michael and Tricia, Michael asked us to give a valid reason why we should not become Team Leaders. We couldn't. Brian also joined the Management Committee.

In 1995, Tom and Margaret decided it was time to retire. Tom suggested we take on their role. We accepted that

it was God's plan, when a speaker at an event we were attending, told us that God had a role for us to take on together. Brian retired as senior partner of a firm of solicitors and we converted our garage into an office. We held the position until 2004 when we were replaced by Alan and Jennifer Goulden and they were followed by Mike Owen.

As well as attending over 70 weekends in England, giving hundreds of information talks, speaking and publicising the Movement at denominational conferences, we led groups to share in Lay Witness celebrations, and take part in weekends, in South Carolina, South Africa, the Philippines and Australia. Our time in Lay Witness helped shape and develop our walk as disciples of Jesus Christ. We were privileged to serve God and his church in this way and are grateful to him for the way he equipped us for this service.

When the Movement ceased in 2014, it had held 1124 weekends, impacting many church members and their churches. We leave the last words to others who shared testimony following a Lay Witness Weekend:

'Jesus became my friend at a Lay Witness Weekend, when I was 15, partly through hearing the team's testimonies.'

'The fruit of the weekend: three families who had recently joined were able to say 'this is our church', a youth Alpha course has been planned, a second weekly prayer group and a new house group have started.'

'I realised that my faith had reached a comfortable plane and that I needed to move on. I am learning to spend more time with God.'



BRIAN & HAZEL ROLLINS

Brian and Hazel are members of MET:Revive and are part of the leadership at Wigan Methodist Mission. They have been married 61 years and have four children and seven grandchildren.