

Rev George Stanley Martin MBE OA

Two weeks ago, whilst in Calvary Hospital, George let it be known that he would welcome a visit from Libby Craft and myself. We entered the room to see a weakened old man whose total demeanour changed spontaneously when we were invited to “pull up a chair”. Clearly George was pleased to see us and ready for a chat.

The next 15 minutes were one of the experiences of our lifetime as we again encountered his subtle intellect, droll but sharp wit and an insightful reflection on many of the highlights of his working life. His underlying affection for us, the people whom he encountered along the way and his acceptance that much had been achieved meant that Libby and I left feeling that this had been one of the most significant experiences of our lives.

It is a great honour for Libby and I to be asked to speak on behalf of us all to pay tribute to this great man. I will draw inspiration from our recent encounter, our long-term relationship and wonderful reflections from so many people who shared his life.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the important role that Leonie played throughout George’s Ministry, especially within Port Adelaide Central Mission. George and Leonie were a great team with Leonie being a trained Deaconess, the family anchor and George’s personal support.

Leonie embraced the work at Port Adelaide and was active within The Mission especially within Bright Hour, Wesley House and the development of Westminster Village.

When George and Leonie came to a very run down Port Adelaide Central Mission in 1967 they were already a great team who had worked successfully together in other areas of the Methodist Church. They were young, enthusiastic and responding to a Call and a challenge.

Certain leaders of the Methodist Church suggested to George that it might be best to close The Mission but this was never in his mind (perhaps this very suggestion was a challenge enough for this determined couple!)

They came to a place with proud tradition but with buildings and services reflecting the past rather than the future.

EG Baths in many rooms and old railway carriages out the back.

As soon as he arrived George began assessing The Mission and its situation and preparing himself for his role:

- He saw challenges and opportunities
- he prepared himself by
 - enrolling in the newly formed graduate diploma of social administration from Flinders University
 - he travelled widely to visit innovative services such as The Brotherhood of Saint Laurence, the Wayside Chapel and Wesley Mission Sydney
- he contacted and built relationships with key federal, state and local leaders and officials. **Especially Local MP's including Mick Young, Rod Sawford & George Whitton**

George soon began a long period of innovation during which time he transformed social work practice in South Australia. In particular, **he**

saw the value of Community Development, Social Planning and building on strengths rather than focusing on individuals and their weaknesses or failures.

He recruited enthusiastic people, often volunteers, from the church and universities (transforming our lives) and incorporated a wide range of other people's ideas to fit practical new paradigms within the Mission.

Positive new programs were developed incorporating this Community Development process. These included

- family services
- childcare
- antipoverty programs to respond to urgent need. Such as
 - health services run by final year medical students
 - legal aid run by final year law students including Franco Camatta and Bob Lempens
- a comprehensive Aboriginal Community Development Program with a significant emphasis on leadership development
- collaborative relationships with a range of Ethnic communities with a emphasis on responding to the challenges of the elderly
- a complete redevelopment of The Mission's aged care services including Wesley House, Westminster Village, Faggotter Grove and Ethnic Link Services.
- The establishment of Portway Housing Association.

He played a major part in the planning of West Lakes including the development of Lakeside Villages.

Being a man of his times and an astute reader of opportunities available from all sources, especially government, **he developed this suite of programs often putting government policy into practice**

(often the government only realised their programs after meeting George or opening the new service at the Mission!)

These innovative programmes and George's policy development lead to him becoming a national figure; for example;

- he became the **chair of Aged Care Australia** and played a major role in reshaping aged care services and funding across Australia
- he was the **Commissioner for Social/Medical Aspects of Poverty In the Henderson Poverty Enquiry** which was commissioned by Billy McMahon, enhanced by Gough Whitlam and reported to Malcolm Fraser!
This comprehensive report was, and still is one of the most insightful and important Australian social policy documents.

Port Adelaide Central Mission, and George in particular, also became respected within South Australia and Port Adelaide. He seemed to know everybody and everybody wanted to know him! All this was based on his reputation, positive attitude and integrity.

His advice was often sought by Ministers, bureaucrats, other CEO's and many others.

One small but typical example with which I am familiar was;

- George was contacted by the Party in Government for ideas in respect of their community welfare policy for the upcoming election. He made excellent suggestions.

- Later the Shadow Minister phoned with a similar request. George made similar suggestions with rationale more aligned to the party's philosophy.
- After the election, the new Minister phoned George and explained that there was insufficient funds for the promised program. George responded by suggesting that such an innovative service could well benefit from a demonstration phase.
The new Minister promptly announced a new innovative service to be run by Port Adelaide Central Mission!

George played a significant role within the Port Adelaide Community and became an elected member of the Port Adelaide Council. As was the norm in those days there were many bitter disputes within Council one of which resulted in George being a witness in the Supreme Court.

Referring to an incident where the mayor of Port Adelaide had adjourned the council meeting and requested to meet Councillor Martin privately In the Mayor's Parlour the judge asked what was said in this private meeting. George's response was "Your Honour, The Mayor reflected on my parentage!"

Whilst George made a huge contribution in many local areas I am sure he would have been especially pleased the recognition from Lakeside Villages in Friday's paper.

The value of his work and the esteem within which he is held is indicated by him being awarded both an MBE in 1979 (for services to the community) and an A.M. order of Australia in 1994 for community services in social welfare.

How then can we summarise George Martin?

- With the long-term support of Leonie and his family he was a man of deep Christian faith, practically expressed with a vision of what could be and a plan of how things can be better
- he was optimistic, opportunist and an honest broker who translated good policy into effective practice
- he made life better for so many people most of whom never knew him.
- I'm sure however, that all here today are blessed by having share his life.

God bless you George