

Evangelism 'Giant' George Verwer Dies at 84

George Verwer, founder of Operation Mobilization and whom Franklin Graham called a "giant in the world of evangelism," passed away peacefully on Sunday at the age of 84 from Sarcoma cancer, surrounded by family members and loved ones.

Verwer was well known and admired for his passion for making disciples of all nations. In 1960, he married Drena Knecht, and the two moved to Spain. While in Europe, Verwer smuggled Bibles into Communist-controlled countries, where he was arrested and deported. While in Vienna, Austria, he climbed a tree and saw a group of young people boarding a bus and it was in that moment that the name Operation Mobilization came to his mind for ministry, a ministry with the idea of mobilizing "busloads" of young people into mission.

Verwer was diagnosed with Sarcoma cancer in February 2023, asked in his newsletter at the time for "people not to pray for his total healing as I am looking forward to heaven." Instead, he asked for grace for the "rough journey that will be ahead."

He survived 14 months after writing the newsletter.

"Operation Mobilization is one of the largest Christian mission organizations in the world," Graham wrote in a Facebook post Sunday. "I've never known anyone who kept a schedule like him—he would preach the gospel multiple times a day almost every day somewhere around the world."

Verwer believed that "literal adherence to the principles laid down by Jesus Christ would, without a doubt, result in worldwide revolution—a revolution motivated by love; a revolution executed by love; and a revolution culminating in love."

Graham says Verwer's life was transformed after a neighbor gave him a copy of the book of John from the Bible and put him on her prayer list, which she called her "Holy Ghost hit list." Verwer would surrender his life to Christ at the age of 16 during a Billy Graham crusade in Madison Square Garden.

"Does prayer work? You bet it does," Franklin Graham wrote. "George was a fervent witness for Christ, and it is said that within a year, 200 of his classmates had become Christians—and his passion for seeing souls saved never faded.

"Operation Mobilization continues to touch the world with the Good News of Jesus Christ. I have been with him on several occasions and always appreciated that he came to Boone (NC) to see me a number of years ago and brought his father. George Verwer was used mightily by God and will be greatly missed."

Under Verwer's "exuberant leadership and fueled by the passion of believers from many nations to reach those who had never heard the Good News, Operation Mobilization expanded in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s across Europe and into the Middle East. It involved volunteers crewing ocean-going ships, with the first launched in 1971. Since then, more than 49 million people have visited the onboard book fairs, with over 70 million portions of Scripture distributed at port calls in 151 countries.

"In his later years, an older and wiser George Verwer began to speak at every opportunity about how and why God works in and through a church filled with human mistakes and sin," Archbishop Joseph D'Souza said. "Losing George is losing my life's mentor and my closest personal friend in the ministry. It is also an inspiration of a life lived well and a legacy now made complete with the words we all long to heart, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Operation Mobilization representatives said of Verwer, "Our founder's earthy mission is accomplished, and he is now with

the Lord.”

 Rev. Johnnie Moore tweeted, “George was not famous on earth, but he is famous in Heaven for making Jesus’ gospel famous all over the world. George was a hero to the church but also reticent to receive any praise. He didn’t seem himself (and he wouldn’t let you see him this way either) as a Super Christian. He believed himself to be a regular, flawed person who was just fortunate to be a tool in the hands of God to share his message of love with the world.”

To learn more about George Verwer and his legacy, visit Operation Mobilization’s website. {[eo](#)}

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Shawn A. Akers *is the online editor at Charisma Media.*