The Founding Fathers of the IUGM

By James M. Harriger

September 17, 1913, is a red letter day for rescue ministries. On that day men and women with vision formed an organization which would have the purpose of “fellowship and cooperation with all engaged or interested in Gospel Missions and other Rescue Work throughout the United States and other lands in the mutual advancement of the cause of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Rescue missions had come of age. The McAuley Water Street Mission in New York was 41 years old in 1913. Many men and women had gone out from there to start other missions across the United States and Canada, and in fact, around the world. Thirty of these men and women saw the need for sharing their expertise, for helping new directors get established, for training and spiritual renewal.

Many of the names on the Article of Incorporation are not quickly recognized, their stories probably lost to history, the missions they served closed and, according to Leonard Hunt, “Rescue Mission men were not known to keep complete files.” Several, though, were men and women whose vision for ministry would still impress us today. “They were highly individualistic. They were as independent as could be, giants in their own areas. Yet in spite of this individualism, they had heart-warming fellowship together around The Cross of Christ, and the common cause—Rescue.” Let us examine the testimony of several of these founders and renew their vision.

Dr. Paul quotes the Year Book of 1921 as stating that the Union was a “child of the heart” of Mr. Sidney Whittemore. Sidney and Emma Whittemore were a wealthy, cultured, refined church-going couple of New York City. In 1874 they paid a “social visit” to the Water Street Mission to see what their giving was supporting. Sidney told the story like this: “I . . . went down to Water Street, feeling that I was such a big one in church life that I knew everything: and to go down and shake hands with Jerry McAuley and his wife—why, yes, I would, and encourage him in that way.” One can imagine this refined couple showing up for that service, sorely out of place when compared to the men Jerry usually ministered to. When the altar call was given, husband and wife both held up their hands and went forward to kneel with the crowd of broken men. Sidney, who had planned just to sit and look on, increased his nights at the mission until he and Emma were with the McAuleys five out of seven nights each week! He served on the board of the Cremore Mission, and was the first president of the IUGM, a vision he had for furthering the cause of Rescue.

Emma Whittemore said before her conversion she was of that character of church people so prevalent—“a card-playing, theatre-going, dancing Christian.” When she first went down to the mission, “it was with the distinct understanding that I was never to go to such a place as that again.” After going forward at that first meeting, God used Emma not only as the helpmate to her husband, but also to organize the “Door of Hope,” for lost and helpless girls. She went on to establish over fifty “Door of Hope” missions in other cities, and served as the second elected President of the IUGM, carrying on the vision of her husband after he was gone.

John Wyburn was an Englishman who came to America to take charge of his brother’s business. When his brother died in 1882, John inherited a large share of the business and a generous cash legacy. Three years later, despondent with life, he withdrew his money and began drinking, ending up on the Bowery in New York, penniless. A convert of the Water Street Mission gave John a referral to Samuel Hadley, then superintendent of the Mission. John didn’t mean to stay at the Mission. He planned to hit Hadley for a “loan” of $10 and get out of there quick. Hadley invited him to stay for the service, and when that convert stood and gave testimony to how God delivered him from alcoholism, John surrendered his will to the Lord. He forgot about going back to his business, instead worked as a clerk at a lodging-house and returned to the mission every night of the week! In 1896 he became superintendent of the Bowery Mission (where he met a pretty young volunteer who became his wife). Three years later he returned to Water Street as the assistant. Samuel Hadley died in February, 1906, and John became the superintendent, serving until his death in 1921.

John served as the treasurer for the IUGM, with Mrs. Wyburn serving as the secretary. Mrs. Wyburn said after John’s death, “On at least three occasions Mr. Wyburn was approached just before the annual business meeting and urged to accept the nomination for presidency of this organization, but he declined, fearing it might take him away too often from his work in Water Street, which always took precedence over everything else.” Mrs. Sara Wray, superintendent of the Eighth Avenue Mission in New York City, spoke of John Wyburn’s love for men at his memorial service:

“I shall never forget a convention of Rescue Mission superintendents in a distant city two or three years ago (1918 or 1919) where Mr. Wyburn and other superintendents, myself included were. We heard eloquent
addresses, but there was just one thing that really gripped me... Just one sentence, uttered with such thrilling effect upon my soul... ‘We never give a man up,’ said Mr. Wyburn. Others may weary, others may say it is of no use, others may speak of wasted time and wasted money, but he, never. (He) knew the love and power of the Good Shepherd Himself.”

John R. McIntyre was another Englishman, a member of the Royal Exchange in London, who worked his way to the head of a company that employed more than a thousand. He came to America to escape liquor, and soon became head of a department in the Wanamaker store in Philadelphia. But liquor again led him to the gutter. John walked six miles to Germantown, and became the first convert of The Whoever Gospel Mission, founded by William Raws. John later became the Superintendent of this mission, giving 50 years of service to the Lord. His testimony of compassion for broken men lives on in the stained glass window by the artist Lawrence Saint, that is in the Episcopal Cathedral, Washington, D.C. done by Lawrence Saint. In that window it is John McIntyre, the redeemed drunkard, with the lost sheep around his neck.” John, a man with compassion and vision, served as President of the IUGM from 1919-1921, and as the Chairman of the Executive Committee for 20 years.

Lucius B. Compton was a mountain boy from the hills of North Carolina. Crippled because of malnutrition, his family thought he was feeble-minded, thus allowing him less than six months of schooling. At 14 he left the hills to escape the law, and roamed from city to city, a boy tramp. In Cincinnati he was attracted by the singing at a mission, and wandered into the service. After he became a Christian and started taking part in street meetings, his stuttering left him in an answer to prayer. He eventually returned to Asheville, and founded the Eliada Orphanage and Home, the Faith Cottage Rescue Mission, a Bible conference grounds, a farm in connection with the home, and went even further to become an internationally known evangelist! This unschooled mountain boy with a dream and a vision served as President of the IUGM from 1947 until his death.?

What a challenge these men and women had before them! Their missions were not necessarily large when they banded together to form the IUGM. They didn’t have huge budgets or staffs to operate their ministry while they worked for another organization. But they had a vision. A vision of an organization that would assist, train, encourage and challenge rescue mission people in the United States, and around the world. Seventy-five years later, that organization started in the office of the Water Street Mission is still advancing—still seeking to provide education, fellowship and service to the men and women who are ministering in the worst parts of our cities. What a legacy they have left for us!


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