

APPENDIX D: TOM'S NURSING HOME MINISTRY TESTIMONY

My initiation to work in Nursing Homes is often a surprise to many. I had a lovely grandmother, but she was not a major influence in my life. Nor were there other older folk who could be “blamed” for my involvement with the elderly in Nursing Homes. I became involved in Nursing Homes simply because I read the Bible and wanted to do what it says.

It was a time in my life when I was uncertain about many things, so I decided to obey what was clear to me in the Bible. While I had grown up in church and never had any serious doubts about Jesus being the Way, I had not been taught the Bible. After University my conversion was not so much to Jesus as to the Bible. I discovered that the Bible is God's own word, with all the authority and power and wisdom and beauty that entails.

So I read the Bible and I discovered the parable about the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25. This both scared me and touched my heart, for my family had always been sensitive to those in need. I also discovered James 1:27, “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” This was clear to me and seemed to focus on what I should do. I didn't know of any orphans in my Indiana community but I knew there were widows and other people with need in Nursing Homes. So I went to one and asked if they had any jobs I could do. I was hired as a maintenance man, something I already had experience doing. That, quite simply, is how my work in Nursing Homes began.

Shortly thereafter I began my Seminary training in Philadelphia. Not wanting to leave my newfound clarity and ministry, I began work in Nursing Homes there too. A retired professor who also had an interest in such work took me under his wings. Dr. John Skilton was to be my friend and companion and mentor for many years to come, in fact, until his death. He was a single man with a house to himself, into which he would invite students to stay. I was privileged to live with him for several years, and it is there, at Skilton House—named after his beloved parents, by then deceased—that my work in Nursing Homes expanded and flourished.

As Dr. Skilton and I prayed, we decided to aim high. We decided to reach every resident in every Nursing Home in the Philadelphia area, including the surrounding suburbs. This began a several-year project of researching each home, charting its needs, which churches were nearby, and offering to train local church people to reach the residents in Nursing Homes near them. Slowly materials were developed as we conducted these sessions. Eventually this material was published, first by Great Commission Publications, and then by Zondervan, as this manual.

We saw holiday times as times of special need and opportunity. During the Christmas season and on both Good Friday and Easter, we planned city-wide efforts to reach every home and every resident in each home with a warm and personal Christian greeting and message. Seminary students and professors, lay people and pastors all took part and we were largely successful year after year to offer a special holiday service at those times each year, using the occasion to distribute large-print greeting cards we mass produced for the occasions. We also developed

large-print greeting cards for other occasions, such as Valentine's Day and Thanksgiving. I still dream of developing a large-print greeting card ministry.

From Philadelphia I began preparations for another phase of my life, mission work as a Bible translator and literacy worker. Each step along the way of preparation provided further opportunity for work in Nursing Homes, this time in various states, including especially North Dakota and Texas. Finally, on returning from the mission field to Toronto, Canada, I began the work afresh again. The work in Canada has given me more of an understanding of the situation in North America, and my mission experiences have opened my eyes more and more to ageing as a global phenomenon, in every part of the world.

