



## **David Stanley 1935-2024**

### **A Spiritual Sketch**

### **On the passing of a godly man**

By Bob Pounder.

I first met David Stanley at Flowery Field Free Christian Church in 2008.

He introduced himself to me shortly after the Sunday afternoon service and insisted on giving me a guided tour of the church building. Proclaiming his Trinitarian beliefs, he pointed out the crucifix on the wall.

Looking back after 15 years of friendship, I can say that David always remained the same open and forthright character that I met back then. He could be blunt and outspoken, but he was never unkind, and there was underlying gentility and deep faith.

During my years of ministry I met David on many occasions and our friendship developed. I remember one of our early contacts - a meeting of the Unitarian Christian Association, held at Stalybridge Church, when he told me squarely that there were “no Christians at Unitarian Chapel Oldham.”

I suppose that’s really where David really stepped into the life of Unitarian Chapel Oldham. Change was in the air as we reconsidered our place within the current Unitarian community, and started to become clearer about our spiritual foundations.

It was David who instigated the installation of a cross, placed prominently on the front wall of the chapel, directly above the reading desk from where the sermons are also preached.

Then in 2020 came Covid and the government’s lockdown policy, which had a major impact on the congregation. Deep divisions arose between those who supported the government’s policy and those of us who felt keeping places of worship open was essential. The eventual decision to remain open after the October lockdown resulted in a painful split in the congregation. Resignations and departures effectively brought to an end the Unitarian witness in Oldham, leaving a remnant that was in effect an overwhelmingly Christian congregation.

We were united not only by our opposition to the lockdown, but also to modern Unitarian thought, particularly the ‘anything goes’ attitude towards faith and ethical issues. In the end a decision was made to separate completely from Unitarianism and to fully embrace a Trinitarian and conventionally Christian faith.

In 2023 we decided to drop the word ‘Unitarian’ from our title, and officially changed the name to simply ‘Oldham Chapel’. The chapel defines itself as Free Christian. In which way are we Free Christian? Only in the sense that we are not doctrinally bound to any church denomination. We believe that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. that Jesus is Lord and we believe in the sufficiency of scripture:

*All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God be completely equipped for every good work.*  
(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

It would have been unthinkable, when I first began my ministry at Oldham in 2010, that I should be writing this some fourteen years later. But all things come to pass according to God's will. Thus, David came to us at a particular juncture in his life and at the time of God's choosing. As I've already said, David found his place in the Oldham congregation, a devout man, he encouraged others in the faith. He was loved and respected, but he would not hold back from rebuking anyone if he thought it necessary.

I have many personal memories of David, but if there were to be one outstanding memory then that would have to be the occasion when I first had the privilege of officiating at a service of Holy Communion at Flowery Field Church.

David, along with other members of the church came to the altar rails to receive the bread and wine. On both knees he made the sign of the cross as I looked at him, before the table of Christ, so to speak, it was there I saw his sincerity, his devotion; his love of the Lord.

I have often thought about that moment, where I really saw David for the first time and afterwards reflected on what a blessing to me that moment had been.

I think also, of a favourite hymn we shared: When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.

*When I survey the wondrous cross  
on which the Prince of glory died,  
my richest gain I count but loss,  
and pour contempt on all my pride.*

I recall him singing this hymn with others at an open air Whitsuntide service of worship at the market ground in Mossley.

The other thing that comes to mind about David was his courageous battle against age, his encroaching infirmity, his determination to press on and to get to worship whenever possible. There are times, I know, when perhaps he would have been better off staying in bed or staying at home in comfort, but he forced his weary body to get up to go to either church or chapel. I know that at Oldham Chapel, and at Flowery Field Church he will be deeply missed and we mourn for him. He will also be missed at the church of St Thomas in Hyde, where he regularly took Holy Communion on Tuesdays.

David is survived by his wife, Carol, his sons Robert and Christopher and his daughter Jill. Also his stepsons, Peter and Philip and his stepdaughter Suzanne.

Our prayers and thoughts are with all of David's family at this time. We have all been blessed by knowing David and having him in our lives. May the Lord bless him and may the Lord comfort Carol and his family in their time of sorrow and loss.