My pilgrim journey

John Langlois

towards hope



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Preface

Reading a biography is, in a sense, entering another person’s world.

In the pages that follow, I invite you to enter mine — a life shaped over many years by a desire to confront what is wrong and, in whatever way possible, to contribute to what is good.

I was born in Leicester in 1942 in the middle of the Second World War. My parents had fled from Guernsey, one of the Channel Islands in the English Channel between England and France, just one day before the invasion of the German armed forces in June 1940. They remained in England until the war ended. I began life as a child of refugees.

When peace returned, we went back to Guernsey, where my family had lived for generations. From those early years, my life unfolded in ways I could never have anticipated — through education, law, public service, and involvement with Christian leaders across many parts of the world.

This is not a book about my achievements, nor an attempt to present a life of success. It is simply an account of a journey — with its uncertainties, its responsibilities, its failures, and its unexpected turns.

If there is any value in these pages, I hope it lies not in the events themselves, but in what they may suggest about guidance, purpose, and the quiet unfolding of a life over time.

Prologue

Before the story begins, it may help to understand the thread that runs through it.

As a child, I came to see my life in a simple way: not as something I would plan and control, but as a lifetime guided by God.

That conviction was not formed through argument or analysis. It arose quietly, with very little understanding. Yet it has remained with me ever since.

Over the years, I have often reflected on how little I saw of the road ahead. I made decisions with incomplete knowledge. Doors opened and closed without warning. What appears certain one day may change the next.

And yet, when I look back, I do not see randomness.

I see a pattern of guidance — sometimes clear, sometimes only visible in retrospect.

Not a straight path, and not a perfect one. I have made mistakes, wrong turns, and moments of uncertainty but through it all there has been a sense — sometimes faint, sometimes unmistakable — of being led by my Shepherd.

You will find here not a model life, nor a set of conclusions.

Simply a journey.

Chapter 1: The Lamb and the Shepherd

My spiritual pilgrimage, in any personal sense, began in a small and quiet moment.

I was six years old.

We were living in the island of Guernsey. One Sunday evening my mother was reading to me, as she often did, from a children's Bible story book. One story in particular had captured my attention — the account of the shepherd who left ninety-nine sheep to search for the one that had wandered away.

I asked her to read it again. And again.

That evening, as she finished the story, I told her that I was that sheep and that I wanted to belong to the Shepherd.

She thought I was too young to make such a decision. She suggested I should wait.

But I was quite certain.

I knelt down by my bed and, in the simplest way I could, asked Jesus to come into my life.

There was nothing outwardly remarkable about the moment. No great emotion, no sense of occasion. Just a quiet decision made by a child.

Yet it has proved to be the most important decision I have ever made.

At the time, I had no understanding of where that choice might lead. I did not foresee the paths I would follow, the responsibilities I would carry, or the places to which I would go.

I only knew that I had entrusted myself to a Shepherd.

I can now see how often I have failed to follow as I should. There have been wrong turns, hesitation, and times when I have relied too much on my own judgment.

And yet, despite all that, I have never lost the sense of being guided.

That is where this story begins.

Chapter 2: Early Years – Displacement, Fear and Formation

My early childhood was shaped by the Second World War, which I only gradually came to understand. As a small child in Leicester, I remember seeing Royal Air Force bombers and fighters flying across the city.

At the time, I was too young to grasp what was happening. I was told later that I was happy during those years. The city felt safe and ordinary, and for a small child that was enough.

When my parents returned to Guernsey, bringing my baby sister and me with them, the island they returned to was very different from the one they had left five years earlier with barely a day's notice. Guernsey had been under German occupation throughout the war. Buildings were neglected, huge fortifications disfigured the landscape, resources were scarce and the mood was subdued.

My parents' home had been taken over by German soldiers and used as a barracks, so they could not return. Instead, we lived with my paternal grandparents.

As a young child, although I did not understand everything that had happened, I sensed enough to feel its effects. Adults spoke about the suffering that had occurred during the occupation years, with stories about slave labourers brought to the island

from Poland and Russia and about their harsh treatment until an early death.

These were not stories that young children should hear, yet they were part of the atmosphere in which I lived. After eighty years I still remember being afraid, particularly of the dark. Somehow, I still feared Nazi soldiers lurking in the shadows although, living in England during the war, I had never seen one.

Something in me changed during those years. The carefree happiness of my first three years in England gradually gave way to a more thoughtful, fearful and cautious outlook. At the time I could not have explained it, but it left a lasting impression.

There was also a quiet sense of not entirely belonging to the island.

Leicester had been the first place I remembered as home. Guernsey was my family's island and my ancestral roots lay there, yet part of me felt slightly detached from it in those early years.

Family history also played its part in shaping my sense of identity.

My surname, Langlois, has Norman origins dating back to the time of William the Conqueror. In the Norman dialect the name literally means "the Englishman" - L'Anglois - the name given to the Norman soldiers who had conquered England in 1066.

As a child I sensed that my family story stretched far beyond the island where I was growing up. Perhaps without fully understanding it, a small part of England and the wider world remained within me.

At the time none of this seemed particularly significant. I was simply a boy growing up, going to school and discovering the world around me.

Only much later did I begin to see how even these early experiences were quietly shaping the person I would become.

They formed the background to the next stage of my life — my education and the first signs of a calling that I could not yet fully understand.

Chapter 3: Calling, Education and Early Missteps

My primary schooling took place at the Forest School in the rural parish of the Forest in Guernsey.

Life in a small country parish was simple and closely-knit. The rhythms of island life were familiar and predictable, and the surrounding countryside formed the backdrop of my childhood.

At the age of eleven I was fortunate enough to receive a scholarship to attend Elizabeth College in St Peter Port, the island's main town.

The school had an excellent reputation and a long history. It had been founded in 1563 by Queen Elizabeth I and had educated generations of islanders.

Academically I worked steadily, although I was never outstanding in any particular subject,

and never did well in sport. While others excelled on the cricket field or the football pitch, my interests lay elsewhere.

What I enjoyed most was being in the Royal Air Force section of the school's Combined Cadet Force. I quickly discovered that I loved flying.

At the age of sixteen I obtained my glider pilot's licence, and at seventeen I gained my Private Pilot's Licence — even before I had a driving licence.

I learned to fly in a Tiger Moth, a small biplane that was already becoming something of a classic aircraft.

There was nothing quite like the thrill of taking the aircraft into the sky and looping the loop. It was far more exciting for me than football or cricket.

When the time came to consider further education, the school suggested that I should go to university to study modern languages. That prospect did not appeal to me at all.

At this point a member of my family played a decisive role.

My great-uncle, who was also called John Langlois, served as Secretary to the Attorney General of Guernsey. When he learned of my uncertainty about university, he suggested that I should consider studying law.

The idea immediately appealed to me.

Because I had missed the university application cycle, I began work as a trainee legislative draftsman in the Attorney General's office while studying for the Bachelor of Laws degree of the University of London through correspondence courses.

I enjoyed the legal studies and passed my first-year examinations successfully.

However, during my second year something happened that altered the direction of my life.

On 6 March 1963 I felt a divine call to Christian service overseas. Believing that I would now go to theological college, I suspended my law studies.

But friends urged me to complete the law degree first, pointing out that such training might prove useful in the future. That made no sense to me, but taking their advice, I resumed my law studies. However, the interruption in my studies had disrupted my progress and at the end of my second year I failed two examination papers. This meant repeating the year.

Then another difficulty arose. My mother was diagnosed with cancer. As the eldest child I felt a deep sense of responsibility toward my family.

The strain of those circumstances affected my studies. When I retook the examinations the following year, I passed the two papers I had failed previously — but, to my huge disappointment, I failed the two papers that I had passed the year before.

It was a bitter blow. I was going nowhere. I felt a failure, utterly frustrated and worn out.

Determined to succeed, I attempted the examinations for a third time. But by then the pressures within the family and the emotional strain had taken their toll.

I failed again.

Exhausted and discouraged, I finally abandoned the law degree.

Instead, I enrolled at London Bible College (now known as the London School of Theology) to study theology for the Bachelor of Divinity degree of the University of London, alongside the college’s own internal qualification.

But yet another setback awaited me.

More than seventy percent of theological students in the various colleges at the University of London failed their B.D. examinations, including me. The outcome caused something close to a rebellion within the university system, and the London Bible College withdrew permanently from the programme.

The Dean of Studies at the college reported to the faculty that, since I had already failed the law degree, I was — in his words — “a born failure.”

I was utterly depressed and confused. My law studies had failed. Now my theological studies had failed. “A born failure” - that seemed to sum me up.

I felt a deep sense of uncertainty about my future. It was not simply disappointment at failing the examinations, but a more searching question, whether I had misunderstood my direction in life altogether. Had I really had a divine call to full-time Christian service?

Yet such moments do not define a life — though they may shape it. What appears to be failure at one stage may later prove to be preparation for something quite different. So, I persisted.

I decided to continue my theological studies and completed the college’s internal degree as well as the University of London Diploma in Theology.

But without the full degree qualification I could not teach in theological colleges overseas as I felt I had been called to do.

As my time at college drew to an end, I felt completely uncertain about the future. I had reached the final weeks of my studies with no clear direction at all.

Yet events were about to take an unexpected turn.

Seeking advice in my dilemma, I spoke with the college principal, the Reverend Gilbert Kirby. Before becoming principal he had served as General Secretary of both the Evangelical Alliance of the United Kingdom and the World Evangelical Fellowship (now called the World Evangelical Alliance).

He suggested that I speak with Bruce Nicholls, a former student, who was conducting advanced research at the college. Bruce had recently been appointed Executive Director of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship.

When Bruce and I met, we discovered that we shared a strong concern about the future of evangelical theology and the need to strengthen theological education in many parts of the world.

That conversation changed the course of my life.

Bruce invited me to join him as his assistant in India later that year.

Before leaving for India, however, I had arranged to spend the summer working for a firm of Christian publishers in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in order to gain experience of Christian publishing.

When I arrived at their offices on a Monday morning, I received a shock. They told me that they had changed their plans and that they would not honour the summer employment as agreed some months before.

I suddenly found myself alone in America, nearly four thousand miles from home, without work or income.

Once again, I felt completely lost.

I spent several days going from office to office across the city seeking temporary work.

I even worked a night shift on the production line of a soap factory.

I found myself frequently in prayer, asking God to show me what to do next. I was running dangerously short of money. I had relied on being employed on a salary for three months.

Eventually a lawyer named Roger Law offered me temporary employment in his legal office for the summer. I learnt so much in those three months. My eyes were opened as to what modern professional law practice looked like.

It was an unexpected kindness — and it would lead to further encounters that would shape the next stage of my life.

Chapter 4: A Turning Point

That summer in Grand Rapids proved to be far more significant than I could have imagined at the time.

While I was working temporarily in the law office, I was contacted by Dr. Raymond Buker Sr., a man who was deeply involved in theological education in the United States. He had heard that I would soon be working with Bruce Nicholls in the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship.

Ray Buker invited me to meet him, and during that conversation he introduced me to a remarkable missionary thinker named Dr. Ralph Winter.

Ralph Winter had been working in Central America and had developed an innovative method of training pastors known as Theological Education by Extension, usually abbreviated as TEE.

The idea behind TEE was simple but revolutionary.

In many parts of the world, particularly in developing countries, pastors could not easily leave their homes and congregations in order to attend residential theological colleges. Churches were growing rapidly, but the number of trained leaders was far too small.

Ralph’s solution was to decentralise theological education.

Instead of requiring students to move to a college campus, the training would go to them. Study materials would be prepared in accessible form, and pastors could continue serving their

congregations while studying part-time in their own regions. Local tutors and group meetings would provide guidance and accountability.

For the rapidly expanding churches of Asia, Africa and Latin America, this model had enormous potential.

Ralph encouraged me to explore the possibility of introducing similar programmes in other parts of the world, particularly in Asia and Africa, where the need for trained leadership was immense.

At the time I could not foresee how influential that conversation would later become.

In September 1969 I travelled to India to begin working with Bruce Nicholls.

Bruce was based in Yavatmal in central India, where he was a lecturer at the Union Biblical Seminary. My role was to assist him in developing the work of the WEF Theological Commission.

For three months I travelled throughout India visiting many theological institutions and meeting church leaders.

Resources were usually extremely limited, libraries were small, facilities modest, and financial support uncertain. Yet there was a strong desire among many leaders to strengthen theological education and to ensure that pastors were well equipped to teach the Scriptures faithfully.

During this period the idea of decentralised theological education continued to grow in importance.

If theological training could be taken beyond the walls of residential colleges and made available in local settings, it could reach far greater numbers of church leaders.

After three months in India, I went on to Singapore.

There, working with Dr Bong Rin Ro and other colleagues, we established the first office of what would later become the Asia Theological Association. The aim was to strengthen cooperation among evangelical theological institutions throughout Asia and to encourage high standards in theological education.

It was during this time that I began promoting the concept of Theological Education by Extension within the Asian context.

The idea attracted considerable interest. Many church leaders recognised immediately that such an approach could help address the urgent need for leadership training across large and rapidly growing Christian communities.

The following year similar programmes were introduced in parts of Africa as well.

These developments marked the beginning of a movement that would later expand far beyond anything we could have imagined at the time.

However, events soon took another unexpected turn.

In 1971 the World Evangelical Fellowship experienced a severe financial crisis. Major donors withdrew their support and overnight the organisation lost most of its funding.

Offices closed and staff positions disappeared, including mine.

The work of the World Evangelical Fellowship effectively collapsed in all but name.

Bruce Nicholls and I both believed strongly that the vision of strengthening evangelical theological education around the world should continue. But there was now no financial support for the work.

This crisis forced me to make a crucial decision.

If the work was to continue, I would have to find another way to support myself financially while remaining involved in the global ministry.

The solution I eventually chose was what Christians sometimes call “tentmaking”, that is, supporting one’s ministry through doing secular work. The expression comes from the Apostle Paul, who supported himself through his trade of tent making, while carrying out his missionary ministry. My trade would be law.

And so, after these formative years of international experience, I returned to my home island of Guernsey in order to complete my legal qualifications and begin practising law.

It was a decision that would shape the next stage of my life in ways I could not yet foresee.

Chapter 5: The Tentmaker

Over the next two years I completed my legal training. I graduated in law in London and was called to the English Bar in 1970 and to the Guernsey Bar in 1971.

On 8 December 1971 I opened my own law office.

At the beginning it was extremely modest. The law practice consisted of only two people: my secretary and myself. Yet from the outset the work began to grow steadily.

Guernsey was at that time developing rapidly as an offshore financial centre, international business was increasing and the demand for legal services was expanding alongside it.

My practice grew so quickly that within a short period I found myself inundated with work. Eventually I merged my practice with another firm, and within four years I was serving as both Senior Partner and Managing Partner of that merged practice, Carey Langlois, now called Carey Olsen. Those responsibilities continued for the next twenty-seven years.

During that time the firm expanded dramatically, eventually employing around two hundred members of staff. Looking back, it sometimes felt less like tentmaking and more like managing a very large tent factory.

Law proved to be a demanding but deeply satisfying profession.

Clients entrust their affairs to their lawyer and expect careful preparation, sound judgement and absolute integrity.

The discipline required by legal work helped to shape my life in many ways. It required attention to detail, careful analysis and long hours of work.

At the same time, my legal career was never intended to be an end in itself.

From the beginning it served another - primary - purpose: it provided the means through which I could continue the wider international work of strengthening evangelical theological education and Christian leadership.

This meant that alongside my legal responsibilities I continued to travel internationally, participating in conferences, consultations and meetings connected with theological education.

Life became very busy indeed.

My wife Pat and our two sons, Mark and Paul, bore much of the cost of that demanding schedule. Looking back, I remain deeply grateful for their patience and understanding during those years.

Professional work, international Christian service and, later, political responsibility developed alongside one another. None of them had been carefully planned in advance.

Instead, it unfolded gradually, often through circumstances that I could not have anticipated.

What had begun as a simple decision to become a “tentmaker” slowly developed into a life in which several different responsibilities were interwoven together.

It was the beginning of what I later came to think of as the expanding tent.

Chapter 6: The Expanding Tent

With the growth of international banking in Guernsey, the nature of my legal practice began to change. I became increasingly involved in international work, working with lawyers and financial professionals in major centres such as London, New York, Chicago and Singapore.

Alongside this, I served for over thirty years as a non-executive director of the Guernsey subsidiaries of both Credit Suisse and Hambros Bank (Société Générale), and later as a non-executive director of insurance companies.

One experience from those years stands out clearly in my mind.

In September 2001, I was chairing a conference of Advocates International in Portugal. During the conference, I received a request to approve a proposed investment in a Credit Suisse First Boston fund of which I was a non-executive director.

The proposal had strong support. In addition to the bank itself, four major New York law firms were urging approval. The pressure was considerable. The investment appeared promising and could generate significant profit.

Yet I had concerns.

I knew that if I went against the wishes of a major international bank and several leading law firms, it might well bring my role as a non-executive director to an end. But my responsibility was not to follow pressure, but to exercise independent judgement.

I resolved to do what was right.

On the Sunday, while others from the conference travelled to see the sights of Lisbon, I remained behind. I locked myself in my hotel room, reviewed the papers carefully, and prepared a detailed legal opinion.

In that opinion, I concluded that although the proposal appeared attractive, its success depended on the continued strength of the New York Stock Exchange — something I could not confidently predict. On that basis, I declined to approve the investment.

I sent the email, fully expecting that it might mark the end of my role as a non-executive director. Professional standards and integrity were not negotiable.

The following day passed without response.

On Tuesday afternoon, during a break in the conference, someone switched on a television set. At first it seemed like a film. Then we realised it was not.

We were watching the attacks on the World Trade Center unfold in real time.

The shock was profound. Lives were lost, families devastated, and the world changed in a moment.

In New York, my colleagues at Credit Suisse were in deep shock. The Swiss bank UBS, whose offices were in the Twin Towers, lost many of their staff. Their counterparts — people known to those I worked with — had been killed.

It was a sobering reminder of how fragile and uncertain life can be, and how quickly events can overtake even the most carefully considered plans.

In that context, my earlier decision took on a different light. It was not a matter of foresight, but simply an acknowledgement that we do not know what the future holds.

My career as a non-executive director did not come to an end. In fact, I was later invited to serve in similar roles elsewhere.

Looking back, I see this not as a personal achievement, but as another instance of being guided to act in accordance with what is right, even when the outcome is uncertain.

Chapter 7: Public Service

The expansion of my work did not remain confined to the legal profession and international Christian service. It extended into public life as well.

In 1980 I was elected as a Deputy in the States of Guernsey, the island's parliament.

This marked the beginning of a new dimension of responsibility — one that brought different challenges, different expectations and a wider sphere of influence.

Public service is often spoken of in idealistic terms. It is presented as an opportunity to contribute to the common good, to improve society and to act in the interests of others. All of that is true and admirable.

But politics is also demanding and, at times, difficult and messy. It involves competing interests, strong opinions and decisions that are not always popular.

I entered public life with the same underlying conviction that had shaped the rest of my life: that I should seek to act faithfully and with integrity in whatever responsibilities were entrusted to me and that Christians following Christ were well qualified to be leaders of others.

Over the years I was asked to serve in a number of roles.

One of my early responsibilities was as President of the States of Guernsey Committee for Horticulture at a time when the island's

once-dominant tomato growing industry was in serious decline. Difficult decisions had to be taken about the future of an industry that had been central to the island's economy for many decades.

I later served as President of the Civil Defence Committee. During that period the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1986 created widespread concern across Europe. Even in a small island community such as Guernsey, we had to consider carefully the implications for public safety and preparedness.

My longest and most demanding responsibility came when I served as President of the States of Guernsey Housing Authority for ten years. Housing is always a sensitive subject in any community because it affects the daily lives of families and individuals.

One difficult issue at the time I was President was the allocation of subsidised public housing. These homes were intended for those in genuine need, yet it became clear that some properties were occupied by individuals who were no longer in need of such assistance.

The decision was therefore taken to reallocate those homes to families who genuinely required support. It was the right decision — but not a popular one among those who were affected.

In one instance resentment over these decisions led to an arson attack on my family home.

It was a sobering experience for my wife Pat and our two sons. It reminded me very clearly that public service sometimes carries personal risks.

It was not an abstract consequence of public decision-making. It was immediate and personal.

I remember standing outside the house afterwards, aware that a line had been crossed. Public responsibility had entered private life.

It was a sobering moment.

Yet the principle remained clear. If public office is to have integrity, decisions must be made according to what is right, not according to what is most convenient or popular.

I also served for ten years as President of the Island Development Committee, where we undertook major reforms of the island's planning system. Those decisions would shape the physical development of the island for many years to come.

In addition, I served for a decade on the Advisory and Finance Committee —the island's central governing body — including six years as its Vice-President.

Looking back, those twenty-four years in public office were demanding but deeply formative. They required careful judgement, resilience and a willingness to make decisions that would not always please everyone.

Throughout those years I tried to remember that positions of responsibility are temporary. They are opportunities to serve, not positions to be possessed.

Public life therefore became another strand in the expanding tent of my life — alongside my legal work and my continuing international involvement in Christian leadership.

Each of these responsibilities brought its own challenges. Yet together they formed part of the same pilgrimage: learning what it means to serve faithfully wherever one is placed.

Chapter 8: The World Evangelical Alliance

My involvement with the World Evangelical Alliance (then called the World Evangelical Fellowship) began in 1969, on the day when I graduated from the London Bible College at the age of twenty-six.

My role working with Bruce Nicholls was modest. I was his Administrative Assistant.

For someone who had grown up in a small rural parish in Guernsey, this was my first real exposure to the international world of Christian leadership.

The vision was clear. We wanted to strengthen evangelical theological education around the world and encourage a renewed commitment to biblical theology in many countries and cultures.

However, the work quickly faced serious difficulties.

As described earlier, in 1971 the Fellowship experienced a catastrophic financial crisis when several major donors withdrew their support. Offices closed and many staff positions disappeared. The organisation effectively collapsed in all but name.

Although the institutional structure had weakened, the vision remained alive. Gradually the work of the Fellowship was rebuilt.

In 1980 I was invited to serve on the International Council of the Fellowship and was appointed Council Secretary and Honorary Treasurer. I served in both of those roles for twenty-eight years.

In total I served on the Council for forty-five years, longer than anyone since the organisation was founded in London in 1846.

During those years I worked with many remarkable Christian leaders from around the world. One of the most important was David Howard, who served as International Director of the Fellowship. Through David, Billy Graham was kept abreast of the work of the Fellowship.

The early decades were not easy ones. Financial resources were limited and the organisational structure was fragile.

David often remarked that my role during those years had been to act as an anchor, helping to steady the organisation during turbulent times. It was a privilege to play a small part in sustaining the work.

At one particularly difficult moment in 1982, when David was appointed International Director, I was able to provide financial support that allowed the worldwide work of the Fellowship to continue for an entire year. It was not my money. It was money provided to me by God through my “tent-making” work. It has been a privilege to be able to do that.

Over the decades the organisation gradually strengthened and expanded.

When I first became involved in 1969, the Fellowship represented approximately one hundred million evangelical Christians around

the world. Today the World Evangelical Alliance represents more than six hundred and fifty million believers.

In recognition of my long service, I was appointed lifetime Council Member Emeritus of the WEA International Council.

Titles themselves are somewhat superfluous. What mattered to me was the opportunity to help strengthen cooperation among evangelical Christians around the world and to encourage the theological foundations of pastors and church leaders.

My involvement with the World Evangelical Alliance formed one of the central threads of my entire life.

From a small beginning in 1969 as an Administrative Assistant, it developed into a lifetime of service alongside Christian leaders from every continent.

The work requires patience, careful listening and a willingness to understand very different cultures and perspectives. It also requires an enormous amount of administration. During my twenty-eight years as Council Secretary I drafted countless sets of minutes for meetings held around the world.

Yet through it all, the purpose remained the same: to encourage the global Church to remain faithful to the Gospel and to work together in unity wherever possible.

It was another part of the pilgrim path on which my Shepherd had quietly been leading me for many years.

Chapter 9: Advocates International

Alongside my work with the World Evangelical Alliance and my professional and political responsibilities, another opportunity for international Christian service came through an organisation called Advocates International.

Advocates International is a global network of Christian lawyers, judges and legal scholars.

Today the network includes around 30,000 legal professionals from many countries. Its vision is to see:

“all peoples thriving in hope, peace and justice, within societies committed to freedom of religion or belief and the rule of law with integrity.”

I was first approached in 1992 by Sam Ericsson, an American lawyer who had a strong vision for bringing Christian lawyers together internationally in order to strengthen justice and integrity within legal systems.

Sam asked whether I would help him establish the organisation.

I agreed to do so and became one of its founding directors. Later I was privileged to serve as its chairman for two terms.

The work of Advocates International brought together lawyers and judges from many countries who shared a common desire to

see legal systems operate with fairness, transparency and respect for human dignity.

One particularly significant experience during this period took place in 1997.

Together with Sam Ericsson I travelled to Beijing in order to meet officials of the State Administration for Religious Affairs in China.

These meetings were conducted in a spirit of courtesy, mutual respect and much human warmth. Our purpose was not to argue or confront but to build understanding. This was true on both sides.

We explained the nature of Christian belief and discussed how Christian communities can contribute positively to the stability and moral life of society. Faithful Christians follow Jesus' example of going around doing good – not running a country.

One question we raised concerned the possibility of Christians meeting together in private homes for prayer and Bible study without the need for State consent.

After careful discussion the Director of the State Administration indicated that such gatherings would be acceptable provided that two conditions were respected: there should be no foreigners present and there should not be more than twelve people present.

This clarification proved helpful to Christians all over China.

What impressed me most during these discussions was the importance of relationships.

Formal structures alone rarely open doors. Trust develops through patient conversation, sincerity and mutual respect.

Chapter 10: Care for Children

The visit to Beijing in August 1997 unexpectedly opened the door to another area of service that would become most significant.

Four months later, in December 1997, I was approached by Robert Glover, who had been deeply moved by the conditions he had seen in Chinese orphanages in a BBC television documentary.

Large numbers of children, many of them with disabilities, were growing up in institutions

where it was extremely difficult for them to experience the care and stability of family life.

Robert believed that there must be a better way.

His vision was both simple and radical. Instead of children spending their childhoods

in large state orphanages, they should grow up in families.

To bring about such a change required far more than goodwill. It required trust, credibility and close cooperation with the Chinese authorities responsible for child welfare.

Because of my previous contact with Chinese officials, Robert asked whether I would

help him establish the organisation that could develop this work.

Care for Children was established as a charity in Guernsey, where Robert

was working as a childcare professional for the States of Guernsey.

Robert and his family moved to China the following year to begin the work on the ground.

The first pilot project was launched in Shanghai with the cooperation of the city

authorities. The aim was to demonstrate that children who had been living in

institutional care could flourish when placed in loving family environments.

The early years required patience, perseverance and a lot of hard work.

Training programmes were developed for social workers and foster parents alike,

helping them understand how children who had experienced institutional care could

be supported emotionally and practically within families.

Gradually the results became clear.

Children who had previously lived in orphanages began to thrive when they were placed

in loving families. They developed emotionally, socially and intellectually in ways that

had been impossible within large institutions.

As confidence grew, the programme expanded.

The work spread beyond Shanghai to other provinces, and eventually the main office

was moved to Beijing so that the programme could develop nationally in cooperation

with the central authorities.

By 2018 the impact had become extraordinary, more than we could have ever imagined.

In just twenty years more than one million orphaned children had been moved from state institutions into family-based care.

Over eighty per cent of State orphanages in China are empty. Today those buildings are used primarily for day care and therapy for children with special needs.

For me, this work brought together many strands of my life.

My legal experience helped in understanding governance and institutional structures.

My international contacts helped open doors for cooperation. And my Christian

convictions reinforced the simple belief that every child deserves the opportunity

to grow up within the care of a family.

What made the experience most real was not the statistics (one million) but the children themselves.

To see just one child who had once lived in an institution begin to respond to the stability and affection of loving family life was deeply moving.

None of this was contemplated when I travelled to China in August 1997.

Once again it was another example of how the pilgrim path unfolds step by step.

I remain deeply grateful to have played a part in a work that has brought hope and stability to so many children.

More information about this remarkable work can be found at:

www.careforchildren.com

There is also a documentary describing the work at:

www.childrenofshanghai.com

Chapter 11: Burundi – Unity, Holiness and the Next Generation

The journey that had taken me through law, politics, international Christian work and China did not end there. It continued, as it often does, into new and unexpected places.

One of the most recent has been my involvement in Burundi,

a small country in Central Africa that has endured decades of civil conflict and deep social divisions. According to the United Nations it is the poorest country in the world.

For many years Burundi suffered cycles of violence between ethnic groups. Communities were deeply wounded and trust had often been broken.

Churches existed throughout the country, but they frequently worked separately

from one another and many pastors had very limited access to theological training

or Christian resources.

Out of the blue I received an email from Edmund Gakiza, the General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals of Burundi inviting me to lead pastors' conferences in Burundi.

In April and August 2025, and again in January 2026, I conducted a series of twenty-one-day conferences for pastors in every province of Burundi.

Many pastors travelled long distances to attend.

What I encountered everywhere was a deep hunger to learn and to serve their communities faithfully.

My message to them focused on three simple themes.

First, the centrality of Jesus Christ — His life, His death on the Cross,

and the meaning of the Gospel.

Second, the importance of holiness in the life of Christian leaders.

Churches can only be strong when their leaders live lives of integrity

and provide an example to others.

Third, the importance of unity among Christians.

Burundi had suffered greatly from division in its national life.

The Church had an opportunity to demonstrate a different path —

one of reconciliation, cooperation and mutual respect.

The teaching given at these conferences was translated into Kirundi and

printed so that every pastor could take a copy home.

I also sensed that pastors needed practical resources for preaching.

For this reason I prepared around one hundred sermon outlines which were

given to the Association of Evangelicals of Burundi so that pastors could

adapt them as they wished for use in their own congregations.

The response from the pastors was deeply encouraging.

Leaders from many different denominations —Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic and others — began meeting together

and discussing how they could work cooperatively for the good of the country.

One particularly remarkable development followed.

In March 2026 the Chief Commissioner of Police of Burundi invited church leaders to meet with him in order to develop better relationships between the churches and the police.

After decades of civil conflict, the possibility of cooperation between

church leaders and national authorities in strengthening peace and

community stability was a significant step.

Another practical challenge soon became evident.

Many pastors lived in rural areas without electricity.

Many worked in ordinary employment during the day and returned home

in the evening to darkness, making it extremely difficult for them

to read the Bible or prepare sermons.

To address this simple but important need, each pastor attending the

conferences was given a small solar-powered lamp.

It was a modest gift, but it allowed them to read the Scriptures and

prepare their teaching after sunset.

During my visits I also became increasingly aware of the importance

of reaching the next generation.

I therefore began preparing Bible story books designed for parents

to read with their young children.

One book contains eighty Bible stories intended for children aged

three to five years. A second book is designed for toddlers and

includes sounds and actions to make the stories interactive.

These books have already been translated into several African languages

so that families can use them in their own communities.

Another concern that grew in my heart during these visits was the

situation of the Batwa people, sometimes known as Pygmies,

one of the most marginalised communities in Central Africa.

Many Batwa children have little or no access to education.

Helping to create educational opportunities for Batwa children in Burundi,

and in neighbouring countries such as Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic

Republic of Congo, has become another project close to my heart.

Looking back over these visits to Burundi, one moment remains especially vivid.

In one village I met four children — Jacob, Valentin, Beniella and Chabella.

They were poorly dressed and possessed little by the standards of the world,

yet they greeted me with warmth and joy.

We had a photograph together.

When I returned some months later, one of the children, Valentin,

ran towards me and embraced me enthusiastically.

That simple moment touched me deeply.

It reminded me that the most meaningful part of any encounter

is often found in simple human relationships.

Coming from a small rural parish in Guernsey I had been led to many different

parts of the world, meeting people in circumstances ranging

from positions of great influence to communities living in

deep poverty.

Yet everywhere the lesson has been the same.

People are people.

Whether rich or poor, powerful or unknown,

we all stand in need of grace.

And once again I was reminded that the Shepherd often leads us

into places we never imagined — not for our own importance,

but so that we may serve others along the way.

Final Chapter: The Journey and the Shepherd

As I look back over the years described in these pages, one theme stands out clearly.

I did not plan my life in advance.

From a childhood in a rural parish in Guernsey, the path has led through many different experiences: education, failure and disappointment (“a born failure” sixty years ago), unexpected opportunities, professional life in law, public service, and involvement with Christian leaders across many parts of the world.

Looking back, the pattern is easier to see than it was at the time.

At each stage there were decisions to make, uncertainties to face, and responsibilities to carry. Yet again and again I found that the next step became clear just when it was needed.

The image that has guided my life from childhood remains the same one that first captured my imagination when my mother read the story of the shepherd and the lost sheep when I was six years old.

Sheep do not always know the path ahead.

They wander. They become distracted. They sometimes lose their way.

Yet the shepherd knows where he is leading them.

He knows where to find them.

Many times, I have felt uncertain about the future, and whether I was making the right decisions. Yet when I look back, I can see that the path was never random.

I discovered repeatedly that guidance often comes gradually rather than suddenly. The next step becomes visible only after the previous one has been taken.

Another lesson has also become clear.

Wherever I have travelled — whether among political leaders, lawyers, pastors, or children in remote villages — the same truth remains.

People are people.

Cultures may differ and circumstances may vary greatly, but human needs remain the same.

Every person longs for meaning, for dignity, and for hope.

For me, the Christian faith has always provided the foundation for that hope. It reminds me that no life is insignificant, and that each person is valued by the God who created us.

The responsibilities I have carried were never ends in themselves. They were opportunities to serve, to learn from others along the way and were rarely straightforward.

Yet my Shepherd has remained faithful.

That is the conviction that has sustained me through many decades.

As I write these closing words, I am conscious that the road ahead is not finished. There are still new paths to explore and new opportunities to serve.

But if there is one thought I would leave with you, it is this:

Stay close to the Shepherd.

You do not need to have everything mapped out.

You do not need to feel ready or qualified.

You simply need to be willing to follow.

The path may not always be clear. There will be uncertainty. There will be difficulty.

But you will not walk it alone.

For me, this is the way I stay close to my Shepherd.

Each day begins quietly — praying and reading the Bible with daily devotional notes which bring clarity and application to what I read.

Then comes the activity and noise of the day — but with direction.

At the end of the day, I write a few lines in my diary, as I have done for more than seventy years, recording my mistakes, but each day bringing a new opportunity to begin again.

Tomorrow is a blank page.

You do not know what it holds.

But your Shepherd does.

So go forward with confidence.

You are in safe hands.