

# THE LAST WORD

## Let Me Tell You About Will Orr

By Jamie Buckingham

Every time I get discouraged and talk about moving to an isolated cabin and living as a hermit, my wife reminds me of Dr. Will Orr.

I don't like being reminded of Will. I love him and respect him, but gnash my teeth every time Jackie gets into one of those, "If-Will-Orr doesn't-give-up,-why-should-you?" moods.

One of the reasons I get irritated is he is 30 years older than I am. It's not fair to compare me with old folks—especially those who are smarter, wittier, braver and ten times more energetic.

A native of Charlotte and the son of an evangelist with the Associate Reformed Presbyterian (ARP) church, Will became a United Presbyterian minister and for 18 years was president of Westminster College at New Wilmington, Pa. In 1967 he retired and moved to an isolated beach cabin a few miles from where I live in Melbourne, Fla.

But Will did not equate retirement with being "shelved." Before going to Westminster College he had been pastor of a large Presbyterian Church in Des Moines. Once he settled into his beach house, the old shepherd instincts went to work again. He was soon up and down the beach, looking for wandering sheep.

They were all over the place. What everyone else thought was a deserted stretch of beach turned out to be a hiding place for a lot of folks who had moved to that section of the world to escape.

Many of them were running from themselves. Others were lonely. Most bruised by the world.

"Hi, I'm Will Orr and we're hav-

ing church in our house next Sunday. Why don't you all come?"

And they did. Several hundred of them. I got involved, mainly because I was intrigued with this fiesty old Presbyterian who refused to give up.

His living room filled up. Will finally convinced his motly group of beachcombers they should build a church building and call it "The Chapel by the Sea." They did.

I got to preach the dedication sermon. The air conditioner caught on fire that morning. The audito-

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**When a man is fired up with the Holy Spirit, there's simply no such thing as retirement.**

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rium filled with smoke and I thought it was another Pentecost. Will said no, that was just the smell of fired-up Presbyterians.

One Sunday, shortly after that, Dr. Orr collapsed in the pulpit. Everyone thought he had a heart attack and he was rushed to the hospital and put on an electrocardiogram monitor. The doctors determined he was okay, but wanted to keep him for a few days of observation.

Typically, Will began complaining. They had put him in a room with a man who smoked. The nurse said it was the only available room. Will said something that sounded like "Harumph!" which is Presbyterian for "get out of my way." He picked up the EKG machine with wires attached to his chest, and dressed in his hospital gown, marched down the stairs to the

hospital administrator's office.

Barging in he said, "If you don't get me a room with clean air, I'm going home. And I'm taking this infernal machine with me."

Three minutes later he was in a private room.

That's the kind of man he is. And that's the reason I don't like my wife comparing me with him.

Maybe I should compare her with Will's wife, Eloise. When they retired and Will was going up and down the beach evangelizing, Eloise was out teaching water-skiing to youngsters—at the age of 70!

She finally had to quit after breaking her leg when she hit the dock while being towed behind Will's boat.

With the beach evangelized and the church built, Will turned things over to a young pastor, and he and Eloise moved to Flat Rock, N.C. He was 76 and it was time to retire.

But the Presbyterian Church at Due West, S.C. (100 miles away) needed an interim pastor. And then the Pinecrest Presbyterian Church near Hendersonville was without a pastor. . . .

Then, in June of this year, the Associate Reformed Presbyterians elected him moderator—the highest office in the church.

"I'll give you the best I have," he said. "But it would not be enough without the power of the Holy Spirit."

There was talk, a few years ago, that the ARP's were "on the way out." Ha! Even if they were, they're not now.

And if you don't believe me, ask my wife. She'll be glad to tell you about Will Orr. ☞