

## Francis Burleigh Willard Sr.



F. Burleigh Willard Sr., 91, passed away Wednesday, March 16, 2011, in the care of The Christian Village and Memorial Home Service Hospice.

A celebration of his life will be held at 5 p.m. Saturday, March 26, at Holland Barry & Bennett Funeral Home in Lincoln with visitation two hours before the service.

Burleigh was born Feb. 3, 1920, in Fowler, Kansas. He married Amy Hankins of Ravenna, Nebraska in 1942. They served together as Free Methodist missionaries in the Dominican Republic for six years before she died, after the birth of their third child.

In 1952, Burleigh married Alma Gregory of Bluffton, Missouri. After their son was born, they returned to the Dominican Republic with their four children. In 1959, the Willard family transferred to Nogales Bible School in Nogales, Arizona, where Burleigh and Alma remained until retirement in 1985.

Burleigh's main role throughout his 40 years as a missionary was to train Latin American young people for the ministry. He was also instrumental in writing and translating materials into Spanish for use in Latin American Bible schools and churches.

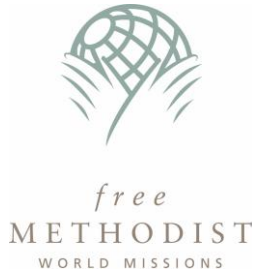
After retiring, Burleigh and Alma lived in the Phoenix for about fifteen years then moved to the Glencroft Christian Retirement Village. Alma passed away in 2003. The following year, Burleigh moved to a son's home in Vernon Hills, Illinois, for a year. After that he resided in a daughter's home in Lincoln, Illinois, where he lived until entering The Christian Village four months ago. During those 5 years, he was received warmly as a part of Neighbors to Nations Community Church. He also published five books, including a devotional book, and two historical fiction books featuring biblical characters.

He attended Central College in McPherson, Kansas and graduated from Greenville College in Greenville, Illinois. He also earned a Doctor of Ministry in Theology degree and a master's degree in Spanish literature.

He is survived by a brother, Johnnie (Noralee) Willard of Stockton, CA, and his four children: Celia Rose Milsagle of Lincoln, Francis Burleigh "Frank" (Jean) Willard Jr., of Littleton, CO; Emily Sue (Bob) Fairbanks of Arlington, TX; and Gregory Philip "Phil" (Linda) Willard of Lake Barrington, IL. He also has nine grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Preceding him in death were a sister, Opal Ruth Willard and a brother, George Archibald "Archie" Willard.

Memorials may be sent to The Christian Village, 1507 7<sup>th</sup> Street or Free Methodist World Missions, PO Box 535002, Indianapolis IN 46253-5002.



## In Tribute of **Rev. Francis Burleigh Willard** February 3, 1920 – March 16, 2011

Free Methodist World Missions is deeply grateful for Rev. Francis Burleigh Willard's years of faithful and dedicated service to the Free Methodist Church, the majority of those years to the people of Latin America. We celebrate his life – a life used of God to touch the lives of countless others.

While a student at Greenville College (Illinois), Burleigh was riding a bus from Chicago to Greenville when a lady asked, "Are you a preacher?" He responded that he was a ministerial student. She replied, "I knew it ... I could tell you were different from the rest of the people on this bus."

Rev. Francis Burleigh Willard was first appointed to the Dominican Republic and began his service as a missionary in 1945. He was dean of the biblical seminary in Santiago, the only Protestant seminary in the Dominican Republic, for several years. He organized student evangelistic teams to tour the island and open new fields. As conference evangelist, Burleigh visited mission stations and new work throughout the island. Burleigh was also director of the Macedonian League for tithing. As members of this league, the Christian nationals learned to give of their first fruits, donating the income from handcrafts, cows, chickens and coconut trees to the work of the church.

Burleigh's first wife, Amy, passed away in the Dominican Republic in 1951. In 1952, he married Alma, whom he knew from Central Christian College of Kansas (McPherson, Kansas).

From 1952 to 1953 he served in Texas with Latin American ministries. He was pastor of the Houston First Church because there was a shortage of pastors at the time. The family then returned to the Dominican Republic.

In 1959 the Willards moved to Nogales, Arizona, where Burleigh served as principal of Nogales Bible School, a training school for ministerial students from Mexico. The Bible school moved to Hermosillo, Mexico, in 1965 and was operated by national personnel. Burleigh became superintendent of Mexican Missions, visiting the several Free Methodist churches in Mexico.

In December 1963, a committee was organized to begin translation work from English to Spanish. Burleigh and Alma worked with the literature committee on discipleship materials, a Spanish version of the *Free Methodist* and other denominational publications. The first issue of *El Mensajero Metodista Libre* (The Free Methodist Messenger) came off the press in April 1964. For the first time, widely-scattered Spanish-speaking Free Methodists had a common bond through literature. Through the efforts of the committee, the first Spanish *Free Methodist Discipline* was also printed in 1971.

The Willards endeavored to impact more nationals and in the mid-1960s began directing a training program for lay workers through short-term institutes on the district level and in local churches. This way they were reaching a much larger number of students than they could in a Bible school setting. They touched people who would not get any training otherwise.

Missionary colleague Doane Bonney writes, “Ruth and I were assigned to Santiago, Dominican Republic, and arrived there in 1958 where I was to take Burleigh Willard’s place as director of the Instituto Evangelico in that city. Later, as Area Assistant for Latin America, I again had a chance to work directly with Burleigh as I visited the Free Methodist work in Mexico.

“Burleigh became an expert in the spoken and written Spanish language. I do not think any of the rest of us ‘ex patriots’ or ‘gringos’ came anywhere near his level of ability in Spanish. He had a wide vocabulary, but, perhaps even more important, he knew how to put the words together, when to use reflexive forms and a whole lot more of the ‘finer points’ in the language of Cervantes.

“Besides being an expert linguist, Burleigh was also a student of God’s Word and an excellent teacher. You could be confident that his teaching would be in the Wesleyan tradition and that when his students went out in the harvest fields of the world, they would build congregations grounded in the truths as revealed in God’s Word. A whole generation of pastors in the Dominican Republic, as well as in Mexico, got their training under Burleigh’s diligent care.”

Burleigh and Alma retired in 1985, Burleigh having served as a missionary for approximately 40 years. Alma died in November 2003.

In his retirement, Burleigh pursued his interest in writing. He had previously written several Spanish textbooks, as well as a novel. He went on to write two more novels, a family history and other inspirational books, including a devotional book co-authored with his oldest daughter, Celia Willard Milsagle.

On March 16, 2011, Burleigh Willard went to be with his Savior, becoming part of the rich legacy of those who have devoted years of faithful service through Free Methodist World Missions. His decision to follow Jesus to the ends of the earth has borne eternal fruit.

Dr. Art Brown  
Free Methodist World Missions  
March 23, 2011

**Tribute to F. Burleigh Willard Sr.**  
**by Muriel Ablard**

Burleigh Willard was an outstanding Christian gentleman. We met him in 1985 in Phoenix and stayed in communication. As a retired pastor, he shared much wisdom and humor with us. He displayed a love of God's Word, God's people, and the mission field, wherever that was.

I have fond memories of his wife providing tea to sip as he taught the Friendship Sunday School class in the prayer chapel. His outstanding command of languages was shared gently with his students. Gentle laughter was a gift he displayed with the local church and anyone who visited his Glendale home.

I am honored to have known this great man of God and Christian leader. His recent books are a tribute to his godly gift of communication and love of church history. What a tremendous legacy.

*Muriel Ablard was pastor for several years of the church of which Burleigh and Alma became members during their retirement.*

Dear Celia & Family of Burleigh Willard,

Thank you for letting us know of your Dad's homegoing. I think I go back all the way to the time Burleigh sang bass in the Central College Quartet at Missouri Campmeetings and Annual Conferences in the late 1930's. He gave inspiration and impetus to my desire to attend College and sing in a male quartet, which was fulfilled not only at Central and Greenville Colleges, but also at Asbury Seminary. And I'm still singing in male quartets here at Light and Life Park!

Over our lifetimes, God gave us many opportunities of ministry together. One of my earliest memories was a humorous moment in the Dominican Republic when Burleigh was driving one of the school buses transporting members of the FMY "Quisqueya Para Cristo" Team from the airport to Santiago. We had to stop multiple times at military checkpoints requiring Burleigh to identify himself by name, which he gave them as FRANCISCO WEELARD. I asked "Burleigh, have you changed your name?" He laughingly replied, "Oh, no--but if I used "Burleigh", we'd never get through the checkpoints. Francisco gives them no problems!"

I'm sure that when your Dad reached the Pearly Gates, he didn't have to worry about "proper identification". They were expecting him and the Savior, Himself, welcomed him with, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant! Enter thou into the joys of thy Lord!"

Sending our love and prayers,

Bishop & Mrs. Robert F. Andrews  
(Bob & "Jimmie")

## Remembering Uncle Burleigh

My first acquaintance with Burleigh Willard came on a summer day in Missouri when my parents informed me, during a visit to Grandma and Grandpa Gregory's home, that Aunt Alma would be getting married soon. The wedding would be in the little-used parlor of my grandparents' house, and I could attend. That was neat. I had probably attended weddings before, but never in a house and never with the reception on the lawn. I learned that along with a new uncle came a collection of new cousins, but that didn't mean much until later.

My next memory of Uncle Burleigh was that he and his family got to live a really exotic life, in a country called the Dominican Republic, that I had never heard of before. We enjoyed getting letters from Apartado 86 in Santiago and seeing pictures and asking questions when they were home on furlough. Furloughs bring to mind the fact that when Uncle Burleigh and family came to visit, we had lots of fun. With these about the only set of cousins our own age, we really looked forward to visits from the Willard-G's as we came to call them, following the Dominican name custom. Together we pulled pranks that probably embarrassed our parents, and laughed sometimes until we cried.

But as I got older, I discovered that Uncle Burleigh brought so much more into our family than just his fun family. He knew so much about things that I knew so little about: desert flora in Arizona, meanings of Greek words in the New Testament, history and culture of Mexico, stories of life transformation in other cultures. Along with that knowledge was a quiet but passionate commitment to Jesus Christ and His work. I wanted to spend time with him, because I always left knowing more, and also wanting to be a better person.

As years went by I came to learn how much other people appreciated my Uncle Burleigh. Working in the New York City area to prepare Hispanic pastors for ordination, I was able to locate copies of his books *Superabundante Gracia* and *Nuestra Herencia Espiritual*. The students devoured them like water in the desert.

My last visit with Uncle Burleigh was in the spring of 2008, when Celia so graciously drove him down from Lincoln to meet me for lunch at McDonalds and about an hour of reminiscence and news. We talked about experiences in Greenville, New York, the Dominican, Arizona, Mexico and more. His eyes grew brighter as he talked about the next book he hoped to finish, a fictional look at the Apostle Paul through the eyes of a nephew. I can tell you that *this* nephew was eager to see the book and so delighted that it appeared while he was still living. It is on my nightstand now, almost finished. As I finish reading the book, I can imagine Uncle Burleigh chatting with St. Paul to fill in the details he couldn't quite get right in time for publication. I look forward to discussing it with him on the other side. In the meantime, may the Spirit that gave such wonderful wisdom and winsome joy to Uncle Burleigh share more of that with me, and with all who have known and loved this man of God.

Dwight T Gregory, Midwest City, Oklahoma     Mar 24, 2011