



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on April 18, 2023

Missionary Evangelist George Verwer Passed on Friday

Those who knew him best called George Verwer “the preeminent North American missionary statesman of the last 60 years.” Lawrence Tong, director of Operation Mobilization (OM) International — the mission that Verwer founded and ran for decades — [said](#), “I believe he was God’s man for the 20th century, who changed the course of modern missions.”

Born in New Jersey in 1938, Verwer accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior at a Billy Graham crusade in New York City at age 14, and never looked back.



George Verwer

He evangelized his high school, converting more than a hundred of his schoolmates to Christ. Upon graduating high school, he and two friends sold most of their worldly goods, bought a beat-up van, and traveled to Mexico where they gave out more than 20,000 gospel tracts.

Verwer’s enthusiasm for the mission led him to being called driven by “Verwer’s fervor.” The ministry grew internationally. He got caught smuggling Bibles into the Communist Soviet Union and was deported. Upon reflection, he redoubled his efforts, which led to the ministry buying, refurbishing, and then sending out five ships to the Global South where the gospel was gaining strength and momentum.

The ships would arrive at a port and hold book fairs, which were attended by millions.

Verwer changed the face of international missions by enlisting and inviting young students to go on short-term mission trips. Said Andrew Scott, president of OM USA:

When the mission agencies of the late fifties were looking for highly trained individuals with seminary degrees who would commit to going for a lifetime, George invited young people who loved Jesus to come for a summer. This was new. This was different.

Thousands came.

OM became one of the largest mission organizations of the 20th century, sending those thousands to the Global South — Africa, Latin America, and the developing parts of Asia — reaching millions in the process.

OM currently has 3,300 adult workers from 134 countries working in 147 countries. And the ripple effect has been enormous: An estimated 300 other mission agencies have been started as a result of contact with Verwer’s OM or launched by former OMers.

The first ship purchased by Verwer was refurbished and renamed *Logos* (Word). It ultimately sailed 230,000 nautical miles, traveled to 250 different ports, and ministered to an estimated 6.5 million people. The ministry added another four ships over time which, all told, touched the lives of an estimated 50 million people.

In its announcement of Verwer’s passing, OM International noted:



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From the early days of leading college mission trips to Mexico, to dreaming of a ship to spread the Good News along the world's coasts; through his passion for books, real relationships and holistic care for the least reached, George challenged and inspired those he met to share God's love; truly practicing what he preached with his own radical life.

Verwer's close friend, Joseph D'Souza, Archbishop of the Anglican Good Shepherd Church of India, grieved and celebrated his passing:

Losing George is losing my life's mentor and my closest personal friend in the ministry. It is also an inspiration of a life lived well and a legacy now made complete with the words we all long to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

I can't wait to see him again. In the meantime, with God's help, let's commit to living our lives more like he lived his own.

Until the end of his life, Verwer continued to exude great enthusiasm for the Lord's work:

I'm still mega-motivated to see everyone in the world being given the gospel at least once ... [to] have the opportunity to hear about saving grace through our Lord Jesus Christ, and I hope I can, right to my last breath, continue to share that message.

He drew his last breath last Friday, April 14, at the age of 84.



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