

# Lorne Sanny and the Church



*by Jim Downing*

My first in depth conversation with Lorne Sanny took place in June of 1956 on a six hour drive from Schroon Lake to New York City. Dawson Trotman had drowned four days earlier.

On this night drive Lorne told me he knew he would some day inherit the mantle of leading The Navigators but had not expected it would happen this soon.

He went on to say that he had already decided that instead of being a one man operation it was going to be a team operation and that God had given him the names of the people He wanted on the team and that I was one of them.

We discussed what I would do. He used baseball terminology to explain that a utility outfielder was a player who filled in wherever needed and that is how I would start out.

Four months I retired from the Navy and moved the family to Colorado Springs.

A couple of years later he asked me to free myself of all departmental responsibilities and be available to him full time.

For most of the next 20 years, when we were both in town, we had a standing appointment at 1:30 every afternoon for prayer, fellowship and to coordinate our activities.

## **Humble Servant**

I learned much from this great man who was seven years younger than me. Several months ago I began writing a manuscript called. "Thirty Years at the Right Hand of Two Great Men: Dawson Trotman and Lorne Sanny." As I checked what I had written with Lorne he said, "Don't change a thing except the title." This humble servant of the Lord felt uncomfortable with being called a great man.

After moving to Colorado Springs both of our families attended the Bible Presbyterian church on the eastern part of Colorado Springs but in 1958 when the Evangelical Free Church moved to the west side of town our families joined the church where the Lorne and Lucy have been members for 47 years.

Lorne solidified his relationship with the Lord after hearing an evangelist at the church Lucy got him to attend. He always had reverence and respect for this God-ordained institution.

During the last 47 years he has spoken at the morning services of the Evangelical Free Church more than 60 times. His messages have always been both powerful and practical and well received by the congregation. When the pastor could not be present Lorne was always the favorite to preach.

His affirmations were not always what he expected. After one morning service Mrs. Bessie Skinner, Betty Skinner's mother, told him she always looked forward to having him speak at the morning service and that he was her favorite preacher. She went on, "Do you know why? Because you always quit on time at 12.00."

## **Home Run**

In our travels together Lorne was often called on to speak without much advance notice.

One day I told him he was the only speaker I knew who, when asked to pinch hit, always hit a home run. I asked him what his secret was. He said that he had concluded that all of us were pretty much alike with similar problems and struggles. He said he would just stand up and talk about his own struggles and challenges and what he was doing to overcome them.

His transparency allowed him to identify with others in an unusual way.

Shortly after he had served with The Navigators for 25 years we had an anniversary celebration. As Lorne spoke he quoted from his journal about the first afternoon he moved into Dawson Trotman's home. It read, "Cleaned out the garage. Having trouble with Scripture memory." He then read from his journal 25 years later. He had written, "Cleaned out the garage. Having trouble with Scripture memory."

In his seven years leading the Counselor Training and Follow Up program for Billy Graham, much of his contact time was with pastors. They often asked him how Billy Graham related to the church. Often they would say, "What the new convert needs is the church." Lorne developed a stock reply. "What the new Christian needs is fellowship in an atmosphere of the word and prayer."

To Lorne the Navigators was not a church or a substitute for the church. He never adopted the word parachurch into his vocabulary with reference to The Navigators.

## **Characteristics of the Local Church**

We once tried to identify some of the characteristics of the local church.

Among our findings:

- The local church has a geographic location and address.
- It is the pillar and ground of the truth where the Word of God is faithfully proclaimed and prayer is practiced.
- It is where the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are administered.
- It is a place for corporate worship and fellowship.
- It has a cradle to the grave program for its congregation.

The Navigators meet few of these specifics. Many of us have heard Lorne say many times. "In Christ's days on earth, He lamented the fact that there was a shortage of laborers. There still is.

The Lord raised up the Navigators to do something about it.”

Nor did Lorne consider the Navigators to be church reformers. He often said that the best contribution we could make to the church was to provide qualified laborers.

He always encouraged staff members to attend church services regularly and, if asked, to take at least one office which matched their gifts.

He greatly appreciated the prayer support given by the local church. Speaking at Bessie Skinner's memorial service he said, “People often asked me why the Lord's special blessing seems to be on me and the Navigators?” He said it was due to the prayers of Mrs. Skinner and other prayer warriors who prayed for him.

For many years Lorne served on the Evangelical Free Church's pastoral advisory committee.

His influence lives on. A few years ago when the mission statement of our church was revised he was on the committee. Those familiar with the Navigators wheel illustration recognize his input as the mission statement now reads:

“We are a worshipping community who through Christ glorifies God by establishing believers in His word, prayer, fellowship and witness.”

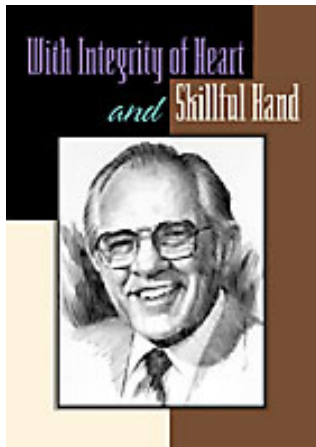


### End Notes

Jim Downing shared these thoughts about Lorne Sanny and the church at the Sanny memorial service at Glen Eyrie on April 3, 2005.

Lorne Sanny was born November 22, 1920 and died March 28, 2005. He was the second president of The Navigators.

[Lorne Sanny audios at Discipleship Library](#)



## With Integrity of Heart and Skillful Hand

by Betty Lee Skinner

Through the pages of this biography, you will walk beside a man with a phenomenal gift for making a “nobody” become “somebody for God.” This inspiring account of Lorne Sanny's life not only entertains but also offers valuable insights into a life dedicated to helping people grow in Christ. Through his simple life lessons, you will realize that you can do it, too!

Lorne was born to Charles and Emma Sanny on 22 November 1920 and raised in LeMars, Iowa. In 1937, the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression caused the Sanny family to move to Modesto, California.

Lorne studied pre-law and received a degree from Modesto Junior College. After responding to the Gospel at a local tent meeting, he launched and led the Christian Youth League and then continued his education at The Bible Institute of Los Angeles.

Lorne's spiritual life caught fire when he met Dawson Trotman at a weekend conference in 1941. For the next 16 years, he became Daws' understudy and, when Daws died in 1956, Lorne was God's clear choice to succeed him.

He was a very different leader from the dynamic, outspoken Trotman. He was meticulous in setting priorities, yet patient with those who led less disciplined and devoted lives. He became well loved among all who were touched by his friendship and ministry. As a humble servant leader of wisdom and vision, he exemplified the surrendered life.

During Lorne's thirty years leading The Navigators, our movement flourished and the staff who served it increased from 171 in fewer than a dozen countries to 2580 in 71 countries. His unwavering trust in the promises of God kept The Navigators on track and advancing into the nations. Year after year, his punishing travel schedule demonstrated a commitment that he and Lucy had made to “give yourself fully to the work of the Lord.” Here are a few memorable highlights of his presidency:

- The beginning of campus ministry, through LeRoy Eims in Nebraska in the late '50s.
- The Overseas Policy Conference of 1961 which set our course into the nations.
- A vast Whing Ding: 3000 collegians at Estes Park, Colorado, in 1968.
- The Fundamentals of the Navigator Ministry, with Jim Pedersen, which Lorne taught around the world from 1976 onwards.
- The International Leadership Conference in 1980: 164 participants of 21 nationalities at the Glen.
- Formation of our International Navigator Council, from 1981 onwards.
- Last but not least, when the time came, a superb process for selecting his successor Jerry White.

After stepping aside from the presidency in 1986, Lorne remained active as a Navigator leader, launching our business and professional ministry throughout the United States and beyond. He continued to serve the Navigator staff worldwide, as well as mentoring Christian businessmen and participating actively in his local First Evangelical Free Church.

Lorne's most widespread public ministry was with the Billy Graham Team. He trained hundreds of counselors for Crusades in the U.S. and Great Britain. In 1972, he received an honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity from Talbot Theological Seminary. In 1987, the Christian Management Association named him Christian Manager of the Year. In 2004 the Billy Graham Association honored him with the title Disciple of the Year.

His long-term friend and deputy president in the early years, Bob Foster, conducted the private family burial on April 2. The following day, 500 friends and colleagues attended his public memorial service at Glen Eyrie.

Lorne married Lucy in 1943. In the midst of very pressured and demanding responsibilities, they successfully raised six children.

*By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place  
he would later receive as his inheritance,  
obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going...  
For he was looking forward to the city with foundations,  
whose architect and builder is God.  
(Hebrews 11:8, 10 NIV)*