

David Howard: He refused to stop dreaming

As one reflects on the history of this global body, the World Evangelical Alliance* (WEA), the name David Howard comes immediately to mind. He led this worldwide body at a critical time when it could have gone into obsolescence. His courage and vision brought others together and reinvigorated leaders worldwide within the evangelical community around a shared commitment to fellowship and action.

Following the Wilberforce antislavery movement and amidst concerns over child labor and persecution in Europe, Christian leaders who felt trapped by the boundaries of denominations sought a means for broader fellowship. This desire led to the WEA's founding in 1846. Over the next century, primarily through conferences and public statements, the organization continued as a loose fellowship. But during that period, the evangelical community became more defined, emerging out of the relative narrowness of earlier forms of fundamentalism and becoming more clearly recognizable within the Protestant world.

Without any overall plan or clear global intention, national evangelical alliances formed in countries all over the world. Today there are 135 National Alliances along with 9 Regional Alliances. But during this period, the organization did not build a strong central pivot from which the global body could find its expression and implement strategies. Lacking proper funding, an overarching global organization was a good idea, but not something to which many were willing to commit effort.

In that time of transition, David Howard of the United States was invited to take the administrative remnants of the WEA and cobble together something that would serve to fulfill its mandate. He served as International Director from 1982 to 1992. His book *The Dream That Would Not Die: The Birth and Growth of the World Evangelical Fellowship 1846–1986*, is a priceless manuscript that provides an understanding of the personalities and dynamics at work during this time.

One can see the Spirit's leading in bringing David Howard into this role. He was exactly what was needed. He had a stellar reputation. He understood the mission mind. He was uncommonly humble and collegial in working with people of other cultures. He had an understanding of the global community and was extremely skilled at inviting others into the enterprise.

I first met David soon after I was appointed as director of the Canadian national alliance, known as the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. At the time, I was

chairing the Lausanne Younger Leaders Committee, planning the Singapore 87 conference. Discussions were taking place at that time as to how the two groups—the Lausanne Movement and the WEA—would interrelate, and some people questioned whether both were needed. David provided clarity concerning the WEA's mandate and encouraged the further development of national alliances. David effectively invited many of us to participate in the WEA as a global enterprise.

Today the WEA, the largest network of Evangelicals in the world, is one of the prime representatives of 600 million Christians. However, its viability as we know it today—indeed, its continued existence—didn't just happen. One of the main reasons why this dream of a worldwide evangelical organization did not die is that David Howard continued to nurture the idea, its mission, and its future so that others could embrace and become part of it.

*The organization's initial name was the Evangelical Alliance (1846); its name was changed to the World Evangelical Fellowship in 1951 and the World Evangelical Alliance in 2001.

*By Brian C. Stiller
Global Ambassador, The World Evangelical Alliance*