

A TIMELY AND PROVIDENTIALLY GUIDED TRANSITION

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On May 5, 2009, just two weeks before he went to be with the Lord, Ralph D. Winter, Founder and General Director of the Frontier Mission Fellowship (FMF), named his successor. The Frontier Mission Fellowship is the evangelical missionary order which oversees and staffs such projects as the U.S. Center for World Mission and William Carey International University.

Dave Datema became the second General Director in the order's history, with the full approval of the FMF General Council. Dave has been a member of the Frontier Mission Fellowship since the year 2000. He is the son of missionaries to Sierra Leone, and has served as a pastor in the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. He is a graduate of Winebrenner Theological Seminary with a Master of Divinity degree. He and his wife Cathie have four children: Cuyler, Callie, Jill and Julie. Since coming to the FMF, Dave has been involved in the development of the INSIGHT program, which is designed to provide a biblical and missions-centered worldview to high school graduates.

Shortly after taking the leadership of the FMF, Datema issued a statement saying,

We will remain anchored in the missiology and values that Dr. Winter has bequeathed to us. There will be continuity with his life's work emphases and concerns. At the same time, there will also be creativity and change. Missiology and methodology can never remain static, because the world doesn't remain static. We will not only see ourselves as stewards of our FMF



Ralph D. Winter's last public appearance

heritage, we will also launch out into the great unknown with the same drive and courage that is part of his legacy. We will absolutely continue to be focused on the frontiers of mission, the boundaries and barriers of which, although hard to see, must be navigated.

This will call for risk, and risk will inevitably in some cases lead to failure. This will NOT be a time to fall back on past laurels. This will NOT be a time to catch our breath. This will NOT be a time to flee from the uncertainty and complexity of frontiers to the safer waters of established theory and principles. The greatest testimony of Dr. Winter's legacy will not be what he has accomplished; it will be what we accomplish in response to his leadership and concerns.

There has been a general sense among the staff of a special outpouring of God's grace during this transition and the final two weeks of Dr. Winter's life. One of the earliest staff members of the FMF, and an Associate General Director of the order, Bruce Graham, commented on this reality:

Dr. Winter had been preparing for a number of years for the transition. Returning home from the hospital for the last time, he decided it was time to designate the next General Director. The FMF General Council met a few days later and affirmed his choice. A special meeting of FMF staff was called to welcome Dave and Cathie into this new role. Shortly afterward, Dr. Winter's family felt it was time to call for hospice care. Several staff and friends were able to visit Dr. Winter over the next few days. Dave called for a day of fasting and prayer as the leadership team went on a one-day retreat on May 20th. The retreat was a special time of testimony, reflection, and relationship building. Dave closed the retreat with a prayer for Dr. Winter. The leadership team returned home encouraged and ready to break the fast with the rest of the staff who had been praying. At the end of that meal, around 9:00 p.m., we got word that Dr. Winter had died. It all seemed so "orchestrated by the Lord."

A new era has begun. 🌐