

Longtime international missions leader Clyde Meador dies

April 26, 2024

RICHMOND (BP)—Longtime International Mission Board leader Clyde D. Meador died April 26. He was 79.



Clyde Meador

Meador worked closely with four IMB presidents as a top advisor and executive vice president, and as the mission organization's interim president from August 2010 to March 2011 and again briefly in 2018 before the election of current President Paul Chitwood.

"I thank God for the life and friendship of Clyde Meador," Chitwood said. "I first met Clyde when I began serving as an IMB trustee in 2002. Over the following years, I saw Clyde was a leader who had earned the trust of everyone—trustees, administrators and missionaries."

When Chitwood was elected IMB president in November 2018, he asked trustees' approval for Meador to remain in the president's office as interim executive vice president during the transition.

In February 2019, at the election of Todd Lafferty as IMB's executive vice president, Meador agreed to remain as an executive adviser. In the subsequent months, he filled several key interim roles as the organization's new executive team was solidified.

"When I began serving in my current role, Clyde's willingness to walk alongside me as I built out our leadership team was a wonderful blessing," Chitwood said. "Humble, gifted servants like Clyde are evidence of God's favor upon the IMB."

Meador retired in May 2016 but returned in 2018 to serve as IMB's interim president. When he retired a second time on June 12, 2020, after more than 45 years of service to Southern Baptists, John Brady, the IMB's vice president for global engagement, called Meador "the glue" holding the IMB together.

"Clyde has inspired leaders at all levels across the IMB to abide in Christ as we face the burdens and challenges of leadership," Brady said. "He kept our eyes focused on doing our part to complete the Great Commission with the wonderful end vision from Revelation 7:9."

'Step-by-step obedience in the same direction'

Meador was known—along with his wife, Elaine—among missionary teams and staff for steady, unflappable leadership. Yet, long years of service appear to testify to the Meadors' simple steps of obedience even more than to their strategic insights and leadership.



Clyde and Elaine Meador pause to pray with Indonesian believers in the late 1970s. (IMB PHOTO)

“When you look at Clyde’s and Elaine’s lives, it’s step-by-step obedience in the same direction towards the Father’s will for their lives,” Brady said.

The Meadors began their careers with IMB in 1974 when they were appointed as missionaries to Indonesia. For the next 14 years, the couple served in a range of roles, with Clyde starting as a church planter in Medan, then training pastors and lay leaders in Semarang and later Purwokerto. In 1987, he became the mission administrator in Jakarta.

After the couple had spent almost 14 years in Indonesia, the government began refusing visa renewals for missionaries who had served more than 10 years and kicked the Meadors out.

“We were grief-stricken,” Clyde Meador later recalled. “[Elaine] fell apart immediately when we left Indonesia. I fell apart about six months later ... a delayed grief ... until I realized what it was and took it to the Lord, and there was healing.”

There was also a new ministry. Later that year, Meador took on leadership of the Southern Asia and Pacific Itinerant Mission. Former IMB President Jerry Rankin, who served as the Meadors’ area director at the time, noted that he saw in Clyde Meador’s leadership of these teams that he “had sound theology and was a strategic thinker.”

More than a decade before mission strategists had introduced concepts like creative access, Rankin said, the Meadors were leading roving teams of missionaries who moved in and out of South Asian countries on training circuits for local pastors and lay leaders.

The couple moved in the early '90s to leading missionary teams across the South Asia, Pacific and Oceania regions as an associate director and then an area director—and eventually moved to serving as a steady right hand to four presidents.

Honored commitments

Former IMB President Tom Elliff, who led the organization from 2011 to 2014, said there is an easy, trusting way about Clyde and Elaine Meador.

“It is the authentic nature of Clyde’s and Elaine’s hearts that stands out most clearly to me,” Elliff said. “You can trust they will do what they say they will do. If they say that they are going to pray for you, they will. ... They remember their commitments. They don’t take these things lightly.”

Rankin, who worked with Clyde and Elaine Meador for much of their mission careers, said the couple’s success as leaders also resided in their willingness to follow.

“You cannot be an effective leader without being an effective follower,” noted Rankin, whose 17-year presidency ended with retirement in 2010. “Clyde ... can enjoy fulfillment and joy in knowing that he is contributing to making things happen. He didn’t seek the credit. He doesn’t need that.”

In 1998, Rankin asked Meador to lead a massive new area which included all IMB missionary teams working in Central and Southern Asia. This followed Rankin’s decision in 1997 to rework the IMB’s structure and focus, an initiative called New Directions.

“New Directions launched a redeployment of our mission force to focus on engagement, to change our ethos to one of church planting, and to understand people groups,” Rankin said. “Clyde’s fingerprints are all over that.”

Meador later called it perhaps the most significant missiology change in modern IMB history.

‘Humble leadership ... made it happen’

In 2001, Rankin asked the Meadors to move to Richmond and join the office of the president as part of Rankin’s leadership team.

“I had a vision for where I knew we needed to go,” he said. “But it was people like Clyde and Elaine, with their humble leadership, that helped make it happen.”

Elliff, who followed Rankin as president, also noted Meador’s humility: “Clyde was so good in working with me. He would humbly come along behind and say: ‘You have the plan. Let’s talk about how I can help implement that plan.’ Not everybody is willing to do that, but Clyde could always see the big picture because, for him, it’s about the kingdom.”

Meador was born in Arkadelphia, Ark., and considered Albuquerque, N.M., his hometown. He received a Bachelor of Arts from Grand Canyon College in Phoenix; a Master of Divinity from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.; and the Doctor of Ministry from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth.

Before his missionary appointment, Meador worked in the information technology field in New Mexico, Colorado and Arizona. He also was pastor of Tracy (Mo.) Baptist Chapel and First Baptist Church, Weston, Mo.

Meador is survived by his wife, Elaine; two grown children; and four

grandchildren.