

A TIME TO REMEMBER - Michael Ian Douglas Sturrock
Saturday 20 October 2007 – 10.45 for 11 am
at Mayfield Salisbury Parish Church, Edinburgh

Tribute by James Crerar, St. George's West Church, Edinburgh

I first met and got to know Mike in 1973 when he returned to Edinburgh after living for 2 years in Ayr and working in a Solicitors' Practice there. He joined St George's West Church in Shandwick Place in the West End where I was a member. He became an **Elder** there in 1977 and in 1989 he became **Clerk to the Deacons' Court** - which is responsible for finance, fabric and other matters.

As an Elder, a member in his District described him as 'a faithful visitor, a good listener, self effacing but with a quiet sense of humour - someone it was a pleasure to know'. As Clerk to the Deacons' Court he was meticulous, quietly efficient and a pleasure to work with.

However, there was much, much more to Mike's involvement in the Church scene in the West End than that. In the early 1970s some younger members of the West End Churches identified that there was no later-evening comfortable, welcoming, meeting place for 20 - 40 year olds especially at weekends as an alternative to a pub or Wimpey Bar after concerts, cinemas and theatres. It just wasn't done in those days to take friends back to bed-sits to chat. So, in 1971, after much preparation, **The Corner Stone** was opened in the Vaults of St John's Church, providing a unique place - pancakes and snacks, coffee, a welcoming chat and speakers and discussion groups. In 1974 Mike heard an appeal for more Corner Stone volunteers from the pulpit of St George's West, immediately 'signed up' and from then on took a leading role in the helper group of around 200 - helping manage and develop it. It was there that he met Anne but I leave it to Anne's brother to tell you more of that and of what Mike described at that very happy party they had to celebrate their marriage only seven years ago as 'their whirlwind courtship'!

Out of The Corner Stone grew another project, **Steps**, and Mike was involved with others in setting this up around 1978. Steps was totally geared for homeless and disadvantaged people, many of whom had depended on the Corner Stone for personal support, but who had greater needs than other customers. Steps operated every Sunday evening, originally based in the former flat of the caretaker of St Cuthbert's Church. The volunteers befriended and really got to know those who came, provided a home-made nutritious meal and ate with them around a table - and then played board games all in an effort to create an unaccustomed 'homely atmosphere' for them. It was not all plain sailing and from time to time there would be arguments and potential violence, situations which Mike would be adept at defusing courteously and with gentle humour. Expeditions were organised; outings to North Berwick, Alnmouth and elsewhere. On returning from one such outing Mike inadvertently filled up the petrol driven hired minibus with diesel fuel, but somehow they all got home safely and no-one held it against

him!

Although there was fun in those days - including memorable retreats to Iona Abbey throughout the 1980s - there was also real dedication and commitment by all volunteers on these outreach mission projects. They sacrificed or cut short their precious weekends and any leisure time to support their teams at Corner Stone and Steps. In Mike's case it took priority over tennis and squash, both of which he loved playing. There simply was not enough time, both for these projects and for sport - on top of work. Mike invited a homeless person to share his flat on more than one occasion and he and Anne continued to support one or two vulnerable people they met at Corner Stone from then on. Steps ran for over 20 years with dedicated commitment by the teams of helpers.

Another of Mike's involvements with the City Centre Churches was as lawyer to **The Council of West End Churches**. The Council owned a flat in Lothian Road occupied by Franciscan Friars. Above this flat were two others, occupied by backpackers but owned by one who shall be nameless but who was generally referred to as 'The Landlord from Hell'. It seemed that almost every week in the flat above, a shower overflowed or the roof leaked, or sometimes both simultaneously! This didn't seem to worry the owner of the flats above who professed amazement that those who owned and lived below should be concerned at these regular floods, and refused point blank to co-operate over repairs, insurance claims and the like. My wife, Veronica, was Chairman of CWEC for a time, having succeeded Robert Philp in that post, and I would not have been surprised if both had had nervous breakdowns during these difficult times had it not been Mike who took on the whole load of dealing with the Landlord from Hell and all these crises with endless patience, perseverance, and professionalism.

Mike had many clients who depended on his skill, expertise and dedication. My only personal experience of him in that sphere was in a small charitable grant-making **trust** he set up for a client some 23 years ago. Mike and I were 2 of the 4 Trustees but Mike was the Secretary and Treasurer, advised the other Trustees, produced the Minutes and the Annual Accounts and did all the work including paying the grants and had the difficult task of writing to some applicants with real needs to explain that we couldn't help them, but often researching alternative sources of grants. He continued to run the Trust, albeit latterly with some help from Anne, until a month before he died. The Trust gave me an excuse, if I needed one, to visit him in the Astley Ainslie Hospital and their Mayfield flat. These visits were an inspiration. Latterly, knowing that he had not long to live, Mike was as cheerful, as interested in what was going on, as concerned for others, and as amusing as ever. It was a huge privilege to have known him and to have enjoyed his friendship.