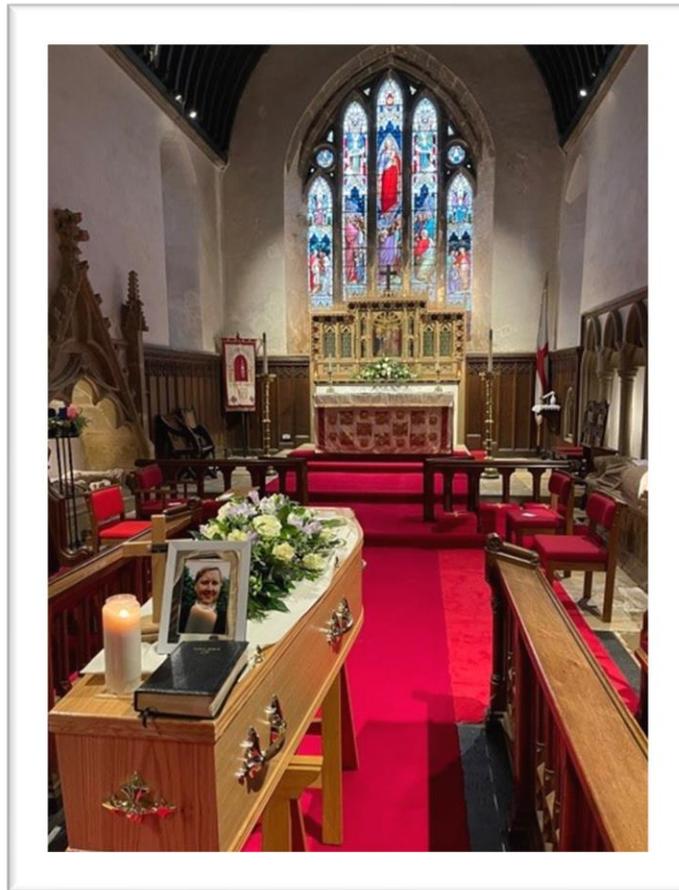


**Opening Sentences and Eulogy at the funeral of  
Reverend William Thomas Snelson  
10<sup>th</sup> March 1945 – 17<sup>th</sup> December 2020**



**23<sup>rd</sup> December 2020  
St Mary's Church Goldsborough**

**Opening sentences – Reverend Garry Hinchcliffe**

Friends, Welcome!

We have a habit as human beings of bandying around tried and tested phrases to the point that they become a little tired and sometimes a little trite.

This year of 2020 has been an extraordinary year of difficulty, suffering and anxiety for millions. The whole world has lost through the pandemic and although we here in this area appear to have been saved the worst of the ordeal we have suffered too, not least because at the very end of the year, as we prepare ourselves to celebrate the incarnation, we have lost one of our nearest and dearest – I've got to be careful here, because nobody could ever accuse Bill of being flowery - he was instead highly intelligent, well-read and had professionally achieved high recognition for his ministry coupled with a deep respect - the two of which are not always easy to hold in tension.

Bill was thoughtful, prayerful, reflective and prided himself on being a pedant – he would on occasion challenge my misuse of grammar or punctuation, and of course, he was right!

I had the honour of visiting and ministering to Bill on the Friday afternoon the week before he died.

Although much diminished, the Bill of old was still very much in evidence... as I sat down, he began telling me the story of an old gentleman he had known from his time as a parish priest in Bardsey – he prefaced his anecdote, by warning me that it was a story he could never tell without shedding a tear.

So, the story goes... this old gentleman eventually coming to the end of his days and much reduced in health, found himself a resident in a nursing home. On one occasion he turned to the nursing staff who were attending him and stated quite forcefully that he wished he was gone because he simply had no quality of life left, to which the nursing staff replied that although that may have been true for him, conversely, he as an individual, through the richness of his spirit and personality, had brought enormous amounts of quality into their lives.

It was obvious to me listening – that the moral of Bill's story was quite simple - the *gift* you see, was not in the receiving and the having, but in the sharing.

I also recognised the subtext for the story - that as Bill neared the end of his life – to have imparted that *gift of quality* to others, was equally **his** wish and hope.

He hoped that the very essence of his life had brought quality to the lives of others - this selfless wish was at the very root of Bill Snelson as a man and as a priest and speaks today of his humility, generosity and love for his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Bill need not have worried – speaking as his friend and colleague for the last 7 years – I know the love and respect in which he was held.

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Bill was a committed ecumenist (years ahead of his time), an excellent communicator and an exemplary priest, I always knew without a shadow of doubt, that if Bill was going to do something it would be done and done to an exceedingly high standard – he was supportive, respectful and was able to bring a wealth of experience to any discussion.

And so to today..... This service is very much Bill's service.

The hymns, music, readings and prayers reflect his passion and his theology – sadly because of COVID-19 restrictions, what it does not reflect is the deep breadth, wealth and richness of his 75 years on this earth and his 50 years as a priest.

Bill's life and ministry touched countless individuals and helped shape and form the platform for ecumenical relationships across the denominations that we all take for granted today – the church of today and the church of tomorrow owes him a great debt of gratitude.

Bill Snelson was many things – but he will always be remembered as a man of true quality – a quality that lives on in his family; in the life of the wider church; and in the lives of all those who had the privilege of knowing him as a priest and as a friend.

## **Eulogy – Matthew Snelson**

### **Introduction**

Dad would have loved to be here with us today, with many of his friends, in person or virtually.

He loved the celebration of his 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, marking his amazing marriage to my mum, Beryl, acknowledging the friendships he has built up over the years, and the importance of his family.

In January of this year, dad renewed his passport, ready for the next Jet2 flight adventures out of Leeds Bradford Airport, and his and mum's next river cruise.

He was not ready to leave us, he wanted to stay for the fun, and to continue his adventures.

I'm going to talk about the Reverend Snelson, Bill as a friend to so many, and as our dad.

As one of the most organised people in the world, dad in his study had a set of white box files clearly labelled. He also has a USB stick with every sermon going back for the last 20 years, and we are open to offers from any aspiring clergy.

Only after his death last Thursday at 8.50am, having endured an awful 3 months of pain of aggressive cancer, did we look into the white box file labelled legal, and find his self-written memoirs, and from these I draw courage to speak today.

Dad states that there were two elements in his life that defined everything, they are faith and family, and these were at the centre of everything that he did and everything he stood for. He is remembered for his wit, his intellect, and his modesty.

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Whilst he had mentioned to mum that he had started a biography, what he has left us with is the masterpiece that has been his life. Dad always wrote the minutes before the meeting – a trick many of us have taken to heart – and this is what he has done with his memoirs.

### Career and progression

Dad was the first of his family to go to university, the first of his school to go to Oxbridge.

He was born in 1945, in Chester, to parents Samuel and Dorothy, and had an elder brother by 8 years, George, and earlier sibling David who died shortly after birth. The family moved to Birkenhead when dad was 5, and that is where he spent his formative schooling, firstly in classes of 40 primary students, and then having passed his 11+, at Rock Ferry High School for boys. His memoirs recall that to gain entry to Rock Ferry High School, a high achieving academic institution, deracinated him from his brother and contemporaries in the street.

Dad described himself as a swot – strangely Clare referred to me as “Mr Swot”, her devised Mr Man character in her brilliant speech at mine and Gill’s wedding in 2002, so maybe I did follow after dad.

Dad’s brother George’s music career took him to be organist and choirmaster at Christ Church, Higher Bebington. This is where Dad first met my mum Beryl, where dad identified with the Church of England in a theological, spiritual, social and practical way, and it was the start of his passage to ordained ministry. In 1961 dad gave mum a Prayer Book for Christmas.

Dad worked before university – amazingly to himself at a motorcycle repair shop, and also caring for psycho-geriatric patients at St Catherine’s hospital where he learnt much about mental illness, human nature, and the world of work.

Dad was accepted into Exeter College Oxford reading theology. It was soon after his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday that he started dating Beryl.

Dad continued his theological education at Cambridge Westcott house, and after asking permission from the Bishop of Chester, asked Beryl to marry in 1968. The view was not to be ordained and married in the same year, thus the marriage preceded ordination. Bill and Beryl married at Christ Church Higher Bebington on 20<sup>th</sup> July 1968.

Mum and Dad moved South, and he was ordained deacon for Christ Church, Esher, to serve in Godalming, and writes: “within 15 months I had received the life-enriching graces of marriage and ordination; they enhanced each other: I never for a moment regretted either”.

My sister Clare was born in Guildford in 1969 according to plan, I caused a little more anxiety in 1972 as Beryl required an emergency appendectomy which was life-threatening.

Whilst Godalming was a large first-job for a newly ordained curate, Leeds Parish Church was bigger. Mum and dad’s housing moved from leafy Godalming to inner city Leeds Maisonette. But the role in Leeds Parish Church was stretching, including chaplaincy work at

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Armley Prison, and addressing both social and civic issues. Mum took on a teaching role at Ebor Gardens Primary school.

And so to St Matthew's Chapel Allerton, where dad was inducted in October 1975 (I was 3, Clare 5). Dad took on a large church, plus the roles of chair of Governors at St Matthew's School, and built a controversial but eventually brilliantly accepted community hall and began his ecumenical pathway forging links with the Methodist ministries, ethnic minorities, and broader religious groups.

It was in November 1978 at age 33, whilst preaching evensong in the pulpit that dad suffered an aortic aneurism, mercifully diagnosed by his GP David House the next morning. Whilst at the time aortic aneurisms were typically diagnosed post-mortem, and whilst having been physically fit, dad was in the hands of the surgeons at Killingbeck hospital and against all odds survived surgery. He took only three months off.

Mum and Dad were invited to move to Bardsey and East Keswick in 1981.

Dad talks fondly of the time at Bardsey, the stability it provided for myself and Clare to grow up, the life-long friendships mum and dad made and continue to cherish, the twinning's to Kisdorf, and the lasting memories of a full vicarage, with a dinner party downstairs, Clare and friends upstairs, and myself and friends in the kitchen.

Dad's career continued to expand outside of his parochial role, as Chairman of the Ridings Housing Association, and roles in the Council of Churches. Dad became a presenter on Radio Aire, setting up the multi-faith advisory board and leading the Sunday morning programme. He says he learnt about communication, communications, and commercialisation.

In 1991 at age 46, at two years younger than I am now, Dad's cardiologist advised that the repair of his heart in 1978 was causing anxiety, and dad was doomed to a medical or surgical disaster; and he would prefer the surgical pro-active opportunity. Dad went to surgery, and nearly died on the table due to complications – and with a 24 hour prayer vigil in Bardsey Church - dad was on the edge. When the call came and "it's the hospital calling with bad news", mum broke, but to be told it was her mother, our Nana, who had died, not dad. Dad survived, was back at work after four months, and went on to live for a further fabulous 29 years.

Dad progressed to Ecumenical Officer for West Yorkshire in 1993, purchasing their first house, in Otley. Dad notes that they did not embed themselves in Otley, and did not develop the relationships of other places they have lived, due to his work in London and mum's in School. I think this is a strong message for all of us now who travel to work, have evenings spent on work laptops, miss socialisation through life pressures, and more recently the Covid pandemic.

Dad applied for the Churches Together in England as Ecumenical lead, and to his surprise was appointed to start on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1997, the day he had a TIA, resulting in hospitalisation until released later into the care of a young doctor Gill (now my wife) who was staying.

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Mum and Dad moved to Harlington, where Dad led Churches Together in England from London, leading multi-disciplinary conferences, working with Arch Bishops and religious leaders across the globe, and representing the Church of England. So broad were Dad's efforts that Mum and Dad, and Gill and I, were able to attend the millennium dome on New Year's Eve 2000, shaking hands with Tony and Cherie Blaire, and given a gift bag including both a bottle of water and a bottle of wine. It was whilst seated in the religious section we experienced dad's miracle workings, he swapped our water for the wine of the Sikh community sitting next to us.

Dad is hugely proud of his achievements at Churches Together in England, and for this we will share his memoirs for those who may be interested.

Whilst living in St Neots in 2013, Mum and Dad spent time in Rome with dad as interim director of the Anglican Centre, once again making new friends and welcoming friends who had the opportunity to visit. Dad took on the role of Development Officer, and later Communications Officer.

When Mum and Dad moved to Knaresborough, dad saw an opportunity to return to good spiritual discipline, a home coming of what he had been ordained for, and he came to it with an enthusiasm refreshed from a break of lengthy parochial ministry.

St Marys, Goldsborough, where we stand now, became a key focus alongside the Knaresborough churches, for Reverend Snelson, for Bill, for Dad, and that is why we stand here now with friends and family, with god looking over us.

### Friends, family and stats

Dad loved some numbers, with some facts and some guestimates:

- mum and dad have been married 52 years
- mum and dad have lived together in 8 different houses
- if mum and dad have entertained at an average twice per week they have hosted friends 5,304 times
- if dad has taken an average of 9 weddings/funerals per year after being ordained, he has served at 459 of both
- if dad has taken an average of 48 services per year, being 2907 sermons, god bless us all!
- amongst this dad married his own wife, his daughter and his son (work that out!)

In Clare and Duncan's wedding, Dad talked about the loving commitment of marriage which extends beyond the couple themselves.

From their boundless giving, mum and dad have developed everlasting friendships, respect, and love, and have received bountiful return.

Clare and I know that these friendships will continue with mum, and we have seen the amount of love, care and support given over the last weeks. Mum will find it hard, we all will

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find it hard, with the loss of Reverend Snelson, of Bill and of Dad, and we must support each other.

Mum and Dad travelled extensively, both as a happy two, and with their great friends for many city breaks and longer holidays.

I mentioned that dad had renewed his passport; it sat nestled in a plastic folder next to mums and their insurance documents, with 175 Euros in cash, as if ready to jump on the next plane, travel for the next adventure, enjoy their time together.

This is the memory that we want you to be left with, of dad as successful in his career, as a fantastic father to Clare and I, as an honoured father in-law, an amazing Gramps to Katy, Beth, Emma and Harry, as a loving friend to you all, and most, as the adoring husband of my mother.