

## POWELL, WILLIAM EIFION (1934-2009), minister (Cong.) and college principal

**Name:** William Eifion Powell  
**Date of birth:** 1934  
**Date of death:** 2009  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** minister (Cong.) and college principal  
**Area of activity:** Education; Religion  
**Author:** Ioan Wyn Gruffydd

Eifion Powell was born 7 November 1934, at 34 Church Street, in the coal mining village of Cwmgors, Glamorganshire. Evan John (Jack), his father, a quiet unassuming coal miner, was the financial secretary of the Tabernacl, the Welsh Congregational Church, Cwmgors. Two sons, Eifion and Huw, were born to him and his wife, Eleanor, a person who possessed a good measure of humour and wit. Later, the family moved a mile or so away to nearby village of Gwaencaegurwen and settled at 6 Colbren Square. His mother died in 1957 at the age of 48.

Eifion was brought up and started preaching at the Tabernacl, Cwmgors, under the ministry of the Reverends T. M. Roderick, Emrys Jones and Irfon Samuel. He was educated at Pontardawe Grammar School, and was specially influenced by Eic Davies, one of the teachers. He went to the University College, Swansea, where he gained his B.A. with honours in Welsh in 1955. Whilst he was there, Hugh Bevan, the literary critic and college lecturer, influenced him greatly. At the end of his three years in Swansea, he moved to Bangor to the Bala-Bangor Theological College. At his last year, and my first, he was the student president. Like the rest of us, he came under the influence of **Principal Gwilym Bowyer** and **Professor R. Tudur Jones**. In Bangor he gained his B.D. in 1958.

Eifion married Rebecca Edwards from Merioneth in 1958, and two children were born to them, Elin and Peredur. The September of the year Eifion was ordained minister of the Welsh Congregational Church at Deganwy Avenue, Llandudno, and Salem, Colwyn Bay. I shall never forget that ordination service and especially the welcome given, in strict verse, by the late Reverend W. Berllanydd Owen to the new minister and his wife.

Eifion Powell moved from North Wales to Drefach, Llanelli, in 1963, and in 1967 to the London Association of Churches to become minister of the Welsh Congregational Church at Harrow. He moved to become minister of the Welsh Congregational Church at the Tabernacl, Barry in 1972, and from there in 1974 to be the successor of the Reverend T. Glyn Thomas at Ebeneser, Wrexham. The Ebeneser congregation moved to a new building and a new location within a year of Eifion's arrival. Eifion moved again to become minister of the Welsh Congregational Church at Minny Street, Cardiff, in 1984. During his time at Wrexham and Cardiff, he lectured on World Religions at the University College Bangor.

During his fifth year as minister in Cardiff, Eifion Powell was appointed to a lectureship at the Welsh Independents College at Aberystwyth, and he was also appointed to a totally new post in the history of the Union of Welsh Independents, namely to become Director of Lay Training. That involved travelling the length and breadth of Wales and the two Associations of Churches in England. He was a pioneer in the foundations that he set for that work. Eifion was appointed Principal of the College in 1992. The respect and admiration of his students towards him was great, and his colleague, Euros Wyn Jones, testified that all who knew him, knew 'of the strength of his personality, the wisdom of his advice, and the diligence of his pastoral care' for his students. Soon after Eifion became Principal, his wife, Rebecca, died in 1993. Rebecca, a very talented lady, supported her husband in many ways. Two of her hymns were published in *Caneuon Ffydd* (81, 738).

Eifion Powell was an able historian and theologian, and he contributed articles, reviews and portraits of contemporary Welsh theologians extensively to various publications: *Y Dysgedydd*, *Porfeydd*, *Diwinyddiaeth* and *Cristion*. At various times, he was the editor of *Cristion*, *Y Cofiadur* and *Diwinyddiaeth*. At the request of the Welsh Hymn Society, he delivered the annual lecture at the 1977 Wrexham National Eisteddfod, on 'The Hymn Writers of the Maelor District', published in *Society's Bulletin* (vol. 2:1) in 1978. At the 1990 Annual Meetings of the Union of Welsh Independents, held at the Preseli District, he delivered the Dyfnallt Lecture on 'The Theology of D. Miall Edwards.' He had been working on the life and contribution of **D. Miall Edwards** as his chapter in *Athrawon ac Annibynwyr*, edited by **Pennar Davies**, shows. He published, with George Brewer, the two volumes *Cristnogaeth a Chrefydd* in 1968 and a chapter, 'Yr Annibynwyr Yfory' in **Iorwerth Jones**, ed., *Yr Annibynwyr Cymreig ddoe, heddiw ac yfory* (1989).

Eifion won several awards in more than one National Eisteddfod. One such award was that at the 1967 Bala National Eisteddfod, when he won on an essay on 'The Life and Work of Gwilym Bowyer,' which was published by the John Penri Press in 1968. While preparing that work, he researched diligently about his subject. **Principal Gwilym Bowyer**, when he preached or gave an address, used to raise his hand over his forehead from time to time. Eifion asked me about that and he wanted to know whether he raised his right or his left hand! In his adjudication on the essay sent in by 'Angst' (namely, Eifion Powell), **Dr. Tudur Jones** said that 'this was an excellent essay, balanced, concise and interesting.'

Eifion Powell was elected President of the Union of Welsh Independents 1996-97, and delivered his presidential address at Pendref Chapel, Bangor, on the theme, 'Grace and Mission.' He was the President of the Free Church Council of Wales 1998-2001. He served on several of his denomination's committees, and he was Chairman of the Mission Board of the Union of Welsh Independents, and the Church and Ministry Department. He served as Chairman of the European Region of the Council for World Mission (CWM), and I had the geniality of his company on two occasions when that Council met, in Hong Kong and at St. Andrews (Scotland). He was very much attracted to the latter place and went there several times on holiday.

On his retirement from the college, he was invited for a second time to be minister of the church at Minny Street, Cardiff, and he considered that to be 'one of the great blessings' of his life. He was there from 1999 to 2002. In 2002, he married Catherine Lane, and they enjoyed seven happy years together.

Eifion Powell had a healthy sense of humour. Indeed, in recalling the days of his youth at Cwmgors, he said that he was 'conditioned by the wit of its people to realize the importance of humour, not only as a means of getting people to laugh, and to forget grievances, but also as a means of learning how to live with oneself and with others in humility.' His response to the specialist at the Heath Hospital in Cardiff who asked him if he wished to have a by-pass, was characteristic of Eifion: 'They've had one in Carmarthen and Dolgellau, so I might as well have one!'

Eifion Powell died on 24 June, 2009. A crowd gathered at his funeral at Minny Street Chapel, Cardiff, on Monday, 6 July. His ashes were placed in his parents' grave in the cemetery of Old Carmel at Gwaencaegurwen.

### Author

Ioan Wyn Gruffydd

### Sources

Personal research

### Additional Links

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