



# A treasured elder...

## Rev. Alvin Curtis Berg

*A life devoted to missionary work at home and abroad*

Treasure  
Our  
Elders

**B**y the time he retired to Kissimmee's Good Samaritan Village in 1980, Alvin Curtis Berg was nearly 70 years old and had spent almost his entire adult life in the service of God and others. He had served as the chief executive of the World Mission Prayer League, a Minneapolis-based evangelical organization founded in 1937, with missions all over the world. He was among the first Christian missionaries allowed into Nepal. He had run a bible school in India and spent more than 20 years training others to spread the Christian gospel. "The Lord definitely had plans for me," Berg said softly.

It's a life the Illinois farm boy might never have imagined for himself. Berg was born in 1913, the second of eight children in the farm community of Creston, located about 75 miles west of Chicago. He was baptized and confirmed in the Lutheran faith and attended Sunday school, but he and his family were not particularly religious. By high school, Berg was making excellent grades, but he had left the church and was regularly driving to nearby Rochelle with his brother and their friends for dancing, drinking and general carrying on. After graduating from high school, a job driving a delivery truck for an oil company got Berg permanently off the farm, "but my life wasn't going anywhere," he admitted.

### Hearing the call

Berg's life began to change when not yet age 25, he moved into town to live with his grandmother, "a prayerful woman who listened to religious broadcasts," Berg recalled with great fondness. "Her witness, her praying and her influence made the difference in my life." A religious awakening resulted in his giving up his wilder ways and re-dedicating his life to God and his Lutheran faith. Within a year he met and married Vallie Ulrey of Paw Paw, Illinois, just as World War II was beginning in Europe.

Berg's job supplying area farmers with fuel was considered strategic to the nation's war effort, so he wasn't drafted until 1943. He served as a radar operator stationed aboard the carrier escort *Cape Esperance*, which ferried aircraft between California and U.S. aircraft carriers in the Pacific Ocean. One Sunday afternoon in November 1945,

**Life partners in Christ:** *Alvin and Vallie Berg on their wedding day in 1939; at World Mission Prayer League headquarters; at Good Samaritan Village in Kissimmee. Berg's room at Good Samaritan is filled with brightly-colored, handcrafted Nepalese artwork.*



Berg found himself honorably discharged from the Navy and sitting with Vallie in a church in Los Angeles. "The minister was preaching from the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 6," Berg said, quoting verse 8 from memory. *Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?'* "He asked for people to come forward and become missionaries, and I whispered to Vallie, 'We're going up.' I guess you could say I got out of one war and into another — and this one is still going on."

### Serving the Lord

The couple threw themselves into the work, with an eye toward eventually going to India, which was soon to be granted its independence by the British. However, it was not until 1953 that they were able to obtain a visa and set forth. The two embarked on a Norwegian freighter in British Columbia and arrived 40 days later in densely populated Calcutta, right in the middle of a huge Hindu festival. Soon they settled in Darjeeling and began intensive language training.

When Nepal was opened up to Christian missionaries a year later, Berg and his wife were part of the earliest United Mission to Nepal delegations. They operated a bible school in the border town of Mirik, India — elevation 5,800 feet — and continued to recruit and train missionaries. During furloughs, the couple traveled extensively throughout Europe and South America. When stateside, Berg studied theology at schools in Iowa

and Minnesota and was eventually ordained a Lutheran minister. In 1975, Berg was named World Mission Prayer League General Director, in charge of its worldwide operations. The pace of constant travel and fundraising took its toll on his health, so in late 1980, he and Vallie leapt at the chance to retire to Good Samaritan Village in Kissimmee, which had just been purchased by the Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society. "Most people want to travel when they retire. Not us." That Christmas, Berg became the campus' chaplain, a post he held for the next six years.

### Coming home

Today, Good Samaritan's immaculate 170-bed skilled nursing facility is Berg's home. Vallie's death in 2001 ended 62 years of devoted marriage, but she remains forever in his heart. "I envy my wife enjoying the festivities up there," Berg chuckled, gesturing toward the heavens. Photos of Vallie adorn the walls of his tidy room. On his bedside table is an open bible, handwritten correspondence and this week's issue of *U.S. News & World Report*, which he reads from cover to cover.

"I don't know when my time will come," 92-year-old Berg said of his long and distinguished life. "I trust in God, and like any good missionary, I'm ready to go whenever called."

FHCA honors Rev. Alvin Curtis Berg and treasures his many contributions to our nation and world.