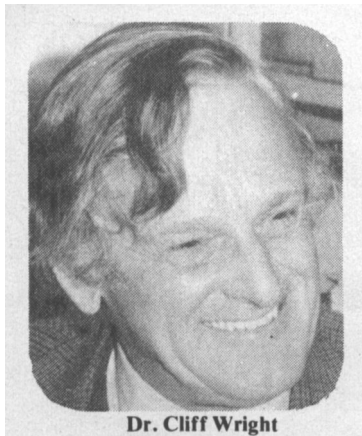


editorial



Dr. Cliff Wright

Dr Cliff Wright, the Executive Secretary of the Commission on Christian Education for the Australian Council of Churches, has contributed this editorial to coincide with 'National Marriage & Family Week.'

He is also the President of National Marriage and Family Week and is well known throughout Australia for his talks, articles and books on Marriage and Family Life.

Dr Wright is presently in China on a Study Tour with a group of academics from Latrobe University. He will be contributing an article on Family Life in China for the August edition.

"FAMILY ENRICHMENT"

Family Enrichment is the theme of National Marriage and Family Week, 1976. The actual week doesn't matter so much, but the possibility of family enrichment does matter a great deal — throughout 1976 and onwards. Many people know that their family life is in fact superficial and disappointing — or at least has not realised its potential.

All of us find it easy to be sucked in by the fairly common mood of

pessimism about marriage and the family. Some have read David Cooper's "Death of the Family", and wonder if the family has any future at all.

Those who criticise family life because of alleged stifling closeness are, I believe, far from the realities of most families. Could it be that marriages, and family life, become empty, unsatisfactory, not because of stifling closeness, but for lack of any genuine closeness?

A little girl of seven years came from the city to the country. She was asked, "How do you like the people here?" She replied "Well, they're all right, but their voice doesn't pay you any attention". In spite of polite words, the girl felt lonely, isolated, cut off.

Does this happen with marriages, with families? Is the trouble not too great a closeness, but little authentic closeness at all?

Outside satisfying personal relationships we are lonely, lost. We have no peace when our deepest need, our need to be loved and our need to give love, is not met.

Marriage and family life provide a place where we belong, where we have territorial rights. It is an attempt at an intimate society of people who believe in one another. The family is a place where children can be loved into growing. In families children can enter into the lives of adults, and adults into the lives of children. Families give us our name, a sense of identity and continuity. The family is an important unit of society. It is more than all of these things — basic to the health and growth of our humanity.

Enriching family life involves enriching marriages. We are in some confusion just now as we move from "head of the house" male domination to a "hand in hand" companionship understanding of marriage.

As we abandon (rightly) the understanding of women as subordinate, troubles are inevitable. Guidelines become unclear. Marriage is in radical change just now, and it is no wonder it is under stress. But the situation should not

suggest abandoning faith in marriage, but living through a re-adjustment period which holds promise of greatly enriched marriages.

There are many ways in which we can work at family enrichment. Here are a few of them.

Ways of achieving more open communication in the family are being invented, for instance through family councils, exercises which open up feeling levels, exercises which focus on family systems — where the power lies, how decisions are made, levels of conversation.

Exciting possibilities are being discovered by which families can support one another. I know of many suburban churches which have family clusters taking various forms. Several families contract to meet regularly for mutual support, mutual enrichment, with children and adults sharing common experiences on an intergenerational basis. Margaret Sawin's visit to Australia under the auspices of the Australian Council of Churches has increased our understanding of the possibilities of family clusters.

Family power is being exercised increasingly in a way that makes it possible for families to take initiative themselves.

This means, as Paulo Freire would say, they can be subjects, centres of initiation for activities and establishing values, rather than objects, pushed around by outside consumer, profit oriented, forces.

Examples of such exercise of family power are seen in the setting up by families of new types of schools, of child care centres, food buying co-operatives and so on.

Marriage enrichment weekends are proving family relationships, family initiative.

Some families are sharing housing, and from that base are initiating social action.

The National Marriage and Family Week Council has useful leaflets available which suggest practical ways in which families and groups of families may endeavor to enrich family life. The 1976 theme is of crucial importance.

**"They are the
sons and daughters
of life longing
for itself"**

